

# Introduction

## Emanuel Carnevali, in Search of a Language

Emanuel Carnevali was an Italian intellectual in America, and an American writer born in Italy. Neither definition describes him completely, and his career is the story of a long, troubled passage across linguistic and national borders. This troubled passage, on the other hand, was strikingly fertile: it gave us one of the first Italian-American bodies of work to be recognized in American literary circles, as well as a crucial document of the many possibilities and challenges that come with choosing one language over another.

Carnevali was born in Florence in 1897, his childhood a prelude to emigration: raised by his mother, Matilde Piano (who was separated from his father, Tullio), Carnevali lived in Pistoia and then in the Piedmont towns of Biella and Cossato. After his mother's premature death in 1908, Carnevali was left in the care of his aunt Melania, and then of his father. He was sent to a boarding school in Venice in 1911 and then attended school in Bologna. Because of a conflictual relationship with his father, Emanuel decided to emigrate. In March 1914, he left for New York with his brother Augusto.

Carnevali lived in poverty in New York, doing menial jobs such as waiter and dishwasher. In 1917, he married another Italian immigrant, Emilia Valenza. He started writing poetry in English, and his first poems were published in 1918; soon he was publishing poetry, short fiction (most notably the series "Tales of a Hurried Man") and criticism in literary reviews. His work appeared in many of the most important literary reviews in the modernist circles of New York and Chicago, including *Poetry*, *a Magazine of Verse*, *The Little Review* and *Others*. After moving

to Chicago he was, for a very brief time between 1919 and 1920, the assistant editor of *Poetry*. He also translated a small number of Italian poets and intellectuals of his time (although not all of his translations were published). Carnevali rapidly established a reputation as poet and critic among American intellectuals, although he remained an outsider, and quite critical of modernist literature.

In February 1920, he experienced episodes of paranoia and delusion. Hospitalized, he was diagnosed with syphilis. He spent the following months between hospitals and clinics, with a brief experience living on the Indiana Dunes of Lake Michigan. When he returned to Italy in September 1922, the diagnosis was encephalitis lethargica, a neurological disease which left him affected by strong tremors for the rest of his life. Carnevali's health seriously compromised his career. He was hospitalized in Bazzano, near Bologna, where his father worked. Carnevali's American friends took to helping him financially (paying, for example, for a room in the Bologna clinic Villa Baruzziana in the years 1924–26). In 1925, his friend Robert McAlmon's Paris-based Contact Editions published *A Hurried Man*, a collection of his poems, short stories, and criticism written until that moment. Carnevali spent most of the following years in Bazzano, bedridden and gradually losing touch with the literary milieu. On the other hand, he kept writing until his death in 1942, always in English, sporadically publishing new poetry and fiction as well as translations from Pound (into Italian) and Rimbaud. The first six chapters of his memoir appeared in the 1932 anthology *Americans Abroad*: he never finished the work, but his friend and editor Kay Boyle collected it in the 1960s. Boyle's compiled *Autobiography of Emanuel Carnevali* saw the light in 1967. In 1978, the poet's stepsister Maria Pia Carnevali (with the help of opera conductor and Carnevali enthusiast David Stivender) collected and translated her own version of the memoir, together with other works by Carnevali, in the volume *Il primo dio*.

In the years after his death, Carnevali has drawn intermittent interest from intellectuals and scholars, going through a series of "rediscoveries." Giuseppe Prezzolini, in one of the essays of his 1963 collection *I trapiantati*, expressed his interest in Carnevali as soon as he heard about this forgotten contemporary of his, but he also lamented the scarcity of sources on him at the time. In the following years, dedicated friends, admirers and scholars rescued Carnevali from oblivion: Boyle, Maria Pia Carnevali, Stivender and the journalist and critic Gabriel Cacho

Millet, who did a great amount of work publishing Carnevali's letters (*Voglio Disturbare l'America*, 1981) as well as translating material left out by Maria Pia's edition (*Saggi e Recensioni*, 1994; *Diario Bazzanese*, 1994). This book would not exist without the dedicated intellectuals who almost singlehandedly rescued Carnevali from oblivion.

This book does not so much "rediscover" Carnevali as place him in the wider transatlantic context, looking at the challenges and possibilities that came with his choice of the English language over his native Italian. Carnevali's relationship with English—as an object of desire, a tool for literary assimilation, and the repository of Italian echoes and memories—is the fulcrum of this book. While he was hardly the only Italian of his time to write in English after emigration (his contemporaries Pascal D'Angelo and Arturo Giovannitti come to mind), Carnevali's case is exemplary for the symbolic power that the language had in his career. The fact that even after leaving the United States (where, after all, he spent only eight years) he kept writing exclusively in English denotes how much he invested in the language.

