This volume brings together two touchy words, myth and monolingualism, each of which comes bearing its own high-voltage and ambiguous history of use. Both words conjure a mood of peripatetic belatedness, angling in each case to uncover some hazy assemblage that appears to have worn out its welcome, luxuriating in the plain sight of theory and practice alike. Myth and monolingualism hail forth for critique two intersecting planes in the same system of regulatory social physics. They attempt to mark the ways in which institutions (in the Bourdieusian sense) self-justify and self-naturalize through forms of speech practice (or what Barthes would call parole) that are generally taken to be shared, common sense, or nonideological. Once invoked—though always somehow retrospectively—both words put their newly adopted objects on notice.

Despite this apparent critical kinship between myth and monolingualism, the rift between the two begins with a glance at the morphology of the words themselves. Whereas the first term, myth, comes to us in most languages in a lexical form that is earthy, protocultural, and hardly one syllable in length, the six-syllable latter term, monolingualism, sounds about as engineered, cloying, and parvenu in any vernacular vocabulary as words ever allow themselves to be. The word monolingualism looks recently unpackaged—shipped in from a university laboratory. Indeed, there is no lay equivalent for monolingualism in any language I know of, and there is meanwhile...
interestingly also no technical equivalent for myth. While the latter term is charismatic and ingenuous, the former appears brashly clinical, prosthetic, and alien to vernacular culture as such. So what are they doing, being seen together here?

This essay takes the opportunity, presented by this volume, to look closely at the disgruntled juxtaposition of these two words. With Barthes and Kafka, I will suggest that a conception of monolingualism as myth, when pursued with a particular use of the word, is capable of clearing away some of the imperious rancor that the two words tend to trumpet when left to their own devices. Drawing from Barthes’ 1957 essay “Le mythe aujourd’hui,” (“Myth Today,” see Mythologies) together with Kafka’s performances of mythic monolingualism in his first novel Der Verschollene (The Missing Person / The One that Got Away, 1911–14), I will suggest that the logic of myth offers subtle resources for discerning how monolingualism works, regardless of whether it actually exists. The concept of myth can also help point out a few discursive formations that indeed look like monolingualism but are not: whether those be linguistic purism or ethnolinguistic nationalism on the one hand, or—on the other—local resistance tactics in the face of global-technocratic translational multilingualism.

A Monolingualism Artist

Kennen Sie außer Ihrer Muttersprache noch andere Sprachen? Welche?
Wie weit reichen Ihre Kenntnisse darin? Können Sie diese Sprachen bloß verstehen oder auch sprechen, oder sich ihrer auch schriftlich bei Übersetzungen und Aufsätzen bedienen?

So prompted, on a personnel questionnaire from the Assicurazioni Generali insurance firm in 1907, the 24-year-old law school graduate Franz Kafka wrote back to his prospective employer in longhand: “Bohemian, and beyond that French and English, but I’m out of practice in the latter two languages.” (“Böhmisch, außerdem französisch und englisch, doch bin ich in den beiden letzten Sprachen außer Übung.” Čermak 59) Less than a year later, Dr. František Kafka responded to another, similar prompt with provident dispassion: “The applicant has mastery over the German and Bohemian language in oral and written form, and further commands the French, and partially the English language.” (“Der Petent ist der deutschen und böhmischen Sprache in Wort und Schrift mächtig, beherrscht ferner die französische, teilweise die englische Sprache.” Nekula 2).

Leaving behind the confessional ‘I’ of the preceding response, Kafka now casts himself in the guise of a petitioner, or “Petent,” who commands multiple languages as a regent might administer his revier. This emboldened applicant no longer betrays any hesitation about the extent of his multilingual talents. Though he claims mastery over German and Bohemian, Kafka characterizes his relationship to French and English not through a frank assessment of his practical proficiency but rather through
a rhetoric of distance. The tentative, intimate tone from the previous year has
dissolved beneath a spatial metaphor of sovereignty and proximity, in which some
languages are ‘closer,’ some ‘farther’ from the writer’s command. The Assicurazioni
Generali questionnaire prompt itself—“How far does your knowledge [of other
languages] reach?”—seems all but ready-made for the young fiction writer’s figural
repertoire.

Such questionnaires prompted Kafka to give an account of his own multilinguality
in early professional life, nourishing his rhetorical palette with the arid tropes of
interoffice communiqué, where affect remained ripe with—because laminated in—
spatial metaphor. Indeed, he was generating this kind of clerical ‘paper German’ at
the same time as he was composing his first philosophical fictions about cross-
linguistic interactions.

Meanwhile, public semiotics in early 20th-century Prague flourished amid what
could be called a double monolingualism, a strategic constellation by which each of
two dominant monolingual ideologies campaigned to secure popular and institutional
misrecognition (méconnaisance) of the existence of its respective other language
(Bourdieu and Passeron, xiii). The flammable Bohemian-German language politics of
the late 19th century were indeed more than the natural hazard of two (or more)
recently nationalized languages abutting one another in everyday life; the double
monolingualism of late Imperial Prague was rather the outcome of concerted efforts
among urban nationalists to establish and maintain linguistically pure spaces.

Indeed, the particular troubles of political “double monolingualism” in the
Crownlands were of a different sort than the presumed troubles of social multilin-
gualism when conceived in the abstract. The 19th-century Bohemia of Kafka’s
forebears had been less a sectarian battleground between German, Yiddish, and
Czech speakers, than an ideological frontier between urban, political monolingualists
and rural, non-partisan, and multilingual anationals. Pieter Judson stresses that,
“[i]n multilingual villages, towns, or regions, early political movements attempted to
mobilize popular support by demanding linguistic equality for their side. As political
conflicts developed around language issues, representatives of each ‘side’ scoured
the region for every potential voter, attempting to mobilize nationally indifferent peo-
ple into nationalist political parties.” (9) The broiling political culture that ushered in
Kafka’s literary figurations was thus one born primarily of a conflict between mono-
lingualism and multilingualism, not between one language and another.

By the time Kafka was hired on at the Assicurazioni Generali insurance agency in
1907, the notion that a singular, shared national language was a constitutive pre-
possession of Western subjectivity had become as naturalized as Peter Schlemihl’s
shadow. Composed in the wake of a long century of nation-building, Kafka’s texts are
designed to historicize the high-modern myth of monolingualism—of which they are a
performative reiteration. In refusing to underwrite modernism’s naturalization of the
monolingual, texts from “In unserer Synagoge” (“In Our Synagogue,” 1922) to Das Schloß (The Castle, 1924) pulse with a preoccupation about how a meta-formal ‘myth’ of single-language representation both constrains and constitutes literariness in the peak decades of national philology.

