“Le fransè ke chparl ègzist”: Translanguaging in the Work of Katalin Molnár

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Abstract

The works of Franco-Hungarian Katalin Molnár (1951–) stand in stark contrast to most modern-day translingual writing in France. Inspired by her avant-garde aesthetics and migration experience, Molnár radically defamiliarizes French through Hungarian syntax, phonetic orthography, and visual modalities. This article examines her work through the critical lens of translanguaging—a practice that draws on the speaker's internal linguistic inventory without differentiating between external, sociopolitically defined individual languages (Otheguy et al.). Through translanguaging, Molnár subverts a common translingual practice of thematizing a language-learning path into French. Instead of witnessing her linguistic journey from a safe distance, francophone readers are placed into a language experience of their own, which invites empathy and a change of perspective. Molnár's visual and linguistic defamiliarization of French moves her texts beyond the dichotomous native/foreign paradigm, inducing readers to participate in the co-creation of a multimodal language that melds the author's ethical and aesthetic concerns.

Keywords

Molnár – translingualism – multimodality – translanguaging – liminality
Introduction

Literary translingualism—“the phenomenon of authors who write in more than one language or at least in a language other than their primary one”—has an ancient and vibrant history (Kellman, 2000: ix). Its reception has evolved, entering a new phase with the rise of modern nation-states in late eighteenth-century Europe. In the twentieth century in France, translingual members of the historical avant-garde (Tristan Tzara, Hans Arp) and the Theater of the Absurd (Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco) rejected the established monolingual connection between language and nationhood. They boldly experimented with language, stretching and transgressing its boundaries. Katalin Molnár (1951–), a Franco-Hungarian author, follows this revolutionary path of avant-garde poetics, similarly critiquing France’s linguistic hegemony and defying its literary “national” model.

Molnár did not take up literature until after her immigration to France in 1979, and her first works were written and published in her native Hungarian. Molnár’s commitment to formal experimentalism may be traced to her early contributions to a Hungarian avant-garde magazine in Paris, Magyar Műhely [Hungarian Workshop], and collaborations with its editors Tibor Papp, Pál Nagy, and Alpár Bujdosó. With her first works in adopted French, Molnár remained committed to the avant-garde aesthetics, co-founding the short-lived literary magazine Poézi Prolétèr: revue de poésie contemporaine et de recherche expérimentale sur la langue française [Proliterian Powetri: Journal of contemporary poetry and experimental research on the French language]. Her “translingual sensibility”—“an awareness of both the power and the limitations of [a text’s] own verbal medium” (Kellman and Stavans 6)—is therefore intricately tangled with her avant-garde poetics. The extreme formal innovation of Molnár’s writing distinguishes it from other contemporary translingual authors of French expression, such as Milan Kundera (Czech Republic), Andreï Makine (Russia), or Brina Svit (Slovenia). Compared to Molnár, these authors tend to thematize rather than perform linguistic strangeness, doing so from a predominantly metalinguistic angle. To this end, Charles Forsdick observes that modern-day translingual writing in France “permits an openness to linguistic and cultural diversity and even to multilingualism, but within a space that is (pace

1 The scholar Sz. Molnár considers Magyar Műhely to be one of the three most influential Hungarian émigré journals in Western Europe (alongside Irodalmi újság in London and Új Látóhatár in Munich) (19).
2 Julia Ori views literary plurilingualism as a common denominator between Molnár’s bilingualism and her avant-garde work (Plurilinguisme dans l’œuvre de Katalin Molnár 12).
Glissant and others) ostensibly still monolingual” (219). By contrast, Molnár explores linguistic ‘otherness’ not only thematically but also formally in a direct and ostensibly inattentive way for the reader. This makes her oeuvre both exhilarating and alienating. Influenced by her avant-garde background and migration from Hungary to France as an adult, Molnár’s writing breaks with convention, probes the edges of formal innovation, and generates unresolved tensions between language and readers.