By writing in English, Carnevali could make sense of his troubled background as well as the hardship of emigration; at the same time, he could make a case for entrance into American poetry and into modernist circles. This meant having to do with different constraints, ideas of Italy that were projected onto him in America and that he had to navigate in the course of his career. His whole work was involved with the issue of how to bring an Italian experience into an American text, and how to do so without renouncing his individuality. This tension between the individual and the national in Carnevali's works, together with his very vocal presence in American modernism, make him one of the most relevant figures of the Italian-American exchange.

Carnevali's choice of English as a language also involved a continuous challenge, a confrontation with a linguistic system that needed to be accessed and decoded before it could be used. This aspect brings Carnevali together not only with other Italian members of the diaspora, but with every other translingual writer. The expression "literary translingualism" stands for the "phenomenon of authors who write in more than one language or at least in a language other than their primary one" (Kellman 2000, ix). Translingual writing is as old as literature itself: one must only think of the countless medieval authors who wrote in Latin while speaking their local vernacular in their everyday life, as

well as more modern examples like Nabokov or Beckett. However, this phenomenon was largely neglected in the formation of modern national canons, the authors “safely” inscribed into American or Russian, Irish, or French genealogies. Translingual writing has come to forefront again in an age of migrations, postcolonial challenges and global discourses. There is no single way of writing across languages, since the strategies and possibilities of translingual writing are as many as there are languages in the world. One question, however, inevitably arises for all works: how much of the “first” language is still showing in the “new” language?

The first thing to note is that translingual authors do not necessarily use idiosyncratic variation of the target language, as one may think. Carnevali wrote a consistent part of his poems and fiction in what could safely pass as standard American English; others showed a clear Italian influence. All of those texts were the result of an approach to an unfamiliar linguistic reality, a language that was an end point rather than a starting point. The social and cultural factors that made him write in that style, the style of Whitman and Sandburg, speak volumes about the need for acceptance that come with translingual writing. When Carnevali, on the other hand, deviated from the norm, his deviations did not claim to represent the Italian-American variety of English that he could hear in New York (a claim that Pietro Di Donato, for example, could make). Carnevali’s English was the instrument of an individual Italian hoping to make a mark in American literature, and using the elements of his background that he considered either relevant, or close to his heart.

The analysis of Carnevali’s translingual writing must take into account several factors of the context—the Italian diaspora, American modernism, transnational channels of translation and criticism, Fascist cultural policy—together with the way in which bilinguals make use of their linguistic resources to fit their aims and the context. Following the evolution of Carnevali’s language, this volume explores the different strategies that he developed to navigate all the constraints that came with his Italian background and with his American presence, without renouncing to his personal aesthetic goals. Carnevali’s story is one of uncompromising individuality in the face of the modern metropolis; at the same time, it sheds light on the exchanges between Italian and American literature (those that happened and, as we shall see, those that did not). Besides, a study of the evolution of Carnevali’s English through the years offers a chance to look at both the potential and the pitfalls of writing in a second language.

## Carnevali versus Modernity

Carnevali's choice to become an American author—which he explicitly wrote to his first editor as he sent her his first poems—is at the basis of his writing. Saying simply that he chose English is not enough, however; this choice implied a series of other choices. The slang of New York, with its modernity and multicultural influences, was the first variety that he encountered. Soon, he started to read contemporary English and American literature, and when he started to write poetry of his own, he had to contend with the literary English of his time.

Writing in the years immediately after World War I, Carnevali was caught in the aesthetic challenges and calls for renewal that characterized modernism—albeit as an outsider. Writing his way into the New York and Chicago milieus, he became nevertheless a recognizable presence in the space of a few years (1918–1922). What is relevant in this sense is not merely Carnevali's presence alongside modernist masters (Carnevali's "Tales of a Hurried Man," for example, were serialized in *The Little Review* along with Joyce's *Ulysses* in 1920), but his specificity in relation to the modernist aesthetics, as he entered the modernist milieu precisely by flaunting his cultural difference.

Carnevali stood in relation to modernism, but modernism was far from being an identifiable whole, and even nowadays a univocal definition of modernism proves somewhat problematic. Its key element is, in any definition, a response to the modernity of the early twentieth century: "Modernity is a social condition. Modernism was a response to that condition" (Scholes and Wulfman 2010, 26). Modernism is inseparable from an idea of modernity, but its boundaries are equally blurry. Emerging as different responses to the challenges and aspirations of the metropolis, the art of the modern

is a perpetually contested practice. It marks out no single zone of value, no single pattern of experience. It is an ill-defined collection of acts and responses—representation and abstraction, engagement and abstention, fascination and detachment, contemplation and critique—that has offered not one value but a region of commitments. (Levenson 2011, 9)

When I define Carnevali as an outsider of such an "ill-defined" cultural atmosphere, I indicate his critical relationship with the authors that would

later be defined as “canonical” modernists: Ezra Pound, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, William Carlos Williams. These authors were all native English speakers, and all of them readily included in the literary and critical discourse of Anglo-American modernity. Carnevali both criticized and appealed to them.