But how did Franz Kafka, the multiple-language speaker—the multilingual epistemologist, even—become renown as one of literary modernism’s archetypal monolingualists? Responding to Sander Gilman’s somewhat severe take on this question, David Suchoff remarks that “If Kafka, like Josef K., does bear any fault, it is for having checked his Jewish languages at the door of his canonical German, which [. . .] tempted him with the lure of literary fame.” (255) In sizing up Kafka’s vested stake in the German-dominated literary-linguistic market, Suchoff and Gilman seem to suggest that the choice to be “bilingual in everything but his writing” was evidence of a sheer, if also reluctant, opportunism in Kafka. This view—that the author’s choice of German as his exclusive language of composition is best understood sociologically or psychologically—holds an axial, if often rueful, status in Kafka studies to date, despite Deleuze and Guattari’s interventions in 1973.3

If, instead, we were to analyze monolingualism as a binding, yet historically contingent meta-formal ‘myth’ of modern national literatures—one that Kafka recognized as irrevocable already while composing his first parables and stories—then his own endeavor to project multilingual lifeworlds in variously sillhouetted form over the threshold of ‘paper German’ looks more like a critical ambition than a sin of omission. Kafka chooses not German but monolingualism as his aesthetic medium—as an oil painter might restrict herself to pencil and charcoal in order to render a particular kind of figure exquisitely visible. Itself a product of the constitutive friction between imperial linguistic multiplicity and nationalist-monolingual dominance in the high modern public sphere, Kafka’s parables feature the hegemony of monolingualism in ways that free code-switching between languages would be unable to broker.

**The Language That Got Away**

"Literatur, als Vorwurf ausgesprochen, ist eine so starke Sprachverkürzung. [. . .] Die Lärm trompeten des Nichts."4

Franz Kafka, Tagebücher, August 1917

Rather than understanding literary monolingualism as a cultural politics of affiliation—as siding with a given speech community, audience, ethnic group, or political program—we may read single-language writing by multilinguals as a kind of critical, ascetic praxis, a “hunger art” that invites a new literary-critical response in the twenty-first century. As David Batchelor writes of painting after Rodchenko, the monochrome “is the reminder of the culture we have not been able to create.” (153) Similarly, it is Kafka’s operative principle of negative performativity that distinguishes
his own monolingual textuality from that of his other multilingually invested contemporaries, such as Karl Kraus, Kurt Tucholsky, and Fritz Mauthner. Yet Kafka scholarship, before and after Deleuze and Guattari, has seen this wielding of monolingualism as a retiring devotion to German itself—to the cultural repertoire and symbolic capital of the language—rather than as an experimental performance of the formal constraint of monolingualism.

Kafka’s novels, particularly *Der Verschollene* and *Das Schloß* offer a sardonic diorama of the mythic accumulations of monolingualism, and how multilingual subjects get arrested in its baffles. Indeed, the unfinishability of each of Kafka’s novels is intimately tied to that particular myth. At the ‘end’ of his first novel, Kafka’s ambitious protagonist, the picaresque English-as-a-Second-Language learner Karl Rossmann abruptly absconds from representability (in German) at precisely that moment in the narrative when he begins to consort with the infinite chorus of trumpeting angels at the Oklahoma theater, which advertises itself as follows:

Das große Teater von Oklahama ruft Euch! Es ruft nur heute, nur einmal! Wer jetzt die Gelegenheit versäumt, versäumt sie für immer! Wer an seine Zukunft denkt, gehört zu uns! Jeder ist willkommen! Wer Künstler werden will melde sich! Wir sind das Teater, das jeden brauchen kann, jeden an seinem Ort! Wer sich für uns entschieden hat, den beglückwünschen wir gleich hier! (*Der Verschollene* 387)

The Great Theater of Oklahoma is calling you! It is calling only today, only this once! Anyone who misses the opportunity shall miss it forever! Anyone who is thinking of his future belongs in our midst! All are welcome! Anyone who wants to become an artist should contact us! We are a theater that can make use of everyone, each in his place. And we congratulate here and now those who have decided in our favor. (267)

Ultimately, speaking the angel chorus’ standard American English—making the noise of the Engeln in the theater of mythic monolingualism—becomes Karl’s own sacrament of conversion; he and the other angels are constituted anew through their assent to the assimilationist linguistic patriotism that US President Theodore Roosevelt demanded of new immigrant Americans in the advent of World War I (see Pratt).

Karl is swept up into the mesmerizing unison of the ensemble and begins to discover its precious subtleties. “You’re an artist!” (“Du bist ein Künstler!”) cheers his friend Fanny as Karl decides to join the chorus of monolinguals as a trumpeter. But Fanny warns, “[D]on’t spoil the chorus, or I’ll be dismissed” (271, “Aber verdirb den Chor nicht, sonst entläßt man mich,” 393). The (German) text of *Der Verschollene* trails off soon thereafter, as Karl’s contract with English monolingualism is sealed:

Karl fing zu blasen an; er hatte gedacht, es sei eine grob gearbeitete Trompete, nur zum Lärmmmachen bestimmt, aber nun zeigte es sich, daß es ein Instrument war, das fast jede Feinheit ausführen konnte. (393)
Karl began to play; he had imagined it was a crudely made instrument, only for making noise, but it was in fact an instrument capable of producing almost every refinement." (271)

Now fully fledged in monolingual English, and taken up into the communal embrace of its institutions, Karl indeed becomes Der Verschollene, the “lost one” who leaves behind the text’s own medium of production, the monolingualism of the (German) other. The novel breaks off as Karl, perpetually lost to us readers, is sublated into his new Anglo-monolingual post in the angel-chorus—a participatory, totalizing myth in which everyone is welcome and everyone has his or her ‘own’ role to play.

Rather than setting the tone and terms for future literary endeavors, Kafka’s first novel however offers a revealing anomaly in his career-long engagement with the epistemological clash between multilingual subjectivity and monolingual text. If his later works, like Das Schloß, can be seen as enacting claustrophobic spaces on the ‘here’ side of the monolingual/multilingual threshold, Kafka’s unfinished debut novel dramatizes an aggressive attempt to steal away from monolingualism and to inherit the multilingual world ‘over there,’ beyond the pale of single-language literary representation. It will be, I claim, Kafka’s one and only sustained work of literary fiction that delights in tramping on the ‘far side’ of this divide between linguistic ipseity and linguistic alterity. Later writings, from “In der Strafkolonie” (“In the Penal Colony,” 1919) to “Heimkehr” (“Returning Home,” 1920), turn to a somber, if often absurdist, forensics of monolingual restraint. Nonetheless, monolingualism remains one of his career-long epistemological and figural projects—that is, how to textualize not merely the divide between German and other languages per se, but rather the divide between literary monolingualism and worldly multilingualism.

