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Translingual Paratopia and the Universe of Katalin Molnár

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The concept of paratopia in Dominique Maingueneau's literary discourse analysis designates the writers' paradoxical location, their oscillation between belonging and not belonging to the literary field and to the society. This in-between situation is also characteristic to bilingual people, and as such translingual writers (Steven Kellman, *Translingual Imagination*, 2000) are outsiders twice over in comparison to other authors: they also live between their original and their adopted societies. The specificity of translingual paratopia consists in the possibility of bilinguals to use their "other" culture or language as a source of legitimization in their adopted society's literary field. The fluctuation may be observed in different dimensions of literary works, as it is demonstrated by the analysis of the Franco-Hungarian writer, Katalin Molnár's novel, *Lamour Dieu* (1999). Since her early texts, Molnár has challenged the validity of linguistic correctness; she plays with the boundaries of text and the limits of language. In her novel too, she transgresses literary forms, rules of grammar, she incorporates Hungarian proverbs and intertextual references into the French text and she creates neologisms that reflect a personal universe. Hence she portrays an image of in-betweenness: she is situated between forms, languages, cultures and universes.

INTRODUCTION

Katalin Molnár (1951-) is a Franco-Hungarian writer who moved from Budapest to Paris in 1979. After writing several texts in Hungarian, in 1995 she started to publish novels and poems in French. Since her early works, challenging what is and what is not considered to be correct—that is, the relation between transgression and innovation—is at the center of her interests. Her works, such as *poèmes Incorrecs et mauvais Chants chants Transcrits* (Molnár, 1995) or *Quant à je (kantaje)* (Molnár, 1996a), break the rules of the academic French language. They push the boundaries of the written word and play with the limitations of comprehension. In her theoretical writings—for example in "Dlalang" (Molnár, 1996b) or in *Konfèrans pour lé zilétré* (Molnár, 1999)—she outlines her *ars poetica* as one that adopts a phonetic orthography close to oral language. She also participated in collective projects. In 1997, alongside Christophe Tarkos and Pascal Doury, she co-founded the literary review *Poézi prolétèr* (Doury, Molnár & Tarkos, 1997).

Her only novel, *Lamour Dieu* (Kité Moi, 1999), penned under the pseudonym Kité Moi, is in line with her previous works and is a vivid example of writing in between languages and cultures. The narrator (Kité Moi), a middle-aged Hungarian woman, recounts her affair with an African man (*Lamour Dieu*) in Paris. One year later, she looks back on their relationship, with help from her friends whose opinions she often quotes, in order to remember the happy moments and to analyze the problems they had. In the beginning, their liaison is

mainly characterized by the satisfaction that their sexual harmony provides them. However, it soon turns out that they have serious difficulties in understanding one another in other areas. This is mainly because of their cultural differences. They have opposing ideas about monogamy, religion, and the way relationships work. This leads to constant arguments and finally, their separation. This simple story is presented in a way already familiar to the readers of Molnár's previous texts: in use are phonetic orthography, repetitions, metanarrative commentaries, and a unique vocabulary that creates a new world with its own system of references. These transgressions reflect an oscillation related to Molnár's *paratopic* position (Maingueneau, 2004)—that is to say that she belongs, and at the same time she does not belong, to the French society and literary space.

PARATOPIA AND TRANSLINGUALISM

Dominique Maingueneau, the main figure of the new French school of discourse analysis¹, formulated the concept of *paratopia* (1993, 2004) to describe a writer's paradoxical location in the "champ littéraire" or literary field (Bourdieu, 1992). According to the analyst, the literary discourse has a special position in a given society. As with other discourses, it is part of the social space from where it emerges. The production and reception of works are conditioned by their social, geographical, and temporal context as well as by institutions such as schools and journals. However, literature is intended to be distinguished from "profane" texts and to be considered as "discourse-origin," namely, a discourse with authority to legitimize itself and other discourses. That is why at the same time it has to deny it belongs to society and so present itself as independent from institutions.

Writers are also conditioned by this special position of literature. The act of creating is considered antagonistic towards the institutions. However, to become a writer, the author needs to define him or herself in relation to the representations associated to this status. Even if they want to be seen as independent artists, by publishing their texts they are automatically part of the social and literary space. This is why they have to *negotiate* their position between belonging and not belonging to the society and the literary field. This *negotiation* is designated by the concept of *paratopia*: "négociation entre le lieu et le non-lieu, une appartenance parasitaire qui se nourrit de son impossible inclusion" [negotiation between the place and the non-place, a parasitic belonging nourished by its impossible inclusion]² (Maingueneau, 2004, p. 72).

Therefore, writers often present themselves as outsiders (bohemians, parasites, hermits, etc.), but these marginal figures, paradoxically, aim for the auto-legitimization inside the literary field. Their "exile" is meant to distinguish them from ordinary society, to place them in the position of observer. And it is this apparent non-conforming characteristic that gives them the right to speak.

If exile and distance characterize the condition of all writers, then the exiled and bilingual authors are outsiders twice over. Not only do they waver on the boundary of society and the

¹ Discourse analysis is generally defined as the discipline of "analysis of language in use" (Brown & Yule, 1998, p. 1). In opposition to the American tradition that generally prefers studying oral speeches, the French school is mainly interested in written texts, such as the literary discourse. Maingueneau wrote and co-edited the most important works on the subject in France: *Le Contexte de l'œuvre littéraire* (Maingueneau, 1993), *Analyse du discours dans les études littéraires* (Amossy & Maingueneau, 2004), *Le Discours littéraire. Paratopie et scène d'énonciation* (Maingueneau, 2004), etc.

² All the translations of French quotes from the text into English are my own.

individual, but they also live between their original and their adopted societies. What sets bilinguals apart is the possibility to use their “other” culture or language as a source of legitimization in the literary field. Being a stranger or writing in a different language does not have to be a discredit to the author. On the contrary, it helps to free oneself from the “the tyranny of a specific syntactical structure.” Steven Kellman (2000) calls this liberation “emancipatory detachment” (p. 28). As Michel Le Bris (2007) points out, these writers remind us that every creation needs distance, both from other people and from the self: “toute création implique à un moment ou à un autre de se rendre étranger à soi-même” [every creation involves at some point becoming a stranger to oneself] (p. 35).