Scholars have recognized the distinctly heterogeneous nature of Molnár’s expression, examining in particular how she defamiliarizes French through phonetic orthography, typographic variation, as well as code-switching and code-mixing with Hungarian. Julia Øri introduces the concept of “translingual paratopia” to discuss Molnár’s linguistic, cultural, and formal oscillation between belonging and non-belonging in France’s literary field, wherein her “apparent non-conforming characteristic [...] gives [her] the right to speak” (Translingual Paratopia 85). Amanda Murphy (Ecouter–voir–sentir) offers a related vision of in-betwenness in Molnár’s oeuvre, that of the readers’ vacillation between a sense of distance (irreadability) and closeness (readability). Murphy’s later publication (Poétiques hétérolingues) examines this in-betweeness from the perspective of queer theory, drawing a strong connection between the author’s ‘faulty’ language and queer disruptions, both of which expose the constructed nature of language and subvert cultural binaries. For Alain Ausoni, Quant à je (kantaje) is a compelling example of translingual self-writing, and its “raytin ovthevoys” [“writing of the voice”] explores a new facet of the autobiographical subject’s rapport with language (177). Expanding upon this, the present study examines Molnár’s work through the lens of translanguaging, which, in education studies and sociolinguistics, refers to “the deployment of a speaker’s full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and

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3 It is important to note that an ostensibly monolingual text may still be rejecting hegemonic properties of the monolingual paradigm. After all, as Dirk Delabastita and Rainier Grutman argue, “the actual quantity of foreignisms in a text is rather less important than the qualitative role they play within its overall structure, i.e. their potential as functional elements” (17).

4 See Øri (Plurilinguisme dans l’œuvre de Katalin Molnár) for a detailed analysis of Molnár’s cross-linguistic interaction both in French and in Hungarian.

5 In a later article, Øri advances that Molnár’s ‘faulty’ language also functions as a means of approaching the truth (Écrire vrai 451).

6 For more on translanguaging as part of a broader self-writing phenomenon in contemporary literature, see Ausoni’s Mémoires d’outre-langue: L’écriture translingue de soi (2018). For Ausoni, translingual subjectivity— with its “demande d’autobiographie” (40) — provides a critical lens through which one relates to oneself and the world.
politically defined boundaries of named (and usually national and state) languages” (Otheguy et al. 283). I demonstrate how Molnár uses translanguaging to subvert a common (and, arguably, cathartic) translingual practice of thematizing a language-learning path, which authors often employ to work through this cultural and linguistic shift in their lives. Instead of providing a linguistic Bildungsroman or a “language memoir,” she ostensibly flips this paradigm by transforming readers into learners of her own literary translanguage. The textual and visual co-creation initiated by Molnár’s translanguaging challenges a hierarchical conversion from one language into another, a process that might otherwise engender attention to ‘errors’ and reinforce a dichotomous native/foreign paradigm. Rather than observing Molnár’s linguistic journey from a safe distance, her visual and syntactic defamiliarization of French prompts the reader to participate in the making of a new polyphonic language that melds the author’s ethical and aesthetic concerns. Recognizing important recurring features across Molnár’s literary universe, this article focuses primarily on Quant à je (kantaje) (1996a) and, to a lesser extent, on Konférans pour lé zilétré (1999a) as the texts that most fittingly unveil the connection between Molnár’s formal innovation at the intersection of translanguaging and multimodality.

Molnár’s Translingual Writing through the Looking Glass of Metaphors

In Nord perdu (1999), Nancy Huston—a Franco-Canadian translingual author—allegorizes the relationship between the French language and certain authors (a group to which, by her own admission, she does not belong) as a deferential interaction between a queen and her subjects. Obedient valets at the service of a beautiful and powerful dame “s’affairent autour d’elle, lissent ses cheveux, ajustent ses parures, louent ses bijoux et ses atours, la flattent, et la laissent parler toute seule” [“busy themselves around her, smoothing her hair, adjusting her finery, praising her jewelry and trappings, flattering her, and letting her talk all by herself”] (47). The hierarchical relationship between the queen (French language) and her followers (French authors) creates an image of literature subservient to linguistic tradition. Enveloped in an aura of veneration, the latter remains uncontested and undisturbed. Following in the footsteps of the historical avant-garde, Molnár’s approach to literature is quite the opposite. Hers is founded upon an unapologetic, methodical rebellion: “[T]umadi keulalang,

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7 The term was coined by Alice Kaplan in her essay “On Language Memoir” (59).
cékomlekouran élèktrik é konmèttèpaçédoi danzunkouran élèktrik. émoijédi ke SI” ["Youtouldmi thatlanguadj izlaikilektrik kurent and thatyudountputyorfingerz inanilektrik kurent. andaysed, YESinfakt"]8 (32). The narrator of Quant à je (kantaje) compares incursion into French to sticking fingers into electric current. This strikingly modernist image evokes a dangerous, painful, and forbidden activity. At the same time, it conveys a reckless defiance and the will to break rules, despite concerns of self-injury.