Modernism was highly concerned with language, and the exploration of its hidden potential, in “an acute awareness of the inadequacy of established literary languages” accompanied by “an unprecedented sensitivity to linguistic and cultural plurality and difference—an awareness, in short, of the condition of Babel” (Taylor-Batty 2013, 3–4). Carnevali’s approach to “Babel” from the point of view of the emigrant was necessarily different from that of his modernist contacts. There is a fundamental discrepancy between Eliot’s, Pound’s, and Joyce’s frequentations of different literary traditions in their stylistic evolutions, and Carnevali’s use of English as a second language. For him it was, if not a matter of life and death, a matter of being recognized as an author or being forgotten, as were many Italian workers in the unforgiving American metropolis.

Several studies have recently “enlarged” the scope of modernism in ethnic and geographical terms (Caparoso Konzett 2002; A. Patterson 2008; Sollors 2008; Ramazani 2009). These “New Modernist Studies,” as they have been called, are preoccupied with “local strains in parts of the world not always associated with modernist production” as well as with “situating well-known modernist artifacts in a broader transnational past” (Mao and Walkowitz 2008, 739). Situated in the same complex urban environment, modernism and avant-garde also coexisted with the rise of ethnic literature, especially in America. Authors from ethnic communities responded to the same metropolitan world that mainstream modernist authors were responding to, often focusing on similar themes (Sollors 2008, 60). At the same time, actual collaborations between American modernists and minority artists were rare. Carnevali was one of the few members of the immigrant masses who managed to create space for himself in English-language modernism, generating curiosity and diffidence in equal measure among the writers of New York and Chicago.

Being Italian, Carnevali had also privileged access to one of the traditions that his fellow modernists appreciated the most. He was highly conscious of it and often attempted to incorporate discussions of Italian tradition into his epic of the displaced migrant:

And as for spaghetti and ravioli, let me tell you once for all that parsley chopped fine and one small onion and . . . Yes, people do think that I am interesting! Characteristically an Italian, don't you know. And it's just what they want . . . the local color, that attractive and light way of talking . . . and those very extraordinary neckties . . . oh, perfectly charming! And, anyway, Dante died quite long ago, and there was a dash of Teuton blood in him, I bet! (E. Carnevali 1920b, 32)

Carnevali was content to include Dante, Petrarca, or Carducci in his fiction and criticism, but he was mostly interested in problematizing the relationship with modernity and with the American metropolis. When he rediscovered the Italian writers of his time, such as Papini, Slataper, and the other authors who wrote for the Florentine review *La Voce*, he immediately felt the desire to engage with them. He did so in the way that the distance allowed him, that is, by becoming a translator. Carnevali's translations may not have had a big impact on the popularity of Italian modernist authors in America, but they are important precisely because they attempted to create contacts between Italian and American/English modernism. One modernity is not enough to describe Carnevali.

Whereas Italian experiences such as Futurism have always been regarded as part of the modernist cultural climate, the term itself has encountered difficulties imposing itself in Italy. This is largely due to the presence of a nineteenth-century movement within the Catholic Church called *Modernismo*. The term has only recently entered the critical debate on Italian literature, providing with its "foreignness" an open category "to access the constellation of cultural phenomena which reflect, in complex and contradictory ways, on the experience of modernity in Italy" (Somigli and Moroni 2004, 4). Under the critical shift, authors and movements that were still categorized under the umbrella term of "decadentismo" or confused with the avant-garde have been placed within their European context (Luperini 2012). A reconsideration of Carnevali's translations and discussion of Italian modernists offers a unique perspective on the similarities and differences between authors who faced the same aesthetic and moral challenges in two different languages.

The aesthetic and moral challenges of making literature from the point of view of an Italian in America always involve, to a greater or smaller extent, the millions of men and women who crossed the Atlantic

in the same years. Carnevali was conscious of being part of a great wave of emigration while, as we shall see, he sought access to American culture and literature exclusively on individual terms. Italian-American literature, though recognizable since the arrival of the first Italians in the New World, was largely born out of isolated efforts, and a clear view of the canon is “emerging” only in recent times (Buonomo and Russo 2011, 77).