This special kind of *paratopia* of bilinguals will be called *translingual paratopia*. The word *translingualism* is defined by Kellman (2000) as “the phenomenon of authors who write in more than one language or at least in a language other than their primary one” (p. ix). This concept allows for the consideration of literary bilingualism as a continuous movement *across* languages, rather than a one-way journey from the mother tongue to a new language or a simple coexistence of two or more languages. Indeed, the translingual *paratopia* is mainly characterized by transgression: transgression meaning at the same time the continuous flow between boundaries—from one language to another, from one culture to another—and the breaking of literary and linguistic norms. However, these transgressions will not only lead to the marginalization of the translingual writer, but, paradoxically, they will represent a way of legitimization in the literary field, placing them in a tradition of being different.

Katalin Molnár’s example demonstrates that as every writer builds the *paratopic* image that legitimizes him or her to speak as a writer, translingual authors also *negotiate* their position in their adopted literary space without rejecting their origins or their differences. As Maingueneau (2004) asserts, *paratopia* is not an initial point but a construction through texts and paratexts: “La paratopie n’est pas une situation initiale: il n’est de paratopie qu’élaborée à travers une activité de création et d’énonciation” [The *paratopia* is not an initial situation: there is no *paratopia* that has not been elaborated through the activity of creation and enunciation] (p. 86). Thus translingualism is not just a biographical factor or a static state. It demonstrates the choice of the author to present him or herself as a translingual. This self-portrait, mainly characterized by *oscillation*, can be observed in different aspects of discourse: in Molnár’s case, via the *oscillation* between literary forms, languages, cultures, and universes.

BETWEEN LITERARY FORMS

As aforementioned in the introduction, Molnár has created works across several literary forms: poetry, novel, and poetic prose. However, generally speaking Molnár’s texts cannot be easily classified. Despite the labels that the author gives them, they transgress the traditional limits of literary forms. For example, in her first publication in French, *poèmes Incorrecs et mauvais Chants chants Transcrits* (Molnár, 1995), the grammatical incorrectness of the poems and the paratextual commentaries that continuously interrupt the text differentiate them from traditional poetry. Furthermore, *Quant à je (kantaje)* (Molnár, 1996a), labeled *agrégat*— meaning the alloy of different elements— is a collage of different texts fragmented into pieces.

Lamour Dieu (Kité Moi, 1999) is the only work of Molnár categorized as a novel. And indeed, at first sight it has everything that a novel normally has: the text is divided into chapters, the narrative sections are combined with sequences of dialogue, and the plot develops from an initial situation, passes through a conflict and a climax then finally ends

with a restoration of peace. However, by revealing particular stylistic and referential properties, it may be seen that the limits of the novel and fiction have been altered.

First, the repeated use of the plural form of the first person pronoun *nous* is worth note. From the first sentence the communication frame of the novel is set out with the narrator speaking to the readers: “Nous vous informons que ce récit contient une histoire (une)...” [We inform you that this narrative contains one story (one)...] (p. 7).³ On the following page, there is a clear identification of the communicating participants: “Nous, c’est Kité (Kité Moi). [...] Vous, vous êtes les lecteurs de ce récit si vous le voulez bien” [We, that is Kité (Kité Moi) [...] You, you are the readers of this story if you agree] (p. 8). The main character narrates the story, but instead of the first person singular, as is usually used in novels, the inclusive first person plural pronoun is employed. However, as the *nous* indicates only one person, Kité Moi, it can be interpreted as a plurality of modesty, characteristic of academic texts, used by scholars in order to reduce the exaggerated subjectivity of the first person voice and to generalize their results.

This academic characteristic is also reinforced by the insistence throughout the text to detail the dates of the events and the narration itself.⁴ This meticulousness evokes the care taken in scientific texts to register everything with minute detail. Therefore, the substitution of “I” by “we” or the abundance of temporal references could be aimed to legitimize the author’s right to speak.⁵ However, the contradiction between the content (the personal character of the novel and the love story) and the academic form, in addition to the exaggeration of the number of references, suggest that these transgressions are meant to parody the academic language that is far from Molnár’s ideals of a writing style that is closer to oral speech: “Je propôz une ékriter du fransè parlé ke lé zilétre peûv aprandr trè vit, trè trè vit, an kèlke smèn koi” [I propose a writing based on oral French language that illiterate people can learn very fast, very very fast, in some weeks you know]⁶ (Molnár, 1999, p.13).

On the other hand, besides the imitation of an academic writing style, *Lamour Dieu* also approaches the limits of autobiography. According to Philippe Lejeune’s famous definition of the autobiographical pact: “Pour qu’il y ait autobiographie [...], il faut qu’il y ait identité de l’auteur, du narrateur et du personnage” [In order to be considered an autobiography {...} the identity of the writer, the narrator and the main character is needed] (Lejeune, 1975, p. 15). As has already been shown, the main character and the narrator are the same and, in addition, they adopt the same name that appears on the book cover: Kité Moi. However, this is undoubtedly a pseudonym that recalls the French expression “quittez-moi” meaning “leave me” in English. The phonetic orthography of “quittez” corresponds to Molnár’s language style and philosophy, meanwhile it also sums up the story of the novel: the relationship with Lamour ends with a separation. But Molnár also plays with the boundaries of the first and last name. When divided, they can give new meanings to the pseudonym: *Kité*

³ From now on the references to *Lamour Dieu* (Kité Moi, 1999) will be only marked by the page numbers.

⁴ “Nous vous informons que ce récit contient une histoire (une) qui a commencé le jourdanse 14 rentrée de tout le monde de l’année 45 à 20 heures à la porte choisie par Lamour (Lamour Dieu) et terminé le jourdeuil 21 bal des pompiers de l’année 46 à 14 heures 15 au talaphone (on a remplacé téléphone par talaphone). Ce qui fait dix mois et une semaine et des poussières” [We inform you that this narrative contains one story (one) that started on Danceday the 14th of Everybody’s Return in the year 45 at 8pm at the door chosen by Lamour (Lamour Dieu) and ended on Mourningday the 21st of Firemen’s Ball in the year 46 at 2.15pm at the talaphone (telephone was replaced by talaphone). That makes ten months and one week and change] (p. 7).