In Molnár’s only novel Lamour Dieu (1999b), venturing into French is likened to an elephant stomping into a porcelain shop: “[V]enir au cœur de la langue tranchaise comme un éléphant dans une boutique de porcelaine” [“getting right to the heart of the [t]rench9 language like an elephant in a porcelain shop”] (99). This allegorical image reverses the power dynamic between the language and the writer. No longer hazardous, French is depicted as a fragile space that can easily fall apart if not treated delicately. Protected by external walls, it becomes vulnerable once the threshold is crossed. Much like an elephant, the writer is a formidable, however clumsy, presence that can wreak havoc. These dynamics—danger and safety, strength and fragility, defiance and doubt—coexist in a state of permanent tension in Molnár’s Quant à je (kantaje).

Quant à je (kantaje)10 [As for I (asforai)] was published in 1996 by P.O.L, known for promoting experimental literature. On its surface, Molnár’s title is

8 Molnár’s work has not yet been published in English. In this article, all translations are my own. It is worth noting that poèmesIncorrects et mauvaisChants chantsTranscrits (1995) gives us a glimpse into the way Molnár translates some of her own writing into English. Namely, she translated “poèmeIncorrectDansNewYork” into “imperfectPoemInNewYork,” with the two versions strongly resembling one another. In an effort to help readers of English better understand what Molnár accomplishes in French, my translations propose to imitate her phonetic spelling, redistribution of words, and Hungarian-based syntax. For a particularly strong example of such pluralistic translation, see Barbara Wright’s artistic rewriting of Raymond Queneau’s Exercises in Style (1958).

In standard English, the cited sentence would be the following: “You told me that language is like electric current and that you don’t put your fingers in an electric current. And I said, yes, in fact” (1996a: 32). This translation, however, is insufficient, as it communicates content but not form. Translating Molnár into conventional English would be contrary to her project, which urges readers to adjust to linguistic opacity. Though its experimental nature poses a challenge for translation, Molnár’s invitation to play along and make her text “more colorful” enables me to undertake this unusual task.

9 In Lamour Dieu, the narrator refers to France as “Trance,” and the French language is “tranchaise.” Translating the latter into English—“Trench”—inadvertently evokes the idea of the French language as an “en-trenched” entity. This notion of being firmly established and resistant to change fortuitously supplements Molnár’s metaphors of the French language and its literary institution.

10 For the remainder of the article, the text will be referred to as Quant à je.
a dual one, written in standard and phonetic French in parentheses. It signals the text’s linguistic plurality in a deliberately grammatically incorrect fashion. To be accurate, the subject pronoun would have to be replaced by a tonic one: Quant à moi [For My Part] or [As for Me]. The title also reveals new connotations if spoken aloud. In addition to foreshadowing the text’s personal nature and its discourse on error-making, it has a homophonic resemblance to the adjective “contagieux” [“contagious”]. This introduces the idea of transmission and of being affected by an external ‘other’ that could be either harmful or beneficial. The choice of a personal over tonic pronoun also brings forth an aural resemblance to the word “jeu” [“game”], which supports the text’s mischievous tone and anticipates the author’s invitation to play along.11

Quant à je lacks a story arc and linear structure. To convey its distinct status and departure from identifiable genres,12 Molnár (via Gilles Deleuze) defines her text as an “aggregate”—an “assemblage hétérogène d’éléments qui adhèrent solidement entre eux” [“a heterogeneous assembly of elements that firmly adhere to one other”] and a combination of “textes autonomes, souvent éclatés, et de morceaux langagiers divers” [“often shattered, autonomous texts and various language pieces”] (1996a: 232). It resembles a narrative collage built from snippets of daily conversations, autobiographical vignettes, metalinguistic and metaliterary reflections, letters, dictionary entries, excerpts from Molnár’s (un)published texts and performances, as well heavy intertextual borrowings (from A. Pushkin, V. Dracsuk, G. Ligeti, etc). Additionally marked by a strong visual presence, Quant à je is marbled with photographs, drawings, charts, symbols, and typographic variation. The text is challenging not only linguistically but also from the narrative standpoint, since uninitiated readers—tempted to read the aggregate in a traditionally linear manner—will struggle to connect the rhizomatic multitude of its stories. It is not until the end of Quant à je that Molnár provides the necessary iconographic and verbal tools to