He worked before Italian-American literature developed the ability to “think” itself, and an “Italian American vision” grew out of the “innumerable, even involuntary, returns that characterize immigrant Italian narrative as it registers its own passage through time and as it discovers and develops its own characteristic themes” (Viscusi 2006, 142). Carnevali developed his Italian-American conscience on his own, never putting much emphasis on being called “an Italian-American author,” but always aware of the problem of being an Italian in American modernity.

Italian-American intellectuals in later decades often mentioned him as precursor. Viscusi praises his “mastery of international culture, which has become a lodestar for Italian American intellectuals” (2006, 178). Boelhower dedicated a good part of his study on immigrant autobiographies in the United States to Carnevali’s *Autobiography* (1982). Other scholars have considered his immigrant individuality in relation to the modernity of America (Domenichelli 1998; Buonomo 2003), analyzed his relationship with American modernism (Ricciardi 1986; Templeton 2013), or compared him with other migrant authors (Fracassa 2005). Scholarly work on Carnevali so far seems to be inspired by his peculiar life story, narrated in vivid detail in the *Autobiography*, as well as the author’s polemical confrontation with American literature.

Valesio cast Carnevali in the role of a quasi-mythical antecedent of Italian poets in America, precisely in virtue of the fact that he could not identify either with Italy, America, or the Italian communities in America:

Ma insomma, la ragione per cui Carnevali merita di essere ricordato come genealogia della poesia italiana contemporanea negli Stati Uniti è il suo aver vissuto e scritto nell’intervallo o interstizio tra diverse compagini sociali; il suo non essere stato né italiano né americano né italiano americano, ma veramente (cioè coerentemente, puramente—anche con la irresponsabilità che spesso si accompagna alla purezza) poeta tra i due mondi.<sup>1</sup> (Valesio 1993, 277)



Carnevali's individual response to the cultural shock of emigration, and his efforts to present himself as an Italian on his own terms, give rise to a crucial question of Italian-American literature: when an Italian emigrant writes, in what measure does he or she represent Italy?

In the volume, I often refer to the idea of *Italianità*. *Italianità* is an umbrella term expanding across and beyond the Italian peninsula to indicate a repository of cultural elements—always shifting, continuously redefined through the ages, but always assumed to be “inherently” Italian. It is a declination, in the Italian sense, of Benedict Anderson's famous definition of a nation as an “imagined community” (2006, 5)—a community that is postulated as eternal but that requires the active imaginative efforts of its members in order to exist. It is a problematic term whose definition is not easy or automatic. When Tamburri asked, “what exactly is this *italianità* that [Italian-American authors] are interested in re(dis)covering,” he could only conclude that the term

could be language, food, a way of determining life values, a familial structure, a sense of religion; it can be all of these, as it can certainly be much more. Undoubtedly, a polysemic term such as *italianità* evades a precise definition. (Tamburri 1991, 21)

Tamburri's intuition applies to Carnevali as writer of texts featuring several indisputably Italian elements (food, Dante, Italian clerical and anticlerical discourses, the Florentine modernism of *La Voce*, Fascism, and the Little Italies of New York and Chicago), but whose definition of *italianità* is elusive at best. The “polysemic” notion of *italianità* can be realized in the text only through a continuous act of translation in which Italian culture is not communicated as a whole, but elements are selected, transposed, and put in contact with elements of the target language. This contact always points to wider frameworks of nationhood and belonging, yet it can only communicate the precarious and momentary stance of the individual author speaking to a restricted public. Carnevali's reaction to the language and values encountered in America contributed to build and define his shape-shifting *italianità*, allowing us a glimpse into an individual conscience confronting the overwhelming largeness and contradictions of “national” culture.

Carnevali's *italianità* in translation is instrumental for a rediscussion of Italian-American literature going, as in the title of Tamburri's 2003

essay, “Beyond ‘Pizza’ and ‘Nonna!’”—that is, beyond the simple reaffirmation of easy-access signs of Italian presence in America. The risk, Tamburri states, is that of being stuck in old hierarchies of major/minor literatures and in the repetition of old dialectics instead of exploring

the different nooks and crannies of our ethnicity as it has changed over the decades and across generations from a dualistic discourse to a multifaceted conglomeration of cultural processes transgressing Italian, American (read, here, also Canada and United States, as one indeed should), and Italian/American cultural borders. (Tamburri 2003, 163)

Carnevali’s oeuvre was based precisely on the transgression of borders and the refusal of easy logics of identity, and his reelaboration of cultural staples aimed at writing itself into “major” literature without letting go of his Italian background. Carnevali was also aware of the dichotomy that Italian-American intellectuals experience between Italian literature representing a major influence over highbrow Western literature and an American milieu in which Italian-American writers have been often relegated within the constraints of “ethnic” literature. His work is an early response to the same risks and pitfalls for Italian-American literature outlined by Tamburri almost seven decades later—and a testament to the challenges that a writer encounters when he or she attempts to inhabit the space between cultures while crafting a language, a style, and a statement.