⁵ In the novel she even adds that she has the permission of Lamour Dieu to write about their story (p. 9).

⁶ The parts of the original text written phonetically will be marked by the underlining in translation, since Katalin Molnár uses her own rules to transcribe specifically French oral language.

(“leave”) as a first name could refer to someone else (leaving the other lover of Lamour Dieu?) or a place (leaving Hungary?) and the family name *Moi*, which on its own means “I” or “me,” may be part of a tautological game: who wrote this book is *Me*.

Despite the fact that the pseudonym casts doubt on the autobiographical dimension of the novel, at the same time it also refers to Katalin Molnár by the initials, K. M. Other autobiographical references strengthen this interpretation: a direct reference to *Konférans pour lé zilétré*, written by the main character in the text (p. 102), and several similarities between the life of Katalin Molnár and Kité Moi: the two children (p. 103), the Hungarian origins and the life in Paris. Naturally, it does not mean that the whole story should be understood as “real,” but the autobiographical references make it possible to establish a relationship between the experiences of bilingualism in the lives of both Katalin Molnár and Kité Moi.

The oscillation between literary forms prefigures the ambiguity of the whole novel at every level, or even, the totality of Molnár’s works. She uses the categories offered by tradition, but she does not accept their limitations. She imitates a style to parody it, writes an autobiography under a pseudonym, and reveals without fully revealing - belonging without really belonging.

Yet, these transgressions of literary forms and the poetics of fragmentation place her in a highly-appreciated tradition in the literary field. Indeed, from the avant-garde to Postmodernism, the violation of norms and coherence became the norm: Dadaism, Surrealism, Oulipo or *Tel Quel*. These groups all questioned traditional literary forms and language and are now considered canonical. On the other hand, new genres or subgenres like *autofiction* (Doubrovsky, 1977) characterized by an *in-betweenness* or hybridity (between fiction and autobiography in this case) achieved a great success over the last decades.

Molnár continues this tradition not only through her texts, but also through her choice of publishers and groups to which she belongs. She published her works with Fourbis, Al Dante, and P.O.L., all of which are known for their interest in contemporary and experimental texts.⁷ Her friendship and collaborations with Christophe Tarkos, who insisted in his writings on the heritage of avant-garde for his generation (Farah, 2010), also reinforce this image: their *Poézi prolétèr* (Doury, Molnár & Tarkos, 1997) is defined in its subtitle as a review of contemporary poetry and of experimental research, just like *Tel Quel*.

BETWEEN LANGUAGES

Katalin Molnár started her physical and linguistic exile in 1979 when she left Budapest and moved to Paris, but, as she informs the reader in *poèmesIncorrects...*, her insecurities concerning the correct way of speaking and writing both in Hungarian and in French had already begun many years before:

Ma mèr, né d’unn mèr ôtrichyènn, a été séparé d’èl a l’aj de deu ou troa zan, é n’a plu parlé du tou pandan pluzyoer zané. Par la suit, èl a toujours parlé oen ongroa ènsèrtèn é mal aksantué, oen peu kom unn nétranjèr. [...] Mon pèr, issu d’unn famiy ouvryèr (kom

⁷ For example, the Éditions P.O.L. where two of her works appeared (one of them is *Lamour Dieu*) prefers publishing avant-garde texts, but this is compatible with its prestigious place in the literary field: “Elle est une référence en matière de publication littéraire d’avant-garde, pièces de théâtre, poésie et certains de ses livres ont reçu des prix prestigieux” [It is a reference in the matter of published avant-garde literature that plays, poetry, and some of its books received prestigious prizes] (Trézières, 2013).

ma mèr d'ayoer) fezè ossi dé fôt de lang ki étè konsidéré kom inadmissibl par lé milyeu kultivé. De sèt famiy é de se réjim j'é donk érité d'unn trè grand ènsèrtitud kan ta la bonn fasson de parler é d'ékrir an ongroa é sessi malgré mé long zétud lèngouistik é litèrèr an lang ongroaz. A sela s'ajout ke j'é étudyé le fransè l'aj de katorz an é sui devenu, plu tar, profèssoer de lang é de litèratur fransèz. Mè kel professoer ! Oen professoer ki n'a eu ôkoe kontakt, pandan katorz an d'étud, avèk lé zumèn ki parl sèt lang. Sèrt, je sui venu an Frans plu tar mè s'ète déjà trô tar pour ke mé fôt lèngouistik, solidman ankré an moa, puis se dissipé. J'é par konsékan ôssi unn trè grand ènsèrtitud kan ta la bonn fasson de parlé é d'ékrir an fransè (Molnár, 1995, p. 2).

[My mother who was born from an Austrian mother was separated from her at the age of two or three and she didn't speak at all for several years. Thereafter, she has always spoken an uncertain Hungarian with a bad accent, a little bit like a Foreigner. [...] My father, born in a working class family (just like my mother by the way), spoke with mistakes that were unacceptable in a cultivated milieu. Thus I inherited from this family and this regime some very important doubts about the correct way of speaking and writing in Hungarian, despite my long linguistic and literary studies in Hungarian. In addition, I studied French from the age of fourteen and I became, later, a French language and literature teacher. But what a teacher! A teacher who during fourteen years of studying had no contact at all with the human beings who speak that language. Admittedly, I came to France later, but it was too late for my firmly rooted mistakes to disappear. Consequently, I also have serious doubts about the correct way of speaking and writing in French.]

Therefore, according to her testimony, the initial doubts with her mother tongue were doubled by insecurities with her French. She is not just between two languages (Hungarian and French) but also between two registers in both languages (the correct or academic one and the incorrect or the informal one). It is very tempting to interpret the author's rejection of academic language as an (over)reaction to her own situation, but it is also important to remark how these initial problems are solved by Molnár to form a coherent system and a complicated writing style. The transgressions of "correct language" and code-switching have become not only a game but also a way to discover and understand what is behind the surface of the observed phenomena:

Parce que "transcrire", c'est "rire" à la fin, jouer à ça, chercher un peu de consolation là où il n'y en a pas, se donner quelque chose qui à nous n'est pas donné, écrire au-delà, de l'autre côté de la montagne, faire autre chose avec quelque chose qui existe déjà, implanter un texte dans une autre langue, sous une autre forme, dans une autre structure, transformer les fautes en vertus et vice versa... (Molnár, 1996a, p. 17).