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11 Murphy (Poétiques hétérolingues 83). See Murphy for a compelling queer translation of Molnár’s title, which builds on the author’s de-formation of language by going beyond dominant approaches to the practice of translation. Playing on phonemic similarities, she takes As for Me through a series of linguistic mutations to arrive at As for I (as foray). Murphy then reverses the process to create an interlingual Demande quatre œil (as forêt) (Ask Four Eye [As(k) Forest]), among others. She argues that, while this translation moves away from its signifier, it draws nearer to its true “signifiance,” characterized by the “travail de variation continu à l’intérieur de la langue poétique” [“work of continuous variation within the poetic language”] (85).

12 See Cardonne-Arlyck (2001) for a genre analysis of Quant à je, in which the text is interpreted as a “composite,” characteristic of twentieth-century literature’s generic hybridity. I thank the reviewer for pointing out this reference.
recognize and follow these divergent narrative routes. Equipped with a loosely structured ability to go off the beaten (linear) path, readers are encouraged to re-explore the aggregate’s multiple beginnings and ends. Following the arrows and abbreviations in the margins, they may explore each narrative as an autonomous entity, without intersecting with others. While most passages are categorized as belonging to a particular story, others—despite their systematic occurrence—remain unidentified.

In her “Notes,” Molnár compares Quant à je to large mussels being plastered with smaller mollusks, which may be easily separated with a pointy knife (235). Much like mollusks, her text is a living organism, in constant intertextual interaction with other bodies of literature. I suggest that the reality of Quant à je is more complex than Molnár lets on, and that the image of mollusks, however compelling, leaves some questions unanswered. For example, given the difficulty of telling its “primary” and “secondary” texts apart, what distinguishes a “foreign” element from a “domestic” one? Where should an incision be made? The notion of contagion, implicitly suggested by the title, offers an equally suitable image for understanding the aggregate’s structure as well as its language. Beyond proximity, it evokes a dangerous, possibly corrupting, influence that compromises and alters ‘original’ identities.13 Quant à je proposes a precarious relationship with the ‘host’ language that ‘infects’ it and changes it from the inside out.

Translanguaging: Merging Molnár’s Ethics and Aesthetics

Molnár’s formal innovation is inseparable from her ethical vision, which, in turn, is shaped by her migrant experience. Discussed at length in Quant à je, it is also programmatically explained in her more theoretic works, such as “Dlalang” (1996b) and Konférans pour lé zilétré14 (1999a). Both texts scrutinize the duality of the French language as one of Molnár’s greatest revelations upon immigration. Molnár comes to France equipped with seventeenth-century French from Corneille and Racine and the art of meticulously constructed sentences, which she learns from teachers who have never traveled to a francophone country. Upon arrival, she is shocked to discover that, despite ostensible fluency, she does not speak the language of her host country, because

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13 Incidentally, one of the narratives in Quant à je is entitled virus.
14 Konférans pour lé zilétré was originally a theater performance, in which the text—read by Molnár—was projected onto a screen behind her. This allowed spectators to experience the text’s uncanny written language alongside the reassuring sound of the spoken word.
there is more than one: “Parske sëtë ègzahteman sa : jariv an Frans avèk tou ske jë apri, le vieû fransè él latin é la gramèr é la litératur é ke ‘amour’ devien féminin ô plurièl é patati é patata épui jariv an Frans é la, stupéfaksion total : mé il parl koi, sé jalna?” [“Kuz that woz ikzektli it: ayeayv in Frans wih evrithin ayv learnt, ould French an’ Latin an’ gramer an’ literachur an’ that ‘luv’ bikamz feminin in thi plural an’ sou on an’ sou forth an’ then ayeayv in Frans and theer, toutal emeyzment: but wot ar they spikin, thouzpipl?”] (1999a: 17). Alongside standard French marked by the French Academy’s stamp of approval, she discovers the living, oral French, which reinvents its rules through dynamic, everyday use. Discovering the plurality of French and the instability of its grammatical norms is bewildering.