The category itself of “ethnic writer” has been rethought in the past decades of scholarly debate, evolving from the original compartmentalization of “ethnic” literature as opposed to the “mainstream.” In the 1980s, scholars started interrogating the notion in its limits and restrictiveness. Sollors in particular proposed to focus on the shifting notions of *consent* and *descent* competing in each text: “we may be better served . . . by the vocabulary of kinship and cultural codes than by the cultural baggage that the word ‘ethnicity’ contains” (1986, 39). The idea is that the transnational writer continually negotiates his or her existence out of multiple constraints, related to kinship (*descent*) or cultural positioning (*consent*). The writer’s individuality is continuously measured against a diasporic community, which stands in relation to an absence (the home country) and the challenges of the host country. The “ethnic” literary agenda is never univocal, having to navigate a range of challenges and

constraints that depend on two cultural environments that are usually taken separately.

The present volume is based on the idea that the negotiations between consent and descent happen not only *through*, but also *around* language—that language is more than a tool for the writer to state his or her position with respect to the forces of consent or descent, but a force of attraction of its own, symbolizing acceptance or resistance of different cultures. Languages carry with them intricate patterns of belonging and difference, individuality and nationhood, all of them evoked in the space of the text: choosing one over another, or combining one with another, is the operation at the heart of migrant writing. Carnevali grew up with no English and spent most of his adult life working to be recognized as an American writer; the present volume deals with what happened between one moment and the other, and the latter's consequences. Language became the place where his Italian background and the challenges of American modernity could be displayed or rewritten, exhibited or discussed, glorified or ridiculed. Carnevali's English became the place where all these opposing aspirations found a place, and all contradictions exploded.

### A Language for the Outsider

The challenges of analyzing a translingual body of work is that of analyzing a text while considering the possibility of another mother-tongue text that never was (translingualism does not necessarily mean self-translation), and the implications of existing in relation to two or more cultural horizons. It is the challenge of considering as many as possible of the cultural, social, and linguistic constraints that the authors assimilated or resisted and that resulted in one single text. In this sense, Deleuze and Guattari's 1975 *Kafka. Pour une littérature mineure* is exemplary; it has often been quoted as a fundamental precedent for the study of translingualism, but also contested by comparative literature scholars because of philological or cultural approximations. The book used Kafka, and his position as a Prague Jewish writer composing in German, to analyze a "minor literature" in the sense of "that which a minority constructs within a major language" (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 16). Deleuze and Guattari take the use of German by Jewish writers in Prague as a model for the "revolutionary conditions" encountered by "every literature within the

heart of what is called great (or established) literature (1986, 18). This approach allows them to dedicate only a few hints as to the linguistic properties of “Prague German that was influenced by Czech” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 23). Scholars have criticized them precisely on these grounds: “what, after all, is this subversive ‘Prague German’ that Kafka wrote? Deleuze and Guattari offer no philological descriptors at all” (Corngold 2004, 274). Corngold warns the reader about the difficulties of claiming that the distinctive brand of German spoken in Prague was recognizable in Kafka’s texts, as he always reportedly intended to write standard German (2004, 273).

Without the space to join in the specific debate, I would like to point out what the researcher of translanguaging may learn from the case of Deleuze and Guattari. They have the undeniable merit of having underlined how an author’s approach to a major literary language is influenced by the use of it as a second language. Yet they have been subject to criticism for asserting the theoretical abstraction while failing to engage directly with the author’s language:

although Deleuze and Guattari articulate their theoretical project through an apparently specific geography, history, and writer, they abstract the theory away from a genuine encounter with particular political contexts and historical situations. (Seyhan 2000, 27)

The specificity of the context, and the author’s individual intention toward the use of language, is crucial in determining the linguistic strategy that the author employed, or at least its visible part in the text.

An important methodological point, when considering the strategies of translanguaging writing, is that an author moves between cultures that are fluid and permeable, not stable and distinct. *Italianità*, as underlined above, is not an unchangeable monolith; but the very fabric of the modern multicultural space is made of exchanges between cultures that are not easily defined. In the 1990s, postcolonial scholars advanced the idea that the movement of ideas and people across borders is better understood not as relation between separate and essentially “pure” cultures, but as a state of perpetual negotiation. Bhabha famously called this the “Third Space” of enunciation, where translation and other forms of textual transformation create

an *international* culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity*. To that end we should remember that it is the "inter"—the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space—that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. (Bhabha 1994, 38, author's emphasis)

The idea applies to Carnevali and his struggles for intellectual freedom beyond the label of a "characteristic" Italian. When Carnevali used an Italian proverb in a short story set in Manhattan; when he wrote articles about Dante or futurism for American readers; when he translated the prose of Papini and the poetry of Govoni, he inhabited the space between cultures but did not bind himself to any of them.