Despite the rough-and-ready second-language acquisition adventure that awaits him at the outset of Der Verschollene, Karl Rossmann languishes at first in the endless narrow corridors of the oceanliner that has brought him to America—unwilling to disembark into the English-speaking expanse outside. Indeed, and with good reason, he shares this self-undermining hesitation with the text itself; the performative contradiction that will necessarily arise between Kafka’s erudite German and Karl’s hybrid, mutating spoken English enacts a chronic figural collision in the text. Who speaks English and when? With what accents, constraints, code-switches, and fluency? How can the social consequences and symbolic textures that ensue from translilingual exchange be indexed in a monolingual German-language text? From within the metapragmatics of the narrative, we could pose these questions differently: How fast can Karl, fresh off the boat in New York harbor with only rudimentary schooling in foreign languages, plausibly come to speak a standard American English that will not require the novel’s readers to suspend disbelief? Will that plausibility itself play an organizing role in the narrative? How much delay and detour will this problem need...
to cause for the picaresque adventurer? Indeed, when it comes to other languages in Der Verschollene, narrative coherence and monolingual form appear to be at cross-purposes—already at the outset of the young multilingual novelist’s career.

These procedural hurdles notwithstanding, the novel betrays a carefree love affair with language acquisition that seems anything but agonistic in its affect or bearing. The triumphalist tone that characterizes Karl’s personal ambitions vis-a-vis English soars with the romantic rigor of a summer-immersion language-school pamphlet:

Natürlich war das Lernen des Englischen Karls erste und wichtigste Aufgabe. Ein junger Professor einer Handelshochschule erschien morgens um sieben Uhr in Karls Zimmer und fand ihn schon an seinem Schreibtisch und bei den Heften sitzen oder memorierend im Zimmer auf und ab gehen. Karl sah wohl ein, daß zur Aneignung des Englischen keine Eile groß genug sei und daß er hier außerdem die beste Gelegenheit habe, seinem Onkel eine außerordentliche Freude durch rasche Fortschritte zu machen. (61)

Learning English was, of course, Karl’s first and most important task. When the young teacher from a business school appeared in Karl’s room at seven o’clock each morning, he would find him already seated at his desk, poring over his notebooks or walking up and down, committing phrases to memory. Karl realized that when it came to learning English, there could be no such thing as excessive haste, and that the best way to give his uncle great joy was to make rapid progress. (40)

More like palliative sidebars to the suspicious reader, such digressions about language offer repeated guarantees that Karl’s deficiencies in English will be nothing more than a quickly overcome social task for the hero—and not a recurrent logical glitch for the text. In a droll gesture to the text’s monolingual form, the narrative relegates Karl’s English language learning to the liminal early hours of each day, before the brass tacks of life as a “frischgebackener Amerikaner,” (63) get underway.

Und tatsächlich gelang es bald, während zuerst das Englische in den Gesprächen mit dem Onkel sich auf Gruß und Abschiedsworte beschränkt hatte, immer größere Teile der Gespräche ins Englische hinüberzuspielen, wodurch gleichzeitig vertraulichere Themen sich einzustellen begannen. (61)

And although the only English words in his initial conversations with his uncle were hello and goodbye, they soon managed to shift more and more of the conversation into English, which led to their broaching topics of a more intimate nature. (40)

The text thus seems to dispose of its own cross-lingual dilemma rather urgently, through a progressive marginalization of ostentatious multilingual behavior and setting.
On further analysis, however, a pattern of irritations undermines Karl’s (and the text’s) happy struggle toward their respective monolingual manifest destinies, as explicit thematization of language choice gradually fades away over the course of the novel. Like a prosthetic device, Karl’s English professor is kept at his side to complete his utterances, as the young immigrant briskly graduates from rudimentary speech to semi-proficiency.

Je besser Karls Englisch wurde, desto größere Lust zeigte der Onkel, ihn mit seinen Bekannten zusammenzuführen, und ordnete nur für jeden Fall an, daß bei solchen Zusammenkünften vorläufig der Englischprofessor sich immer in Karls Nähe zu halten habe. (62)

The greater the improvement in his English, the more eager was his uncle to have him meet his acquaintances, and he arranged that during these encounters the English teacher should for the time being always remain near Karl, simply in case of need. (40–41)

Soon, Karl undergoes a rite of consecration as an English speaker, for which he had not yet considered himself worthy. At one of his uncle’s get-togethers:

Karl antwortete unter einer Sterbensstille ringsherum mit einigen Seitenblicken auf den Onkel ziemlich ausführlich und suchte sich zum Dank durch eine etwas New Yorkisch gefärbte Redeweise angenehm zu machen. Bei einem Ausdruck lachten sogar alle drei Herren durcheinander, und Karl fürchtete schon, einen groben Fehler gemacht zu haben; jedoch nein, er hatte, wie Herr Pollunder erklärte, sogar etwas sehr Gelungenes gesagt. (63)

Occasionally glancing at his uncle, and amid dead silence on all sides, Karl answered at length and, by way of thanking them, sought to make a pleasant impression by using turns of phrase with a certain New York flavor. Upon hearing one such expression, all three gentlemen burst out laughing, and Karl began to fear that he had made a vulgar mistake, but not at all, for as Mr. Pollunder explained to him, he had said something that was actually quite felicitous. (45)

This Mr. Pollunder is Karl’s first monolingual English confidant and benefactor, and Karl’s difficulty understanding this avuncular figure’s English syntax and lexicon is displaced into spatial figurations. Referring to the man’s stately American mansion, Karl complains that Pollunder “talks [. . .] as if he were unaware of the size of this house, of the endless corridors, the chapel, the empty rooms, and the darkness everywhere.” (69, “Er spricht,’ dachte Karl, ‘als wüßte er nicht von dem großen Haus, den endlosen Gängen, der Kapelle, den leeren Zimmern, dem Dunkel überall.’” 105) In stark contrast, Karl’s own German-speaking Uncle Jakob’s house “seemed to him a coherent whole lying before him, empty, smooth, prepared just for him, and
beckoning him with a strong voice.” (71. “Es erschien ihm als etwas streng Zusammengehöriges, das leer, glatt und für ihn vorbereitet dalag und mit einer starken Stimme nach ihm verlangte.” 108) The two empty residences—one obscure, endless, and unknowable, the other cohesive, servile, and beckoning—index how Karl experiences the respective spoken languages of their inhabitants.