With the illusion of fluency pulled out from under her feet, Molnár appears lost in contemporary spoken French. Her insistence on the dual nature of this language corresponds with the view that “each of us, even so called monolinguals, has multiple overlapping rule systems acquired through our participation in divergent speech communities” (MacSwan 179). From this perspective, every ‘monolingual’ navigates several variations and registers of their native language in changing social contexts, akin to speaking different languages. On the one hand, Molnár chips away at the monolithic notion of monolingualism by emphasizing the differential ways in which we communicate in various situations. On the other hand, however, she recognizes the ideologically tangible consequences within monolingualism, as it impacts education, policy, and sociopolitical constructs of belonging.

Molnár’s discovery of the linguistic schism between the written and spoken paradigms radically opposes that of marginalized migrant populations. For many of them, the sound of spoken French is the first linguistic point of contact with their host country. Though Molnár does not equate her experience with theirs, it is important to acknowledge that she approaches migrants’ struggles from a more privileged position. Working-class and migrants with less education may be socially disadvantaged and marked as “other” in part because they may not have mastered standard French. Molnár, on the other hand, experiences symbolic expulsion from the “native” French community when unable to interact colloquially. Without denying this fundamental difference, Molnár considers her position as a foreigner with formal education and no knowledge of spoken French to connect with those who first learn it in informal daily exchanges. Arriving from opposite ends of the spectrum, they meet at the halfway point of linguistic non-belonging. This motivates the

15 Despite higher education, Molnár had an uneasy relationship with her first language. While we can question to which extent Molnár can speak to the experience of work-
narrator’s desire to valorize and legitimize oral French against the daunting stature of its standard register.

Standard and oral French coexist in society, yet they are differentiated within a hierarchical structure of inequality. Oral French, while invaluable for survival and indicative of belonging, is dismissed in formal contexts as inferior or incorrect. Acquisition of spoken French is deemed insignificant, and its users—if limited to it—are viewed as ‘illiterate.’ Channeling the voice of hegemonic institutions and guardians of the language, Molnár ruthlessly concludes:

Parlé fransè, sa na rien a voir avèk ékrir an fransè, sé tunn lang a par ke tu apran a par, sa pran du tan mé se tanla, sa kont pa parske sèt lang, él kont pa, le fransè parlé, tu rigol? Sé mòvè, sé vulguèr, sé bouréd fôt

Spikin french, it haz nathin tu du with raytin in french, itsa seperet languadj that yu lern seperetly, it teyks taim but thistaim, it daznt kaunt kuz this languadj daznt kaunt, spouken french, ar yu kidin? Its bad, its vulger, its fulov misteyks.

This realization drives her entire literary oeuvre. There is a covert correlation between language prestige and its literary production, which is often entangled in colonial politics of domination and questions of social class. Molnár is conscious of the relative literary invisibility of oral French, which contributes to its view as substandard. It could be argued that by writing much of her text in a language register deemed inferior—which she calls “lékri dlavoi” [“raytin ovthevoys”] (1996a: 233) and “transcription de la parole” [“transcription of speech”] (237)—the author seeks to legitimize it in formal circles, in addition to recognizing the time, effort, and utility of acquiring this register. By phonetizing and incorporating orality in her texts, Molnár acknowledges the power of everyday language over the sanitizing rules of academic institutions.

To craft her language, Molnár transforms French—a language with orthographic depth—into one of shallow orthography. The latter means that “the correspondences between letters and sounds (graphemes/phonemes) in the writing system are close to one-to-one” (Davis 4). It allows one to build a

16 While highly innovative, Molnár’s radical approach to French is not without predecessors. See Lucie Bourassa on connections between Molnár and Raymond Queneau (2010).
stronger connection between the sound and its spelling, which is advantageous for the acquisition of reading proficiency. To transcribe oral French, Molnár combines several words into one and removes grammatically silent letters as well as those omitted in informal speech (e.g., skispass—ce qui se passe [“wots-goinon—what’s going on”] (15), keuchpouvè—que je pouvais [“thataykud—that I could”] (42), taümalou—t’as eu mal où [“weardyuhurt—where did you hurt”] (141). She redistributes diacritics (e.g., étuvoudrè—et tu voudrais [“and you would like”] (53), jvèmamuzé—je vais m’amuser [“I will be having fun”] (17)) and adds new letters to materialize a linking consonant produced by the liaison (e.g., nouzavonzapri—nous avons appris [“we have learned”]) (208). This new spelling system helps predict the phonemic structure of language. In turn, its pronunciation allows us to anticipate its orthography. Bourassa argues that Molnár’s phonetization of French generates “une langue plus permissive” [“a more permissive language”], which helps escape anxiety and humiliation of errors and “democratizes” reading (131, 117). Building on this, Őri concludes that “[t]o 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” (Linguistic Paratopia 91). While certainly more accommodating in its ‘incorrectness,’ Molnár’s language is not without rigor.