More recently, scholars have criticized Bhabha's paradigm for its highly metaphoric nature and its lack of distinction between translation in the strict sense and transnational writing at large (Wagner 2012, 64). At the same time, the global nature of the modern world makes it necessary to understand the "various kinds of practices" traveling "from one cultural context to another and by doing so undergo[ing] processes of meaning-shifting, or rather, of an extension of meaning" (Wagner 2012, 57). Several linguistic practices can generate this type of meaning-shifting (translation, translanguaging, multilingual writing), and Carnevali practiced most of them. These practices are not the same, but they all involve a degree of linguistic transformation.

Metaphors of transformation are indeed powerful when it comes to describing an existence between cultures. Some use the metaphor of translation to describe migration as the experience of the "translated being" moving "both in the physical sense of movement or displacement and in the symbolic sense of the shift from one way of speaking, writing about and interpreting the world to another" (Cronin 2006, 45). The migrant engages in translation on an everyday basis; for him or her, translation is often a matter of life or death. This process "cannot be reduced to ethnic struggles floating free of history or economics, nor of the landscapes that from time to time come to embody them both," but it is always situated in a precise context of migration (Inghilleri 2017, 143).

The experience to be communicated is often one of displacement, trauma, and misunderstanding, so the task becomes one of translating

“the source language of pain into the target language of the host country” (Hron 2009, 39). If most migrants feel the pain of leaving and the challenges of thriving or failing in the new home, the translingual migrant writer then becomes a special kind of migrant who “translates” this pain in a language that people in the new home will understand. This type of migrant writing reaches out to a linguistic Other—we may even say that the Other is the catalyst of translingual writing, because were it not for the new audience, there would be no need to make the effort of writing in the new language:

If we consider the narrative that articulates the premigration self a source text, and the narrated self that emerges from the translating act carried out for their adoptive language the target text, language migrants are translating from the mother tongue to the foreign language. They are translating the self into the other. (Wilson 2012, 49)

The idea that translingual writing is in some way a translation of the self into a new language is a powerful metaphor, and it gives a good idea of the challenge involved. Like translation, it addresses a new culture and deals with the problem of carrying meaning from one code to another. And, like translation, it implies the risk that not all meaning can be safely rendered in a different code—that something may be, as the saying goes, “lost in translation.”

Translingual writing may share features with translation, but it is not a translation. It lacks a tangible original: translingual writing is born, so to speak, in the target text, and all discussions of “faithfulness” usually associated with a translation are purely hypothetical. It is best described as a form of writing in his own right, with a conceptual nature that sometimes makes us think of it as translation. This does not mean that there is no link between translingualism and translation: the link is conceptual and also practical, as Carnevali (like many other translinguals before and after him) worked as a translator as well. However, what brings together all his efforts at the deepest level—the translingual writing, the literary translations, the intercultural criticism—is a close relationship with English and Italian. Therefore, the most pressing task is not the analysis of how Carnevali handled his “translation” from Italian into English, but how he handled his English and his Italian throughout his literary career.

When Carnevali was writing, bilingualism was still largely considered outside the norm as the imperfect sum of competencies, “two monolinguals in one person” (Grosjean 2008, 10). The status quo of nation-states in Europe equates originality and authenticity with one national language—and claims that authentic expression can only come in the mother tongue:

The uniqueness and organic nature of language imagined as “mother tongue” lends its authority to an aesthetics of originality and authenticity. In this view, a writer can become the origin of creative works only with an origin in a mother tongue . . . (Yildiz 2012, 9)

This is still a very common belief in our time, but it is dispelled by the realization that, in times of global flows of people and words, new languages open up new possibilities rather than impairing one’s use of a pristine, genuine mother tongue. Linguists have recently focused their attention on the possibility that different languages *add* to one’s personality and one’s set of expressive tools; their findings offer interesting suggestions and points of comparison for a scholar who embarks on an analysis of literary translanguaging. The “wider implications of multilingualism in literature are still under-researched” (Gardner-Chloros 2013, 1101), and, while the present analysis is an eminently literary one, the study of a translingual author may not ignore the ideas that are being developed to explain the speech of individuals who have more than one language in their lives.