[Because "transcrire" {transcribing} is "rire" {laughing} in the end, playing, searching for a little bit of consolation where there isn't any, giving to oneself something that was not given, writing beyond, from the other side of the mountains, doing something different with something that already exists, implanting a text in another language, under another form, in another structure, transforming the mistakes into virtues and vice versa...]

Molnár thus creatively compensates for the challenges of learning a second language as an adult. Instead of hiding the difficulties of French from herself and every foreign person, she names them and creates a new, mixed “language”, an *in-between* language. For example, in *Quant à je*, the following sentences written in French imitate the rules of Hungarian grammar: “Toutefois, vivait alors France-dedans un hongrois mâle et je loin-allai chez lui et il ceci dit à moi: pourquoi debout es-tu dehors? Viens-tu dedans chez moi car je place préparai pour toi. Et je alors dedans allai. Et il compagnon-mien devint pour moi et amant-mien et bienveillant protecteur-mien” [Nevertheless, lived then France-within a Hungarian male and I far-went to his house and he this said to me: why standing are you outside? Come-you inside to my home because I space prepared for you. And I then inside went. And he partner-mine became for me and lover-mine and kind protector-mine] (Molnár, 1996a, p. 84).

Molnár narrates her own story, her relationships, and her exile in this mixed idiolect, appropriate to describe her *in-between* situation. In fact, in her theoretical writings, she expresses her mistrust in languages that, according to her, manipulate reality: “les phénomènes langagiers ne reflètent pas les phénomènes réels” [linguistic phenomena do not reflect the phenomena of the real world] (Molnár, 1996b). Languages cannot reflect experiences because of the arbitrariness of their grammatical rules that have nothing to do with the unpredictable way in which the world functions. The formal correctness is a sterile concept for her that does not entail the correctness of ideas: “S’exprimer correctement ne veut pas dire exprimer correctement, parsekemoi, kiçuipafrançèz, jèssèydabordéléchôz atravèrlégègl, éalorla, achakfoi, jramass démèrd” [Expressing oneself correctly does not oblige correct expression, because I, who am not French, try to do things first through the rules, and then, every time, I just mess it up] (Molnár, 1996b).

Liberating the commonly-accepted language, regulated by grammar, could be then understood as an attempt to get closer to an ideal expression that can better reflect reality than “correct” French. Her personal language, where content and form are in harmony, would be thus the best way to express her personal experiences. The same way, the adoption of phonetic orthography, in order to transcribe oral speech in *Lamour Dieu*, represents Molnár’s choice to make written language more “real,” to write as people really talk in their everyday lives.

With this denunciation of the difference between the rigidity of norms and the language in use, particularly sharp in French, Molnár follows the thoughts of 20th century French writers like Louis-Ferdinand Céline or Raymond Queneau. As the latter proclaims, it is necessary to create a “néo-français” or “troisième français,” a written French corresponding to the oral language: “il faut opérer une triple réforme ou révolution: l’une concerne le vocabulaire, la seconde la syntaxe, la troisième l’orthographe” [it is necessary to execute a triple reform or revolution: one concerns the vocabulary, the second the syntax, the third the orthography] (Queneau, 1965, p. 19). Queneau considers that these reforms had already started in Céline’s novels, such as *Voyage au bout de la nuit* (1932), that transcribes a popular French register—that is, modern oral French—from beginning to end. Queneau himself also experiments with language in accordance with these ideas, like in *Zazie dans le métro* (1959) where he integrates oral language in his text by using phonetic orthography and by imitating colloquial register.

Molnár’s phonetic writing can be thus understood as a continuation of this tradition that she enriches with her translingual experience. Indeed, she explicitly names Céline and Queneau among others (not without playing around with their names) as her precursors in *Lamour Dieu*.

[...] non seulement on n’invente rien mais on ne se prive pas non plus des autres, de Fouis-Cerdinand Léline par exemple (fou français, 57 av. K.-M. – 10), ni de Quaymond Reneau (fou français, 48 av. K. M. – 25), [...], tas de choses dans ce récit viennent directement de chez eux, on les a volés, on les a copiés, que tout le monde soit rassuré là-dessus (121-122).

[it’s not only that we don’t invent anything, but we don’t deprive ourselves of others, of Fouis Cerdinand Léline for example (crazy Trench, 57 B. K. M. – 10), nor of Quaymond Reneau (crazy Trench, 48 B. K. M. – 25), {...}, a bunch of things in this novel are coming directly from them, we have stolen them, we have copied them, everybody should be sure of it].

Blurring the boundaries between oral and written language can also be due to an attempt at “Hungarizing” French. Since orthography in Hungarian reflects its phonetic system, Molnár can be more aware of the distance between pronunciation and orthography in French and of the difficulties that it causes especially for strangers and for less educated people. Indeed, her imitation of oral speech also has a social function or, as Lucie Bourassa explains, such techniques constitute the “democratization of language”: “Molnár propose une écriture phonétique plus facile à apprendre que l’autre, qui pourrait coexister avec elle et servir dans le quotidien pour permettre à plus de gens de lire” [Molnár proposes a phonetic orthography that is easier to learn than the official one, that could coexist with the latter and be used in everyday life to facilitate reading to more people] (Bourassa, 2010, p. 117).

As Molnár (1995) explains in the fragment quoted from *poèmesIncorrects...* (p. 2), she is different, even in her language, since she belongs to a low level of society. To write correctly thus becomes a means of social discrimination and to write incorrectly is a way of speaking to everyone and being understood by everybody:

...parler en barbare pour les barbares que nous sommes est un acte bien plus sain que parler avec pureté [...] Pour entrer dans un nouveau établissement, dans un nouveau milieu est difficile, mais avec un résultat trop faible encore plus difficile de s’intégrer. Relativiser l’idée de la pureté des langues revient à voir plus clairement cette armature et la voire plus clairement revient à se défendre mieux contre (Molnár, 1996b).