In addition to the poetic function of irreverent renewal, Molnár’s legitimization of oral speech has an ethical, applied dimension, which is brought into sharper focus through the lens of translanguaging—“the act performed by bilinguals of accessing different linguistic features or various modes of what are described as autonomous languages, in order to maximize communicative potential” (García 140). A recent paradigm shift in the field of linguistics and bilingual studies, translanguaging marks a distinction between external (rigid) and internal (fluid) perceptions of language. Unlike code-switching, which examines how internally distinct grammars of named languages (e.g., French and English) overlap, translanguaging scholars bring to the fore the speaker’s individual integrated linguistic inventory (idiolect). Translanguaging is about the co-presence of languages in the process of meaning-making, and its communicative repertoire also includes nonlinguistic means of expression. It is therefore a disruptive practice that focuses on the inherent flexibility of lived language practices. In the same vein, Molnár pushes against a common misconception of bilingualism as a set of two separate monolingualisms that a speaker deploys relatively distinctly. She rejects arbitrary boundaries between named languages, while also violently imploding the sociopolitical oneness of

17 It is challenging to illustrate this transformation in English due to its rare use of diacritical marks and the absence of the liaison.
language from within. Translanguaging acknowledges that both bilinguals and monolinguals operate via idiolects, and that the difference between the two is quantitative rather than qualitative (Otheguy et al. 292). This allows us to ultimately connect Molnár’s ‘monolingual’ context of language registers (oral/standard French) to her translanguaging with Hungarian.

In Konférans pour lé zilétré, Molnár reveals her own vision of translanguaging with a striking classroom example. It involves a fictional French child whose parents help him learn the language and a French child born to North African parents who speaks “un ôtr fransè” [“another French”], meaning oral French (25). In the classroom, both are expected to acquire a particular kind of a named language—standard French. In other words, they are asked to focus on “those idiolectal features found in the speech of those who share a superior class membership, political power, and, in many cases, an ethnic identity” (Otheguy et al. 301). In Bakhtinian terms, it is a monologically structured environment devoid of tensions that projects the authority of a single, universal voice or language. It gives an advantage to the French child whose parents help them navigate this standard register. Demonstrating discrepancies in the way both students would engage with formal education, Molnár urges us to recognize the value of spoken French by actively integrating it into the learning process instead of suppressing it. She envisions a situation in which a teacher could help a student arrive at grammatically correct standard French construction by drawing on their knowledge of its spoken equivalent. For example, if a student misconjugates a verb in a way that corresponds to a correct phoneme in oral speech, Molnár imagines the following response: “[B]a la, tu ékri korèkteman le fransè parlé, seulman ya la vièy gramèr, la trè vièy gramèr ki veû ke tu rajout isi un ès [...] Parske ôtreman, sé ke dé fôt é dé fôt é de lankre rouj é a la fin, léchèk total” [“Wel ther, yu rayt kurektli in spouken french, iksept ther iz the oud gramèr, the veri oud gramèr hiar that wonts yu to ed an es [...] Kuz atherwayz, its just misteyk epon misteyk an’ red ink and at thi end, towtal feyler”] (1999a: 26). Instead of categorically marking something as wrong, Molnár advocates for a more empathetic approach to relativize the notion of an ‘error’ in a constructive manner. She reminds us that certain rules come exclusively from writing and not from speaking. If the classroom recognizes connections between standard and oral French, some mistakes—instead of being outright rejected as a rule violation—could be acknowledged as a passageway from one to another. Such overlaps would function as a pedagogical scaffolding tool. Contextualizing and relativizing errors through the prism of translanguaging allows for a more flexible approach to language learning and a more equitable environment. It enables students to draw on their idiolects and asks teachers to create dialogic connections instead of operating within a
monolithic concept of language. In many cases, it also prevents a schismatic separation between school and home.\textsuperscript{18}