In her work on *The Bilingual Mind* (2014), Pavlenko starts her chapter on bilinguals’ autobiographical narratives analyzing the claim that the Russian version of Nabokov’s memoir somehow helped him add more detail than in the English version. At the end she wonders: “but even if the switch to Russian did trigger new memories, how generalizable is Nabokov’s experience?” (2014, 190). This book does not intend to generalize Carnevali; rather, I intend to analyze him in his specific, idiosyncratic Italian and American context. The focus is on Carnevali eschewing his father’s Emiliano-Romagnolo dialect, keeping Carducci’s literary language at arm’s length, and attempting to decode Manhattan slang and to conjure Whitman’s rhythms. Chapters 4 and 5 in particular focus on a type of language that can only be Carnevali’s because they appeal to the different localities and cultural spaces that he encountered

in his journey. At the same time, finding similarities between Carnevali's memoirs and similar experiences in the research on bilingualism helps frame his operations within a similar set of challenges and opportunities faced by bilingual migrants before and after him.

This is a volume on how a man managed the two languages he spoke with a view to becoming a recognized writer. In this sense, a very recent understanding of bilingualism provides conceptual tools. This is based on the idea that "language users employ whatever linguistic features are at their disposal with the intention of achieving their communicative aims," regardless of those features being part of this or that language (Jørgensen 2008, 169). In this view, human beings "have *language*, and that is important. It is less important that some of us have *languages*" (Jørgensen 2008, 169–70, my emphasis). This idea applies to all areas of human life, but one can easily see a poet, and a bilingual poet such as Carnevali, agree on the grounds that poetry is concentrated in a particular effect on the reader, and its strength may in some cases take precedence over the national origin of the words themselves.

Linguists call this general understanding of human speech *linguaging*, and the free movement of bilinguals across repertoires of words and phrases *translanguaging*. When a speaker experiences life in multiple contexts where multiple languages are spoken, he or she knows elements from more than one repertoire:

Translanguaging is the enaction of language practices that use different features that had previously moved independently constrained by different features, but that now are experienced against each other in speakers' interactions as one new whole. (Garcia and Li Wei 2014, 21)

While the sociocultural tenets of the modern nation-state generally call for separate monolingual environments, translanguaging regards the operation that speakers do on an everyday basis across the world when they freely use the linguistic tools in their toolbox. In a literary analysis, this idea is particularly useful because of its focus on a linguistic performance rather than on some essential and ingrained national identity of the writer (Harissi, Otsuji, and Pennycook 2012, 527). As we shall see, while Carnevali only wrote in English, his English was influenced by the words and literary works he knew, and that came from America as well as from Italy and France. The audience was always American, but



his Italian background showed more or less depending on the subject matter and the context. All his works, more or less idiosyncratic as they are, come from a choice (repeated in every word) between English and Italian. The idea of *italianità* does not disappear in this effort, but it often becomes problematic. American culture becomes a moveable and elusive target, a goal that was established by Carnevali—and several migrant authors before and after him—and that we may equate provisionally with recognition, the idea of being part of a canon. In both cases, the language is the tangible form of this movement between uncertain poles, and its catalyst.

This analysis works for Carnevali in its individuality—or rather, in the tension between his individuality and what was posited as “Italian” or “American.” It does not directly involve the general history of the Italian language in America, of the many forms that countless dialects and the language of Dante took in the New World, and that as a general rule mark their speakers “as belonging in the contact zone between speakers of standard American English and speakers of Italian dialects” (Viscusi 2006, 28). This is the *Autobiography of a Language* (emphasis on the singular article) and, as such, is concerned with the language of Emanuel Carnevali, following it from the first memories of an Italian childhood to the odd and idiosyncratic English of a returning emigrant.

### A Journey Across Two Languages

The five chapters of the present volume present the story of Carnevali’s language in a chronological order.

Chapter 1 deals with Carnevali’s childhood in Italy and with the problem of the “mother tongue.” The analysis of Carnevali’s texts starts with his posthumously published *Autobiography* (1967), searching for clues on the poet’s linguistic upbringing, with a view to understanding the development of a translingual writer in relation to emotional and social circumstances.

The metaphor of the “mother tongue” is a common image that we use in everyday writing and conversation, but in fact it threads a fine line between the individual and the nation, between emotional and social constraints. Analyzing the factors that led Carnevali to abandon Italy and the Italian language means unveiling connections that invest the family history as well as nationalistic and identity tensions in turn-of-

the-century Italy—and the role that they all had in Carnevali's rejection of the mother tongue.

Then, by looking at Carnevali's recollection of his early years in New York, the chapter reflects on the migrant's linguistic and social ordeal. Carnevali's *Autobiography* sheds light on the struggle of Italians in New York from the point of view of one who attempted to make an entrance not only into the English-speaking American society, but into its literature as well.