[...speaking in barbarian to the barbarians that we are makes much more sense than speaking with purity {...} In a new establishment or in a new environment, it is difficult enough to fit in, but our integration becomes especially difficult if our {language} skills are weak. Putting into perspective the idea of a pure language makes one see more clearly this system and seeing it more clearly makes one fight better against it.]

Lamour Dieu exemplifies this linguistic discrimination by the imitation of oral language that has a very important role in the description of the characters. The register a person uses can reveal his or her social standing, as it happens in the case of one of the main characters, Lamour Dieu. This character speaks using many filler words (“ba”, “voilà”, “olala”, etc.), he has a sloppy pronunciation (he eliminates a lot of sounds), and he prefers short and simple constructions and words: “Lamour Dieu évite les mots compliqués, il préfère dire machin, truc, patati, patata, n’empêche que des fois il dit des trucs du genre: je n’en disconviens pas”

[Lamour Dieu avoids complicated words, he prefers to say thingie, stuff, blah blah, even if at times he says something like: [I do not contravene it] (p. 142).

This kind of speech is mainly characteristic of a low social position that is in accordance with Lamour's description in the text: a black man, originally from Africa, who lives in the suburbs of Paris. The phonetic orthography and the exact transcription of his words represent the narrator's attempt to be more faithful to reality, and, in the end, more realistic. Indeed, Kité Moi pretends that all the conversations were recorded, and she just transcribed them, including the so-called useless words:

[...] [chez Loupé (journal parisien)] ils n'ont absolument pas le souci de garder les choses dites telles qu'elles ont été dites, non, eux, ils n'en gardent que l'essentiel (ce qu'ils considèrent l'essentiel) et l'agencement en phrases qui respectent la grammaire, très vite, très très vite (ils ont l'habitude) et puis surtout surtout laisser tomber le reste: répétitions inutiles, propos inachevés, mots superflus et et cetera, tandis que nous, on tient à tout et on y tient dur comme fer (tournure lamourienne que l'on utilise, allègrement, ici) car dans les choses dites telles qu'elles ont été dites, il y a justement ce reste, car on va pas nous dire qu'une répétition est une chose inutile et qu'un propos inachevé l'est par hasard et que les mots hors sujet sont superflus. (pp. 31-32)

[...] [{at Loupé's (Paradisian newspaper)} they really don't care about keeping the things that were said the way they were said, no, they just keep the essentials (what they consider to be essential) and they edit that into sentences that respect the grammar, very fast, very very fast (they are used to it) and then they mainly, mainly eliminate the rest: useless repetitions, unfinished remarks, superfluous words, et cetera, whereas we stick to everything and we stick to it strongly like iron (a Lamourian turn of phrase that we use here happily), because in the things that were said, there is the way they were said and that is exactly what matters, because they can't tell us that a repetition is a useless thing and that an unfinished remark is what it is by chance and that the words without subject are superfluous.]

Thus the correction of language would reveal more about grammar than about the person who is talking. In summary, Kité Moi presents herself as a truth-teller and indirectly legitimizes her position as an author through the rejection of the manipulation of language and the faithful recordings of the conversations.

In dialogue, the main character, Kité Moi, differs little from Lamour Dieu: she uses fewer filler words, however she does speak a popular register of French. This fact may suggest that bilingual immigrants, just like uneducated, illiterate people, are socially marginalized. However, as is repeated several times in the novel, Lamour Dieu admires Kité because she is an intellectual, that is to say that, in spite of her translingual situation, she can be considered as a socially distinguished person: "Bref, notre plouck à nous, venant de ce qu'on appelait autrefois le peuple, avait une grande admiration pour ce qu'on appelait autrefois les intellectuels et nous avec" [In short, our negro, coming from what were formerly called common people, deeply admired those who were formerly called intellectuals, including us] (p. 58).

This means that writing can represent the process of overcoming one's situation of exile and exclusion. The narrative sequences of *Lamour Dieu* could prove this point: even if they diverge from the register of the traditional novel (being closer to oral language) and they

parody an academic writing style, they are written according to the French orthographic rules and they are presented as carefully-edited texts, the results of a reflection and the author's work. Thus, narrator-Kité Moi and character-Kité Moi, are clearly separate representatives of written and oral language.

Therefore, Kité Moi is not only between two languages and two registers, but also between two social positions. Her *paratopic* image is given by her translingual situation: she uses her outsider-ness as an advantage to observe the non-sense of the norms, and, by transgressing them, she creates a heterogeneous *in-between* language.

BETWEEN CULTURES

Despite her ideas about the arbitrariness of language systems, at the same time, Katalin Molnár recognizes that differences in linguistic structures can hide divergent perceptions of the world:

Le hongrois est ma première langue, la langue dans laquelle j'ai grandi, et ses règles continuent d'être inscrites en moi comme une loi absolue, quelle que soit ma maîtrise du français. De plus, toujours malgré moi et comme tout le monde, ma langue d'origine conditionne mes sensations. Par exemple, je pense et je dis: "J'ai mal à une dent", au lieu de dire "j'ai mal aux dents", ce qui est fautif en français. Mais dans la langue hongroise, on n'a qu'un œil, qu'une oreille, qu'une fesse, qu'une jambe, qu'un bras, et lorsqu'on est manchot, on n'a plus qu'un demi-bras. La perception intime de l'anatomie est donc différente pour un Hongrois et pour un Français. Les deux langues que je pratique s'influencent, se télescopent, entrent en conflit. (Molnár quoted in Diaktine, 1996, July 11)

[Hungarian is my first language, the language I grew up into, and its rules continue to be engraved in me like an absolute law, regardless of my knowledge of French. Moreover, always in spite of me and like for everyone else, my original language determines my sensations. For example, I think and I say: "Look into my eye", instead of saying "look into my eyes", and it is incorrect in French. But in the Hungarian language we only have one tooth, one ear, one buttock, one leg, one arm, and when somebody is armless, he only has half an arm. The individual perception of anatomy is thus different for a Hungarian and for a French person. The two languages I use influence each other, they collide and they conflict with each other.]