Acquiring English is further spatialized in the narrative through circuitous, labyrinthine figures. Karl opts to hold his tutoring sessions on the fly, while driving to riding practice:

Karl nahm dann den Professor mit ins Automobil, und sie fuhren zu ihrer Englischstunde meist auf Umwegen, denn bei der Fahrt durch das Gedränge der großen Straße, die eigentlich direkt von dem Hause des Onkels zur Reitschule führte, wäre zu viel Zeit verlorengegangen. (65)

Karl then took the teacher along in the automobile, and they drove to their English lesson, mostly via detours, since they would have lost too much time going through the bustle of the main street, which led directly from Uncle’s house to the riding school. (42–43)

There Karl meets up with his first English-speaking friend Mack. Again, the dilemmas that speaking English might have posed for Karl (and the novel) are displaced into spatial figurations: detours, indirect routes, and unexpected lateral excursions. Such is also the case when Karl seeks to use his choppy English to order food in a hotel lobby. After some moments of elaborate tactical deliberation, he decides to seek help from the most approachable looking woman on the hotel staff, in hopes of landing a successful cross-language transaction. As he stands hesitant on this tense emotional threshold, the foreign language interpellates him instead:

Karl hatte sie noch gar nicht angeredet, sondern nur ein wenig belauert, als sie, wie man eben manchmal mitten im Gespräch beiseiteschaut, zu Karl hinsah und ihn, ihre Rede unterbrechend, freundlich und in einem Englisch, klar wie die Grammatik, fragte, ob er etwas suche.

„Allerdings“ sagte Karl, „ich kann hier gar nichts bekommen.“ (156)

Karl, who had been eavesdropping, had not yet addressed her when she looked up at him and, interrupting what she was saying and using English that was as clear as a grammar book’s asked in a friendly voice if he was looking for something. “Yes indeed,” said Karl. “I can’t get anything here.” (104)

This precipitously helpful hotel staffperson enacts, for Karl, the English language as a sublime whole, “clear as a grammar book’s.” Her preemptive address surprises the young man, who had been struggling to muster up the courage to speak to her in an
American English register appropriate for the setting. His unwitting and disarmed response, in turn, does not answer her question at all—whether he was looking for something—but rather describes a broader deictic circumstance conditioning their exchange: “I can’t get anything here at all.” The “here” where Karl “can’t get anything” doubles as physical location (the hotel) and the abstract domain of literary monolingualism itself—a domain in which cross-lingual situations, such as the one at hand, are always already dis-figured.

Barred from simulating anything but the most nativist styles of speech, the text instead indexes the translingual impasse through spatial-deictic deferral. The hotel clerk immediately comprehends Karl’s deictically overdetermined riddle, and she responds to him in kind:

„Dann kommen Sie mit mir, Kleiner“, sagte sie, verabschiedete sich von ihrem Bekannten, der seinen Hut abnahm, was hier wie unglaubliche Höflichkeit erschien, faßte Karl bei der Hand, ging zum Büfett, schob einen Gast beiseite, öffnete eine Klapptüre im Pult, durchquerte den Gang hinter dem Pult, wo man sich vor den unermüdlich laufenden Kellnern in acht nehmen mußte, öffnete eine zweite Tapetentüre, und schon befanden sie sich in großen, kühlen Vorratskammern. „Man muß eben den Mechanismus kennen“, sagte sich Karl. (156)

“Then come along with me, little fellow,” she said; then she said goodbye to her acquaintance, who raised his hat, which seemed like an unbelievably polite gesture in these surroundings, and, taking Karl by the hand, went to the buffet, pushed aside a guest, opened a hinged door in the counter, and with Karl in tow, crossed the corridor behind the counter, where one had to watch out for the tirelessly circulating waiters, and opened a double door that had been covered with wallpaper, and now they found themselves in large cool pantries. “You simply have to know the mechanism,” Karl said to himself. (104)

This savvy and accommodating clerk—a kind of textual concierge of monolingualism—needs no further clarification of the protagonist’s predicament, steering him, upon an uncannily circuitous route, out of the public space of the hotel and into a storage repository hidden away in the bowels of the building. Kafka thus translates the problem of translilingual exchange into a kinetic crossing of unknown thresholds—from public to semi-public, from apoplectic frustration to intimate knowledge of the “mechanism,” from deferential etiquette in the hotel lobby to “shoving” guests aside at the buffet table in order to get, urgently, from here to there—from monolingualism to its hypotextual negation.

Der Verschollene, however, is one of the few Kafka texts that stage such raucous and felicitous cross-linguistic stuntwork, where the hero both hungers for and succeeds at “intercultural dialogue”—a rare occurrence in Kafka indeed. Especially in
the later works, the failure to cross, or even to be dragged across, such thresholds tends to prevail. What Karl finds behind the buffet table, deep in the hypotext of the hotel—the subtext obscured below its surface—is the inner mechanism of monolingualism-as-myth, a principle that would follow him—Karl as much as Kafka—throughout his career.

**Disinventing The Myth of Monolingualism**

Barriers to analyzing how Kafka’s day-to-day multilingualism animated and structured his writing still linger in the secondary literature on modernist prose fiction, where ‘language’ still tends to be writ large and singular. As the comparatists Hokenson and Munson write, “[b]ilinguality seems to be the one category of language-user that high modernist thought did not, indeed perhaps even refused to, consider.” (137) Relatedly, the notion that an author’s multilingual subjectivity informs and participates directly in his or her textual production has given rise to a hereditary uneasiness in literary studies. The composite legacy of New Critical, (post-)structuralist, Chomskyan, and even Lacanian lines of thought about language therefore bear only meager affordances for a critique of literary multilingualism. Quizzically, the most prominent and frequently cited interventions from theoreticians on the subject are autobiographical or confessional in nature (cf. Derrida, *Le monolinguisme de l’autre ou la prothèse d’origine* [Monolingualism of the Other], Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* [Strangers to Ourselves]).