Chapter 2 starts when Carnevali enters the stage as a published poet in 1918 and concentrates on the author as a linguistic outsider using a newly learned language to address a monolingual audience. Translingual writing is a process: the long and laborious acquisition of a set of linguistic tools, and the confrontation of a new (often monolingual) cultural context. To understand Carnevali's growing command of the English language, the analysis centers on selected linguistic strategies and key words in both his published and unpublished early writings. Carnevali's use of specific imagery and concepts (in particular the notion of "commonplace") in English illustrates how a translingual author can approach an unfamiliar language, communicate his experience, and express a stance with respect to the target culture.

The story of how Carnevali established a reputation in American literary circles and both adopted and rejected American models shows how translingual writing is never a straight process, but always a complex one involving personal factors as well as the context and editorial market. Carnevali addressed American literature with a strong will to make himself heard and carve out a niche for himself in a literature whose language he had learned in those very years. Judging by the critical opinion of colleagues such as William Carlos Williams, he managed to be recognized as a new presence in America.

After establishing a presence in the target culture, how does an author communicate his or her culture of origin? Does translingualism favor translation and make the author an intercultural broker? How does that interact with the author's individual agenda?

Chapter 3 considers how Carnevali communicated his Italian identity in the new culture and how he related to the Italian immigrant community in New York. Carnevali's criticism and translation strategies indicates a desire to represent *italianità*, but only in his own terms. He made a name for himself in American modernism as a critic and translator of Italian literature at a time where it was experiencing a revival among

English-speaking modernists. However, his treatment of Italian literary symbols also denotes an intention to engage critically with tradition as a means to affirm his individuality.

When it came to discussing fellow Italian migrants, Carnevali's ambivalent and provocative use of the racially derogatory term "wop" indicates an uneasy relationship with the Italian immigrant community. While he sometimes championed the rights of Italian immigrants against discrimination, his strategy of representation suggests that he considered his agenda as separate from the interests of the Italian community in New York as a whole.

The last section of the chapter considers Carnevali as a literary translator. During his career, he translated his favorite Italian authors into English for American literary reviews. Most notably, in 1919 he translated a small anthology of his choosing of poems by Papini, Prezzolini, Saba, Govoni, and Slataper from *La Voce*, an Italian modernist magazine that he greatly appreciated. The project showed Carnevali's transnational links and his agenda as a cultural mediator. The translations themselves are also an interesting document of the links between translation and translanguaging, presenting strong Italian influences and showing the different challenges of translating into a second language.

The issue of the translanguaging writer as "transposing a culture" has been expressed from the beginning of the debate on translanguaging. Carnevali's treatment of the Italian tradition, of Italian emigration and Italian modernism, respectively, reveal how that communication does not take place simply between two discrete cultures. Rather, it must consider personal interest, different group interests, and demands of the editorial market.

Chapter 4 follows Carnevali back in Italy: in 1922, severely ill with encephalitis lethargica, he returned, and in Bologna and its environs he would spend his last two decades. Despite his sickness, he continued to write. Carnevali's works from the late 1920s are ideal for analyzing the evolution of translanguaging writing in a changing context, as well as the strategies that made Italy communicable to the American audience. He created a unique language featuring several literally translated Italian phrases and idioms; that strategy enabled him to effectively represent the unique features of life in small-town Italy under the Fascist regime and even to challenge the mainstream discourse of Italian culture. This highly idiosyncratic language demonstrates the provocative potential of translanguaging writing: it defines Carnevali as an outsider in both Fascist

Italy and American literary modernism and shows translingual writing's strict dependence on the cultural context.

A returning migrant is a double exile. In a rigidly monolingual society, such as Fascist Italy, the return of a migrant can result in diffidence and exclusion. Chapter 5 focuses on the relationship between Carnevali and 1930s Italy, focusing especially on his last big enterprise as cultural mediator: a translation of Ezra Pound's *XXX Cantos*.

While Italian commentators either ignored Carnevali or (rarely) attempted to absorb him into Italian culture, his few remaining links with the literary milieu included Ezra Pound with his group of Italian contacts. Pound gave Carnevali the job of translating the *Cantos*: a job left unfinished for health reasons. The surviving drafts, as well as the only published "Canto," are extremely interesting for what they show in terms of the translingual's relationship with the task of the translator and with his mother language. At a time when the transnational dimension of modernism is increasingly recognized as a defining element of the era (Ramazani 2008; Mao and Walkowitz 2008; Sollors 2008), it is important to record this episode of transatlantic, translational vision, its goals and outcomes.

All of Carnevali's work in the 1930s, both translation and original writing, shows a progressive detachment from both his adopted culture and the culture of his birth. His journey across languages and cultures apparently ended in silence and oblivion in a boarding room in Bazzano (Bologna) in 1942. However, in the following years a small group of dedicated friends, editors, and scholars collected his published and unpublished work, making available to the contemporary public one of the richest and most diverse texts of Italian/American writing.