These observations of Molnár are in line with the theories of linguistic relativity. According to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, linguistic systems determine speakers' perception of the world and even the way they think. Therefore, users of different languages "are not equivalent as observers but must arrive at somewhat different views of the world" (Whorf, 1956, p. 221). Indeed, research in second language learning, psychology, and anthropology as well as the testimonies of translinguals seem to demonstrate this interdependence between language, culture, and thought. Bilinguals often affirm that when they express themselves in different languages they not only perceive the world in divergent ways, but they feel like different people: "Reflections of bilingual writers and explorations by linguists and psychoanalysts show that languages may create different, and sometimes incommensurable, worlds for their speakers who feel that their selves change with the shift in language"

(Pavlenko, 2006, p. 26-27). Translingual writers also describe their experience of changing languages with the Whorfian term “worldview” (cf. Huston, 1999; Bianciotti, 2002), or even as a schizophrenic division of their selves (cf. Todorov, 1996).

The linguistic relativity calls into question the possibility of translating from one language to another: are the worldviews translatable? If every language represents different perceptions of reality, translation means betraying the vision of the world in the original. However, the differences in worldviews are not totally impenetrable as the centuries-old practice of translation demonstrates: “There is always an escape from the trap of one’s language—through language itself, through the creativity, dynamism, flexibility, as well as the complexity and basic comparability of both individuals and languages” (House, 2000, p. 79). Cultural determinism thus does not make translation totally impossible, but it calls attention to the importance of cultural context. In conclusion, it suggests that translating should be a process of *re-contextualization* of the source text.

This is especially true for fixed expressions and proverbs that vary from one culture to another and that contain the popular beliefs of a culture or nation. Taking them out of the context of their production or translating them literally to another language would lead to incomprehension or misunderstandings. However, *Kité Moi* proceeds precisely that way. In the text of *Lamour Dieu* she incorporates Hungarian expressions translated *verbatim* to French:

(1) Les Molnarois disent: elles les avalent comme un canard les nouilles. Et c’est parce que les canards avalent n’importe quoi en Molnarie. [The Molnarians say: they eat like a duck devouring noodles. And this is because the ducks devour anything and everything in Molnary.] (p. 13)

(2) Une hirondelle ne fait pas l’été comme disent les Molnarois ou le printemps (variante française), ce qui prouve que les hirondelles mettent plus de temps pour regagner la Molnarie que la Trance, en revenant de l’Olifantique [...] [One swallow doesn’t make the summer, as the Molnarians say, or the spring (Trench variant), and that proves that swallows take more time to get to Molnary than to Trance returning from Olifantica {...}] (p. 32)

(3) Les Molnarois disent: ne mélange pas le fils de l’hippopotame avec la philosophie, ils disent ça parce que ces deux choses se prononcent pareil en molnarois: “vizilo fia” et “filozofia.” [The Molnarians say: don’t confuse the son of the hippopotamus with philosophy, they say that because these two things are pronounced similarly in Molnary: “vizilo fia” and “filozofia”.] (p. 82)

(4) Les Molnarois disent: tu bois jusqu’au cou le verre amer et c’est parce que les verres ont des cous et non des fonds en molnarois. [The Molnarians say: you drink until the neck of the bitter glass, and it is because the glasses have necks and not bottoms in Molnarian.] (p. 115)

The explanations of these proverbs point out the interdependence of context and language, just like cultural and linguistic relativity theories do. According to *Kité Moi*, an observation of nature dependent on the geographic context influences linguistic expressions and thought. If Hungarians see people who eat very fast like ducks, it is because ducks in Hungary hurriedly eat anything and everything (quote 1). That is why the changing of the

context also means the alteration of idiomatic sentences: because the swallows arrive later in Hungary than in France, the same proverb has two variants: one in Hungarian and one in French (quote 2). On the other hand, the narrator also observes how phonetic particularities of language can determine thought: French people would never confuse the son of the hippopotamus with philosophy, but for a Hungarian these two words are connected by their pronunciation and by a proverb that exploits their similarity (quote 3). Finally, the particular perception of reality that a community may have can influence their expression and their way of thinking: because Hungarians perceive that glasses have necks and not bottoms they drink until the end of the neck and not “bottoms up” (quote 4).

These sentences interrupt the continuity of the text yet they are intended to enrich it by offering a new interpretation of reality for Francophone readers. The comments help this audience to whom the work is aimed to understand the Hungarian references. However, the insistence on identifying the source of the idioms, even if it is unnecessary to interpret it correctly or if it had already been mentioned in the text, suggests more. Kité Moi wants to emphasize the divergence in the perception of reality in French (“Trench”) and in Hungarian (“Molnarian”). The literal translation of idiomatic expressions challenges a more traditional way of translating that prefers searching for equivalents, homogenizing the text. On the contrary, Kité Moi shows the diversity of languages without transcending their differences.

All these linguistic references to the Hungarian popular culture show that Molnár could not and did not want to deny her origins. On the contrary, she takes advantage of her *in-between* situation to observe the nature of language and to create something original. However, she never forgets for whom she is writing. By choosing to write her novel in French, her audience is by default the French public. Even if she incorporates strange elements in her text, she guides her readers towards the intended interpretation. In short, she speaks as a Hungarian-born French writer, to a French public, in Hungarian-enriched French.

BETWEEN UNIVERSES

These particularities of Molnár’s language style that have so far been noted, such as phonetic orthography, incorrectness and the incorporation of literal translations of foreign expressions in the text, are characteristic to all of her works. Nevertheless, there is one feature in *Lamour Dieu* that had not appeared before: the use of a personal reference system consisting of neologisms and substitutions of existing words by words of her own creation. These personal references are sometimes difficult to identify, but they always have a correspondent in the French language. They refer to it through their phonetic similarity or paraphrases. In this way, the novel builds its own innovative universe, a universe with its own interpretative reference frame. This unique system recalls other “languages” invented by writers, such as the poetic language of Boris Vian in *L’Écume des jours* (1947), the newspeak of Orwell in *1984* (1949), the slang of Burgess’s *A Clockwork Orange* (1962) or the Zemblan of Nabokov’s *Pale Fire* (1962).