Arising out of the rigors of formalist foreclosure upon the textual artifact itself, and extending to the muscular post-War dictum that “the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art,” (Wimsatt and Beardsey 488) the moratorium on authorial reading has scuttled a great deal of scholarly speculation on multilingual authorship within literary studies—as opposed to neighboring fields like linguistic anthropology, pragmatics, sociology of literature, and applied linguistics—where such a hereditary directive as “intentional fallacy” is not in force. Beardsley and Wimsatt’s forensic disarticulation of the author from text, however, overlooked the performative bind arising between monolingual textuality and multilingual subjectivity. The ‘author’ icon that traveled from New Criticism to post-structuralism was an enduring legacy of this elision. When Foucault, for instance, sought to articulate a theory of authoriality, the problem of language multiplicity did not appear anywhere among the “functional conditions of specific discursive practices” that constituted the core of his findings (“What is an Author?” 139). Decades later, this legacy leaves scholarship standing, less than nimble, on the edge of aporia when it comes to formulating theoretical discourses that take seriously multilingual authors’ textual dilemmas vis-à-vis the unmarked myth of monolingualism. Meanwhile, critiques of ostensibly monolingual authors’ works are exempted from bearing such issues of ‘language choice’ in mind.
In the case of Kafka, monolingualism is a circumstance of literary text alone—not of his "consciousness," his workplace, his father's store, his intimate and professional relationships, Jewish Prague, the family home, or even his putative "territorialité primitive tchèque" (Deleuze and Guattari 30, "primitive Czech territoriality"). There is plain and ample evidence that, in each of these latter realms, at least two languages were in furtive and contentious cross-pollination with one another throughout his life, vying each moment for a minute toe-hold into political or situated hegemony (ˇCermak, Nekula). Literary text, therefore, is the only domain of Kafka's work and livelihood in which the ideal of monolingualism could reign expansive and uninterrupted. His works are therefore not a presentation of some aspect of his life; literary text could not be further from the truth of his linguistic subjectivity or his symbolic ecology. To put this in broader terms, the relationship between monolingual texts and their multilingual authors are best seen as apophatic—pulsing with the significance of what is not there.

Given the spoils that the high modern episteme of monolingualism offered, literary artisans like Kafka were variously compelled to strike an irrevocable bargain with monolingualism-as-myth—a bargain that resists elective divestiture, particularly if one wishes to publish books. In this vein, we may recall how Barthes described Maupassant's disgruntled intimacy with the Eiffel Tower:

C'est signe pur—vide, presque—il est impossible de le fuir, parce qu'il veut tout dire. Pour nier la Tour Eiffel (mais la tentation en est rare, car ce symbole ne blesse rien en nous), il faut, comme Maupassant, s'installer sur elle, et pour ainsi dire s'identifier à elle. (La Tour Eiffel 27)

This pure—virtually empty—sign is ineluctable, because it means everything. In order to negate the Eiffel Tower (though the temptation to do so is rare, for this symbol offends nothing in us), you must, like Maupassant, get up on it and, so to speak, identify yourself with it. (237)

Maupassant's choice for radical, myopic, and yet disdainful identification with the tower also aptly figures Kafka's literary habitus vis-à-vis monolingualism. Based in the multilingual provincial capital of a multinational empire, Kafka nonetheless committed himself and his readers to a monolingual contract—purified of local references, social deixis, code-switching, and other ostentatious traces of translanguaeg practice. While Pound and Joyce were promoting a panlingual lyric expansionism, Kafka’s texts abstained from such play across languages, preferring instead to deepen what might be called monolingualism's vow of poverty.

Monolingualism's mythic effectiveness rests on its familiarizing self-disclosure and its reassuring transposability. All it wants in return is a particular kind of belief in planetary linguistic order that did not exist before the 17th century.
Barthes’ famous example of second-order signification, *quia ego nominor leo* from a Latin grammar book, is ‘mythic’ in Barthes view because it suppresses and mutes its first-order meanings and their historical and social contexts. (Who is this bold and proud lion? Who is she speaking to? Why is she speaking, anyway?), replacing them with the mythic, second-order message: “I am a grammatical example demonstrating correspondence between subject and predicate in Latin.” From this analysis stems the insight that monolingualism-as-myth performs a different, equally mandatory second-order signification. Under the episteme of monolingualism, *quia ego nominor leo* becomes: ‘I am Latin. Latin, like your language—you have one, right?—can say anything. Don’t worry about it too much. We can get it translated.’

For an item of speech to qualify as *language* under monolingualism, it must pertain to at least one among a set of sovereign, equal, non-overlapping, transposable, possible, federated, panfunctional integers of systemic languageness—like Dutch, English, or Igbo. (The mythic logic of monolingualism doesn’t even require linguistic territorialization anymore, though Yildiz 2011 makes a strong case that it indeed once did.) In *Mythologies*, Barthes writes:

> Le mythe est au contraire un langage qui ne veut pas mourir : il arrache aux sens dont il s’alimente, une survie insidieuse, dégradée, il provoque en eux un sursis artificiel, dans lequel il s’installe à l’aise, il en fait des cadavres parlants. (241)

Myth [. . .] is a language which does not want to die: it wrests from the meanings which give it its sustenance an insidious, degraded survival, it provokes in them an artificial reprieve in which it settles comfortably, it turns them into speaking corpses. (244)

While the mid-century Barthes was animated in part by his dismay at what appeared to be indomitable, anachronistic myths of French imperial rectitude, he was careful to pursue myth not in terms of the particular substances under its sway, but rather in terms of myth’s signifying structure. Indeed, Barthes asserted that myth was a structure that functioned with a relative lack of interest in the precise historical nature of the meanings it conscripts. Everything under the sun is equally susceptible to mythologization, and no myth is eternal. Barthes sought to provide what amounts to an absolute grammar of myth, one that was indifferent, universalist even, in its relation to the cultural materials of a particular age.

Under the myth of monolingualism, language artifacts—if they are to be considered “language” at all—tell their interlocutor the nature of the bounded system from which they issue, and reassure that interlocutor that that system is accessible to him via transposition or translation. Kafka’s famous parable of Odradek, “Die Sorge des Hausvaters,” dramatizes a scene in which such a linguistic artifact behaves badly vis-à-vis the monolingual episteme that textualizes it: Instead of providing
documentation of its linguistic provenance, the creature merely says: “Unbestimmter Wohnsitz” (“Residence unknown”) and laughs at the myth, contented with its performance of monolingual mimicry.

Kafka’s legendary 1913 introductory lecture for a visiting Eastern Jewish theater troupe is, in this context, no less than a backhanded gauntlet-throw toward the urban Jewish-German audience, for whom Yiddish/Jargon—a language whose existence was not even registered among the eleven imperial Landessprachen on the 1900 census—tended to signal the provincialism of their grandparents’ generation. The speech begins by suggesting that the performances the guests are about to experience may be both threatening and familiar to those who are in the habit of caring about deceptively subtle linguistic differences. Standing before the assembled members of the Prague Bar Kochba Association to introduce Löwy’s dramatic readings of Yiddish lyric, Kafka forewarns them that any keen attention they might lend to this semiodiverse prism between Yiddish and German will only bring them avoidable dismay and hardship. The myth of monolingualism is far too harmonious to disavow, the epistemological and social implications too perilous:

Wir leben in einer geradezu fröhlichen Eintracht; verstehen einander, wenn es notwendig ist, kommen ohne einander aus, wenn es uns passt und verstehen einander selbst dann; wer könnte aus einer solchen Ordnung der Dinge heraus den verwirrten Jargon verstehen oder wer hätte auch die Lust dazu? (“[Rede über die jiddische Sprache]” 118)

We are living in a downright pleasant harmony; we understand one another when it is necessary, we get along without each other when it suits us and understand each other even then. Who, amid such a state of affairs, could ever understand the confused jargon, or who would even feel like doing so?

The trap Kafka lays here for his audience members—for their curiosity about the exotic, because halfway-familiar, sounds of Yiddish—signals not resignation to a monolingualist future, but rather an incitement to linguistic transgression—similar, in rhetoric and dramaturgy, to the 1915 parable “Vor dem Gesetz” (“Before the Law”), published in the Jewish weekly Vorwärts—a parable uttered, not surprisingly, by a bilingual priest. If these German speakers at the Bar Kochba truly wished to appreciate Yiddish—which was tantamount to appreciating the differences between the two languages—were they willing to accept the epistemological consequences? Why, after all, should one prefer to grasp the difficult polysemy bound up in Yiddish-German homonyms (‘blood’ and ‘death’ are the two examples he notes) over syncretic assimilation, an expedient “harmony” (Eintracht) between apparent cognates? For Kafka the presenter, Yiddish speech holds this potential to upset the monolingualist’s mastery over signifiers, his penchant for producing and preserving centripetal
meanings. Because of its uncanny intimacy with German, Yiddish rescinds the audience’s entitlement to overlook what Halliday, Kramsch, and Pennycook have termed semiodiversity. Kafka’s speech here enacts a dramaturgical space of initiation between languages, a space in which the monolingualist is confronted, at a short distance, with a foreign, familiar parole that threatens to disrupt his authority over even ‘his own’ meanings.

Qualifying ‘Myth’

Myth, as we mentioned, is a broad and unwieldy term. I would propose that a vernacular use of the concept myth—along the lines of: ‘It’s an (urban) myth that Army-trained dolphins armed with anti-terrorist laser beams are still loose in the Gulf of Mexico’—leads us immediately into a cul-de-sac when thinking about monolingualism. Tinged as it is with a general admonishment toward naiveté, this use of the word myth sets up two classes of people—believers and critics—who deal with myth in ways that are fundamentally at odds with another, but are in some ways mutually reliant. Myth-believers are held under myth’s sway and are therefore unchanged and unchangeable in their stance toward myth. Myth-critics have, in contrast, furnished for themselves a lateral glance at the myth, are able to minoritize its role in their lives, and are therefore changed in their general apprehension of the world. This evangelical approach envisions a threshold of conversion by which a myth-believer can become a myth-critic when she divests from the myth, at which point she is no longer beholden to its message. I suggest that any such apprehension of monolingualism as myth, one that underwrites a temporal or intellectual threshold between participants and critics, or that relies on the notion of “divesting” from monolingualism through critique, is inclined to underestimatethe mythic power and structure of monolingualism—misapprehending it as a small-minded, coercive, and propagandistic ideology that should have been debunked long ago. Furthermore, to pan monolingualism as an outdated ideology (say, in the Netherlands) or as a jingoistic farce (say, in the United States) would somewhat graciously evacuate the many things the myth of monolingualism has been effective enough to invent and institutionalize over the past three centuries—including highly advanced popular literacy, mutual comprehensibility between states and their citizens, technical standardization, the publishing industry as we know it, and also, indeed, ethnolinguistic nationalism. As an historically contingent episteme, monolingualism has brought forth a bundle of inventions that even the most vigorous celebrants of multilingual subjectivity would have a hard time doing without.

But if a discourse on monolingualism (as myth) pursues as its primary analytical objective the relative truth or falsity—or the ontological status—of monolingualism, that discourse will be forced into a stalemate of rebuking, rebutting, or correcting positive claims, by replacing them with other claims that, nonetheless, still avail themselves of the myth’s originary terms—essentially impugning the said myth with items
borrowed, as Audre Lorde puts it, directly from it. For instance, we could indeed choose to take a vigorous debunking stance toward monolingualism as myth, such as a) Monolingualism has never actually existed in human language practice, given the dialogical, centrifugal nature of speech itself, or b) Speech communities, particularly those emerging over the 18th and 19th centuries from war-nationalized societies in Northwestern Europe, became monolingual by force but never were monolingual in essence. We could continue with c) Anglophone Americans do not on average prefer to remain life-long speakers of one language only, and they in fact vigorously oppose English-only legislation, or d) Learning and mixing multiple languages does not aggravate children’s developmental aptitude and educational achievement; poverty and exclusion do this. These we could call respectively the ontological, historicist, corrective, and redistributionist arguments against the myth of monolingualism, and there is assuredly ample evidence and scholarship to defend each of those interventions.

Having done so, however, we encounter the problem that ‘debunking myths’ may indeed lead to gradual policy changes and consciousness-raising, but tends to leave the generative template that makes and remakes the factual distortions of monolingualism relatively untouched and durable. As a matter of course, we also are then compelled to take refuge in logical premises produced by that generative structure itself. In the case of monolingualism, myth-debunking projects require us to make affirmative counter-distinctions, using terminology such as multilingualism, plurilingualism, “codes,” “switching” and the like—namely, constructs that take as their justifying basis a natural or heuristically sound cleavage between monolanguage and multilanguage. The statutorily multilingual European Union, for instance, now finds itself several decades into just such a experimental dilemma around hundreds of language pairs (for 23 member languages), such that the socially multilingual United States can only wonder hopefully at the whole affair. And yet, such state-centralized planning around universal trilingualism compels policy-makers—at each turn, and often against their better wishes—to essentialize, delimit, individualize, and institutionalize categories of speech experience and linguistic identity that often have only the most tenuous historical grounding themselves (Yngve).