Lamour Dieu, just like the aforementioned novels, places the events in apparently non-realistic, dystopian time and space. First of all, with regard to the time frame of the novel, the abundance of references is counterbalanced by the ambiguity of the referents. That is to say that the narrator’s insistence on detailing not just the dates of the events of the story but also the dates of the written text itself suggests that Kité Moi wants to register faithfully each and every event. But at the same time, she masks the temporal references, substituting them

by her own invented words whose referents are not always totally obvious. In the following table some of these referents are presented with their literal translation into English, and their English correspondent:

Table 1: Temporal References

In the text	Literal translation	English
jourdeuil	Mourningday	Monday
jourdur	Hardday	Tuesday
jourmoche	Uglyday	Wednesday
jourlong	Longday	Thursday
jourenfin	Atlastday	Friday
jourdanse	Danceday	Saturday
jourcalme	Calmday	Sunday
bonnes résolutions	Good Resolutions	January
déclaration des impôts	Tax Declaration	February
manque de vitamines	Lack of Vitamins	March
arrêt du chauffage	Interruption of Heating	April
bourré de jours fériés	Stuffed with Holidays	May
examens de fin d'année	End-of-year Exams	June
bal des pompiers	Firemen's Ball	July
stationnement gratuit	Free Parking	August
rentrée de tout le monde	Everybody's Return	September
assurance appart	Flat Insurance	October
visite des cimetières	Cemetery Visit	November
achat des cadeaux	Gift Shopping	December

The new signifiers for the days and months do not simply refer to their French counterparts, but they describe them. The names for the different days reflect their ambience and how the average worker feels about each one and the activities they do during the week. The names of the months describe the main events in each of them in a very subjective way. Indeed, some of the activities can be identified as part of Occidental traditions (visiting cemeteries on the 2nd of November or Christmas shopping) and even as typically French (the firemen's ball that takes place on 13th and 14th of July), but these descriptions emphasize only one of the multiple characteristics of each month. The years are counted from the birth of Katalin Molnár, who seems to have taken the place of Christ himself. The dates of the events after her birth are indicated by her age (the novel is developed in the years 45 and 46) and the ones before her birth are written in the following way: "57 av. K.-M." [57 Before K.-M.] (p. 122).

The spatial references, also frequently present in the text, diverge from the normal denominations. Whereas in the case of the temporal referents the original words were totally eliminated and substituted by another one, the original places are in general phonetically present in the new word. *Kité Moi* changes them partially and gives them new meanings, but without completely eliminating their ability to be identified. Her most frequently used

method is the construction of the so-called “mots-valises”: the fusion of two words into one based on a partial formal similarity⁸ (Table 2):

Table 2: *Spatial References*

In the text	Words	English
Urolope	Urologie + Europe	Europe
Olifantique	Olifant + Afrique	Africa
Trance	Transe + France	France
Molnarie	Molnár + Hongrie	Hungary
Paradis	Paris + radis + Paradis	Paris
Annapeste	Anna + peste + Budapest	Budapest
Lergique	Allergique + Belgique	Belgium

This table shows that the words are not fortuitously mixed, but rather intended to express a characteristic of the place they represent. *Olifantique* recalls the words elephant, ivory horn and Africa: all connected in the imagination of the readers. Europe is associated with a branch of medicine that is partly concerned with the problems of procreation, which in turn could reflect the idea of the “old continent.” Hungary is substituted by the writer’s last name, and this place name becomes the spatial reference for the author’s country in the novel. France and Paris are positively presented as an ideal place (the “paradise”) where people are in ecstasy (“trance”) after they pass the border (“trans”). On the contrary, the new reference for Budapest contains the word “plague” and the name of the patron saint of Hungary according to Kité Moi: “Annapeste, sens étymologique: le four à chaux d’Anne (sainte protectrice de la petite Molnarie)” [Annapeste, etymologically speaking means: the lime-kiln of Anne (patron saint of little Molnary)] (p. 16).

The same mechanisms and the invention of neologisms can also be observed in other references in the novel and can be sorted into four main groups: (1) famous people, (2) socio-cultural references, (3) objects and concepts, and finally (4) swear words. The first group mainly consists of the names of writers. The second group encompasses nationalities, races, religions, and activities related to them or to other social traditions. The third group contains references to objects, concepts and feelings from everyday life. Finally, the expressions found in the fourth group, the swear words, are generally substituted for a “nicer” word. Presented in the following table are a few examples for each group with their corresponding French and English translations:

Table 3: *Other References*

In the text	French	English
<i>1st group</i>		
Filliam Waulkner	William Faulkner	William Faulkner
Bonoré d’Halzac	Honoré de Balzac	Honoré de Balzac
Figmund Sreud	Sigmund Freud	Sigmund Freud
Quaymond Reneau	Raymond Queneau	Raymond Queneau

⁸“L’amalgame de deux mots, représentés par une partie d’eux-mêmes, en un seul pour former un mot-valise s’opère ordinairement sur la base d’une similitude formelle partielle plus ou moins étendue” [The mixture of two words, represented by one part of each of them, into one to form a *mot-valise* is usually based on a more or less extensive, partially formal similarity] (Sablayrolles, 2006).

Hartin Meidegger	Martin Heidegger	Martin Heidegger
<i>2nd group</i>		
richicain	américain	American
totallemand	allemand	German
gentillais	antillais	West Indian
laminoir	noir	black
Le Petit Camembert	Le Petit Robert	Le Petit Robert
Joyeux-Noël	Noël	Christmas
kréditien	chrétien	Christian
Privadan	Ramadan	Ramadan
monotogamie	monogamie	monogamy
<i>3rd group</i>		
talaphone	téléphone	phone
non-répondeur	répondeur	answering machine
pénétratif	préservatif	condom
repliage	mariage	marriage
tristesse	maîtresse	mistress
monsonge	mensonge	lie
mixtualité	sexualité	sexuality
outranger	étranger	Foreigner/stranger
<i>4th group</i>		
matin	putain	whore
bonnerie	connerie	bullshit
apaiser	baiser	fuck
gourde	merde	shit

A large number of these neologisms are *mots-valises*: for example, *kréditien* contains the words *crédit* (credit) and *chrétien* (Christian) and *pénétratif*, is made up of the words *pénétrer* (penetrate) and *préservatif* (condom). There are also substitutions: the substitution of phonemes (*talaphone*), and words (*Le Petit Camembert*, *matin*) and also simple additions: *Noël* (Christmas) becomes *Joyeux-Noël* (Merry-Christmas) and the *répondeur* is *non-répondeur*—in other words, a “non-answering machine.” In the case of the names of writers and other intellectuals, spoonerism or *contrepèterie*⁹ is employed (the first letters of two words are exchanged).