Compelled by civic expediency and technological urgency, monolingualism and multilingualism remain the heuristics of choice—absent other categorizations that might enjoy more subtlety in social analysis while retaining sensible applicability in public affairs. Similar and notoriously freighted double-binds persist in how the US Census Bureau reports ethnicity/race, whereby a given respondent’s civic desire to ‘be counted’ as something relatively commensurate with who they are often conflicts with the principles of enumerability, singularity, and individuality with which s/he is interpellated as a citizen/denizen. Even when laid bare as violently inaccurate, such myths of category remain central, untroubled, and authoritative. Both the compulsion to produce evidence of a documented language and a documented ethnicity/race
tend to effect "a kind of arrest, in the physical and legal sense of the term. [. . .] For this interpellant speech is at the same time a frozen speech at the moment of reaching me, it suspends itself, turns away, and assumes the look of a generality: it stiffens, it makes itself look neutral and innocent." (Mythologies 235, "une sorte d’arrêt, au sens a la fois physique et judiciaire du terme [. . .] Car cette parole interpellative est en même temps une parole figée: au moment de m’atteindre, elle se suspend, tourne sur elle-même et rattrape une généralité : elle se transit, elle se blanchit, elle s’inncent." 233) Given how swiftly these umbrella categories of multilingualism and monolingualism are being operationalized for the purpose of statescraft, any scholarly analysis that instrumentalizes the one to debunk the other—or that affirmatively elevates the one as a civic or moral virtue over the other—will suffer a certain methodological top-heaviness and fragility. What’s more, the kind of multilingualism that is often elected to stave off monolingual parochialism is often deeply at odds with existing popular multilingualisms, leading to new discourses of verbal hygiene for postmulticultural societies (Cameron, Verbal Hygiene, “The One”). The multiethnolects and language permutations that are most common among pupils in Dutch and German schools, but are not predicates of the EU’s 23-member-language civic subjecheid, defy and irritate the visionary programmatic status of multilingualism on the European (Union) stage. German-born secondary school students are more often users of Turkish, Kurdish, English, and German together than they are of French, Italian, English, and German together, and yet the actual multilingualism of the former is eclipsed by the idealized multilingualism of the latter.

It will be equally insufficient, however, to debunk the multilingual/monolingual binary wholesale as a ‘myth’ or logical fallacy, because this option contents itself too quickly with the idea that these categories, once discovered to be ontologically untenable, are also therefore ineffective, or will soon grow to be so, as the work of debunking them marches forth. Regardless of their truth or falsity, myths are, if anything at all, effective, and it is precisely myth’s effective, modest, and yet unsurperable performativity and interpellary stride that distinguishes it from other things: natural orders, fables, stories, tales, rumors, ideologies, pleas, policies, legends, polemics, pathologies, movements, backlashes, alibis, or orthodoxies.

I would like to suggest that monolingualism is indeed none of these latter things, and that notions of monolingualism that see it as one or the other among them both over- and underestimate its signifying logic. Rather than a program of ethnolinguistic supremacy or a movement of ressentiment, monolingualism is a relatively modest kind of signifying structure—in Barthes’ characterization, a kind of speech or “parole”—which will use anything at its disposal to preserve its appearance of timeless and pacific self-evidence. Indeed, to do so, monolingualism will continue to marshal all the resources of multilingualism, multiculturalism, diversity, plurality, and democracy as the source materials for its own second-order signification.
As I have suggested, Kafka's fictions may be reread as studies of the modest yet totalizing ambitions of global monolingualism amid its uneven emergence in modernity. Among Kafka's preferred textual operations is, for instance, to displace linguistic multiplicity into spatial figures and deictic malaises—into oddly menacing thresholds and neighboring rooms, unreachable and distant surfaces, obscure circuits of hallways and detours, troubling ruptures between 'here' and 'there.' Often, the textual format itself tends to stagger laterally at the level of the syntagm, sentence, or chapter, giving rise to a loose and troubled contiguity—of "vielen eng aneinander stehenden niedrigen Bauten" (Schloß 18, “many lower, tightly packed buildings.”) 8)—one way the landsurveyor K. beholds the architectural structure of Westwest's residence in Das Schloß.

Given this lingual-spatial analectic in Kafka and elsewhere, hypotextuality is a particularly germane concept for understanding multilinguality's troubled structural relationship to literature (Genette). While a digraphic medium like film (with subtitles and visual cues) can represent milieus where multiple languages are used simultaneously, literary texts are hard-pressed to signify such spaces. Genette's concept of hypotext accounts well for the fractious relation between monolingual literary texts and multilingual life worlds—a relation in which a single-language text signals and indexes, often urgently, a patently cross-lingual set of signifieds, oral histories, or collective experiences. Though the term hypotext suggests one text ‘below’ another, Kafka's manifest monolingualism rumbles with a lively und unrepresentable language event happening ‘in the other room.’ For instance, the late text "Heimkehr" collides and colludes with monolingualism as meta-formal constraint. The dilemmas this parable foregrounds are: How is an irrevocably multilingual lifeworld to be rendered into monolingual text? At what expense and by what means does this 'translation' of lived multilinguality into textual monolingualism take place? The parable's first-person narrator paces up and down his father's courtyard, where old, unusable appliances block his way to the stairwell. Smelling the coffee coming from behind the kitchen door, the narrator poses a question to himself: "Do you feel at home?"

The voice that answers, again his own, begins to falter.

Ich weiß es nicht, ich bin sehr unsicher. Meines Vaters Haus ist es, aber kalt steht Stück neben Stück, als wäre jedes mit seinen eigenen Angelegenheiten beschäftigt, die ich teils vergessen habe, teils niemals kannte. Was kann ich ihnen nützen, was bin ich ihnen und sei ich auch des Vaters, des alten Landwirts Sohn. (573)

I don't know. I am very unsure. It is my father's house, but each item stands cold beside the next, as if it were already occupied with its own concerns, some of which I have forgotten, some which I never knew. How can I be of any use to them, what am I to them, even if I am my father's—the old landlord's—son?
Cold ‘pieces,’ the surplus material of other-language signification, populates the disorderly courtyard, yet the narrator can have no use for them in the monolingual, German narration at hand. After some deliberation, the narrator demurs from knocking on the kitchen door, choosing to listen only from afar to the muffled, inchoate voices within. “What else is happening in the kitchen is the secret of those sitting there [. . .] The longer one stands before the door, the more foreign one becomes.” (“Was sonst in der Küche geschieht, ist das Geheimnis der dort Sitzenden, das sie vor mir wahren. Je länger man vor der Tür zögert, desto fremder wird man.” 573)

What the narrator fears most is that someone might come through the door toward him, without his having knocked, and ask him something in a language for which he is ‘responsible’ but has not mastered—just as the English-speaking hotel clerk had done in Der Verschollene.

Neither the text nor its narrator ever enters or witnesses this other room; the monolingual ‘here’ of the narrative must remain outside, increasingly foreign, yet always surrounded by entropic piles of unusable words that nonetheless belong to the narrator by inheritance. Still, the text rumbles with a lively and unrepresentable language event happening ‘in the other room.’ Next door to the manifest text is the space of formally interdicted and therefore unpublishable language—of the unruly and mundane admixture of dialectal usages—of Yiddish, Czech, and the local argot of German Prague—which, like the silent appliances in the yard, for Kafka could not ‘be of use to’ his literary fiction. Indeed a great proportion of Kafka’s writing is, in both spatial and critical senses, ‘about’ what is being said by the muffled, other-languaged voices in the kitchen, where the coffee is brewing and the hearth is lit.

Over the course of Kafka’s writerly career, his textual performances interpellate the space of mixed, unpublishable language—the unruly admixture of dialectal usages, Yiddish, Czech, and Prague German that, like the silent appliances in the yard in Kafka’s “Heimkehr,” the author could not “make use of” in his literary fiction. I have chosen to call this relationship hypotextual, rather than para- or intertextual, in order to highlight how the other room’s language remains “below” the threshold of publishability, given the metaformal constraint of monolingual text to which its author subscribes.

Conclusion
In one of the countless passages that Franz Kafka forbade his friend Max Brod to publish, he again articulates this double-bind between language and literary monolingualism in architectural and spatial terms:

Das Schreiben versagt sich mir. Daher Plan der selbstbiographischen Untersuchungen. Nicht Biographie, sondern Untersuchungen und Auffindung möglichst kleiner Bestandteile. Daraus will ich mich dann aufbauen, so wie einer,
dessen Haus unsicher ist, daneben ein sicheres aufbauen will, womöglich aus Material des alten. Schlimm ist es allerdings, wenn mitten im Bau seine Kraft aufhört und er statt eines zwar unsichern aber doch vollständigen Hauses, ein halb zerstößtes und ein halbfertiges hat, also nichts. ("[Das Schreiben]")

Writing fails me. Therefore, a plan of autobiographical investigations. Not biography, but investigation and discovery of the smallest possible constitutive parts. Out of these, I will build myself, like one whose house is unsteady and wishes to build a steadier one next to it, when possible out of the material of the old one. But it is indeed a bad thing if one’s energy gives out during construction and, instead of having an unsteady yet complete house, has a half-destroyed and a half-constructed one, i.e. nothing.

This anxious parable presages the delicate interdisciplinary positions in which we literature and language researchers may find ourselves in the first decades of the twenty-first century, between monolingual myth and multilingual world. The comforts of working and teaching in a single, ‘unsteady yet complete’ philological discipline have delayed the project of designing steadier fields of inquiry for the new century and its languages, with the assistance of the “smallest possible constitutive parts” of their predecessors. Both a source of comfort and an epistemological constraint, the monolingualist legacies of our disciplines are causing their foundations to tip and rumble, as global migration, affective interconnections, and translingual flow across borders confound national narratability. A shift away from monolingual constraints in research and teaching is thus an unavoidable, and yet daunting, task of de-mythologization, requiring new conceptions of linguistic analysis and literary authorship themselves.

Barthes insisted that myth can appropriate substances and signifiers that appear fundamentally opposed to the myth itself. For instance, an African boy in French military uniform saluting the tri-couleur of the Republic (on a Paris news magazine cover) was in effect the “speaking corpse” into which the ultimate righteousness of French imperialism “settles comfortably.” Indeed, the myth of monolingualism has other walking corpses, many of which look as if to be acting in open opposition or rejection of monolingualism, given their celebratory air of diversity and cosmopolitanism. (See for instance Yildiz’ analysis of Karin Sander’s multilingual art installation “Wordsearch.”)

Kafka’s monolingual performativity, in a sense, pre-imagined the kind of “homogeneous, empty” meaning that many latter-day platforms of monolingual myth-production have been able to monetize and multiply: including certain forms of automatic translation technology, post-ethnic logics of linguistic citizenship, naturalization, and verbal hygiene (Cameron), certain traditions of immigrant writing animated by state-sanctioned prizes and subsidy that prize monolingual multiculturalism, certain exigencies of the globalized publishing industry for translatable content, certain
protocols for multilingual Research and Development in software optimization and marketing, as well as new forms and formats of cognitive capitalism, in which hypomnesic offshoring and linguistically engineered divisions of labor have been able to take hold. All of these mythic resources could also easily traffic under the name ‘multilingualism,’ and often do. Yet monolingualism-as-myth is able to harness the meaning-filled traffic of these domains, in order to reinstate its simple message: integrity, indivisibility, sovereignty, transposability.

Collectively, Kafka’s parables pulse with far-off signals of a linguistic life banished from the textual domain in early 20th century European publishing, and equally so in the translational ideologies of 21st century global traffic. The thresholds that threaten with utterances from the elsewheres of language—the closed kitchen door in “Heimkehr,” the hatch in the console in Der Verschollene—were nascent fissures in the myth of monolingualism. Kafka’s corpus may be understood anew as an experimental divestiture from this myth, a comical and solemn study of its mandate. In a twenty-first century scholarly sphere that can no longer withstand monolingual foreclosure, Kafka’s writings may assist literary criticism anew in revising the monolingualist tenets that have defined authoriality, textuality, and literary style, and revisit the multilingual concerns that, for Derrida, lay at the foundation of post-structuralism:

If I had to risk a single definition of deconstruction, one as brief, elliptical, and economical as a password, I would say simply and without overstatement: plus d’une langue—more than one language, no more of one language. (Mémoirs 14–15)

In grasping literary monolingualism not as a natural state of things, but as a procedural and epistemological malaise, Kafka’s texts turn upon themselves, straining against “the bias of the artifact” endemic to high-modern national literatures (Morson 595). They endeavor to perform—not describe—the intrusion of the multilingual world into the mythic monolingual significations of literature, reminding us, again and again, of “the culture we have not been able to create.” (Batchelor 153)
Notes

1. 27. “Maupassant often lunched at the restaurant in the tower though he didn’t care much for the food. It’s the only place in Paris, he used to say, where I don’t have to see it.” (236)

2. Čermak 59. “Do you know other languages beyond your mother language? Which ones? How far does your knowledge reach? Can you merely understand these languages or also speak them, or can you also make use of them through written translations and compositions?” Unless otherwise noted, translations are my own. See also Gramling, Where Here Begins.

3. On the sociological bias towards multilingualism in literary studies generally, see also Kremnitz 8°ff.

4. 818. “Literature—expressed as an allegation—is such a drastic curtailment of language. [. . .] The noise trumpets of nothingness.”

Works Cited


Notes

1. 27. “Maupassant often lunched at the restaurant in the tower though he didn’t care much for the food. It’s the only place in Paris, he used to say, where I don’t have to see it.” (236)

2. Čermak 59. “Do you know other languages beyond your mother language? Which ones? How far does your knowledge reach? Can you merely understand these languages or also speak them, or can you also make use of them through written translations and compositions?” Unless otherwise noted, translations are my own. See also Gramling, Where Here Begins.

3. On the sociological bias towards multilingualism in literary studies generally, see also Kremnitz 8°ff.

4. 818. “Literature—expressed as an allegation—is such a drastic curtailment of language. [. . .] The noise trumpets of nothingness.”