Firstly, the changes are due to the pleasure of the game itself: enjoying the language’s creativity, testing the limits of comprehension and amusing the readers. For the most part this is true with respect to the words from everyday life, as Kité Moi herself also remarks: “Catholique sera bucolique mais talaphone, ce n’est qu’un jeu: il en faut aussi quand on écrit un récit sinon ça serait comme dans la vie, ce qui n’a pas beaucoup d’intérêt, vous le savez bien” [Catholic is bucolic but talaphone, it is only a game: you also need it in the narrative otherwise it would be just like real life, which is not interesting at all, you know] (p. 14).

⁹ According to the definition of *Le Nouveau Petit Robert*, it is the “intersion des lettres ou des syllabes d’un ensemble de mots spécialement choisis, afin d’en obtenir d’autres dont l’assemblage ait également un sens, de préférence burlesque ou grivois” [the inversion of letters or syllables of a specifically chosen group of words in order to create new ones, the construction of which also has a meaning, preferably burlesque or bawdy] (Rey-Debove & Rey, 1996).

Thus, the creation of these new references may come from a desire to distinguish the real world from the fictional world.

On the other hand, the swear words are substituted, according to Kité Moi, because of an apparent decency and prudence: “Nous vous informons que nous n'utiliserons ni mots vulgaires ni injures ni mots contestables par les uns ou par les autres. Nous allons les remplacer par des mots convenables. Ainsi *con* sera *bon*, *putain* *matin* et on verra plus tard pour les autres” [We inform you that we won't use any vulgar words, insults or questionable words for anyone. We will replace them with appropriate terms. As such, *con* {cunt} will be *bon* {good}, *putain* {whore} *matin* {morning} and we'll see later for the others] (p. 14). This decency can be understood as an ironic reference to the literary or academic French that does not tolerate “inappropriate” terms.

However, considering all the temporal, spatial and other types of references, the majority of the neologisms are used for expressions that could identify the historical, geographical, or social frame of the novel. Therefore, the substitutions could be understood as an attempt to mask these referents in order to situate the story in a fictional world or in a *non-place* that would be home to the exiled writer who, because of her double belonging, does not really belong anywhere. But, as was demonstrated earlier, a French reader may easily identify these references. Therefore the reason to change them is not only that of *hiding* but also that of *showing*, thus revealing the arbitrariness of language.

The etymology of words that reflect their meaning, generally speaking, has been lost in French, and that is why Molnár proposes her own way of reintroducing the motivation between form and content. For example, *jourdenil*, which translates to “Mourningday,” contains not only the meaning “the first day of the week,” but it also describes how difficult it is to get up on Monday and go to work after the weekend. In the same way, Hungary becomes Molnary because this place is only interesting to the readers and to Kité Moi because it is her country.

As a translingual writer, Molnár could be more aware of the absence of motivation than most native speakers. The perspective of what another language offers and the point of view of an outsider can lead to the “defamiliarization” of language: “L'acquisition d'une deuxième langue annule le caractère 'naturel' de la langue d'origine—et à partir de là, plus rien n'est donné d'office, ni dans l'une ni dans l'autre; plus rien ne vous appartient d'origine, de droit et d'évidence” [The acquisition of a second language abolishes the ‘natural’ character of the original language, and from that point, nothing is given automatically anymore, in neither of them; nothing belongs to you anymore by origin, right or evidence] (Huston, 1999, p. 43). Hence the position of the outsider benefits the translingual who can build his or her *paratopic* image. Not belonging allows him or her to observe and reflect on linguistic phenomena, and this ability gives him or her the right to write.

CONCLUSION

Translingual *paratopia* was defined as the position of the translingual writer in the literary field of his or her adopted country: a paradoxical location between belonging and at the same time, not belonging. The analysis of different aspects of Kité Moi's *Lamour Dieu* demonstrates that this *oscillation* exists in several dimensions of her writing. In summary, her self-expression is extremely eclectic and transgressing. Her idiolect is characterized by the use of a mixture of different languages and a personal reference system.

This language style recalls the works of other Francophone translinguals. Even if Molnár is a representative of European, educated immigrants like Kundera, Semprún, or Makine, she seems to be closer to a second group of Francophone writers who originated mainly from the ex-colonies. The latter, as they already come from a culture of mixture, are more frequently engaged in experimenting with “creolization,” meaning the contamination of French by their mother tongue. This is the case, for example, of the Martiniquais Patrick Chamoiseau who integrates in novels like *Texaco* (1992), written in French, elements of his creole language that is already a mixture of languages in itself. Molnár, as she affirmed, also comes from a family and a culture where languages and registers coexisted and contaminated each other, which explains her solidarity with other socially-marginalized immigrants. Lamour Dieu, her African lover, is thus in a way her alter ego: despite of all the cultural differences that separate them, they are both outsiders, marginal in the Parisian society.

Molnár takes advantage of this situation in order to observe linguistic and cultural phenomena through the eyes of an outsider. Her knowledge of another language allows her to compare and question everything which, according to Marie Dollé (2001), is the work of every writer: “l'écrivain doit naviguer entre les écueils que constituent les automatismes que charrient la langue, qu'il s'agisse de clichés, d'idées reçues, ou plus sournoisement, de manières de dire ou de raconter. Il lui faut tout remettre en question, tout suspecter, ce qui suppose une étonnante capacité de dédoublement” [the writer has to navigate between the reefs of automatismes, carried along by language, that may be either clichés, platitudes, or simply, ways of speaking or telling. They have to question everything, suspect everything, which implies a surprising inherent ability to split oneself in two] (p. 13).

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