Molnár’s classroom also reveals a case of linguistic incongruity. On the one hand, the difference between written and spoken French may not be seriously considered due to their belonging to the same named language. On the other hand, the two registers are viewed as separate (enough so for one of them to be called “un ôtr fransè”) to be implemented selectively based on the nature of interactions. Molnár recognizes the social dimension that differentiates between these two “languages,” making one appear inferior, vulgar, and incorrect when deployed in the wrong setting. At the same time, she views the situation from a speaker’s internal idiolectal space and seeks to generate an inclusive, hospitable space where linguistic in-betweenness could be productively implemented.

Though Molnár’s hybrid language would help level the linguistic field, it is important to point out a contrapuntal dynamic at play. As Bourassa and Őri maintain, creating a language that reflects its pronunciation is a reterritorializing gesture for those learning it. However, it is also highly deterritorializing for those who already know it. Shallow orthography produces a more welcoming text, yet it also requires a certain relearning process from those who are used to standard spelling and who expect to quickly scan a text for its meaning. Instead of observing the narrator’s struggle with the French language from a reassuring distance (as one frequently does with ‘language memoirs’), franco-phone readers face their own challenge as learners of Molnár’s translanguage.

With phonetic French, comprehension is hindered visually, as readers can no longer differentiate between usual syntactical units of meaning. In \textit{Quant à je}, words corresponding to individual parts of speech (preposition, verb, noun, etc.) are combined into larger segments. For example, Molnár rewrites “qu’il est impératif” [“that it is imperative”] as a single “kilétinpératif” [“thatitsimper-atif”] (13) and “parce qu’on s’est séparés que” [“because we got separated that”] as a single “parskonséçéparéke” [“kuzwegotsepereytidthat”] (15). Rather than obeying grammatical imperatives of written French, Molnár redraws borders between words to reflect the pace and pauses in spoken French. As a result, sentences can no longer be read at a conventional word level, which pushes readers out of their comfort zone. When language serves as a visual barrier to signification, reading becomes a significantly more labor-intensive cognitive task. It obstructs automatized recognition, delays comprehension, and draws attention to its own materiality.

\textsuperscript{18} In the educational context, scholars view translanguaging as a social justice strategy that decenters monolingualism and whiteness.
Unable to instinctively capture units of meaning, readers (at least in the early stages) are compelled to read aloud in order to adjust to the text and let new patterns emerge. Diatkine views this as a celebratory return to "l'émerveillement enfantin de l'apprentissage de la lecture" [“childlike wonder of learning to read”] (4). The Latin term for a “child”—in fans—opportunistically refers to an inability to speak. This “childlike wonder” should therefore be considered alongside its opposite dynamic: the frustration of being without language. Rediscovering a language at an adult age highlights its arbitrary character and constructedness, while also emulating in some ways the experience of many migrants in France from outside the francophone world. It echoes the Derridian notion of inherent non-belonging in every language: “La langue dite maternelle n’est jamais purement naturelle, ni propre ni habitable” [“The so-called mother tongue is never just purely natural, nor owned nor inhabitable”] (112).

Bilingual Translanguaging

Translanguaging is a socially aware practice, carried out with mindfulness of its interlocutors. While monolingual translanguaging is more acceptable, for bilinguals, “the deployment of full linguistic resources can run up against strong norms articulating the sharpness of linguistic boundaries” (Otheguy et al. 297). As a result, bilingual translanguaging is often reserved for communities that share the same linguistic resources. Pushing against these normative limitations, Molnár boldly interweaves French and Hungarian, all the while addressing readers who are unlikely to share her linguistic and cultural background. Writing “un fransè déranjé par unn lang apriz avan” [“french disturb’d bai a priviusli lurnd languadj”] (1999a: 8) can be viewed as Molnár’s individual case of translanguaging “which eludes classification in group terms, either in relation to other second language learners or as representative of a particular

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19 Molnár occasionally adds other languages into her text, such as German, Latin, and especially English. Used in emphatic exclamations and song lyrics reminiscent of the Beatles, her English is not visually differentiated from the rest of the text. It is phonetically spelled to reflect how it would be spoken with a heavy French accent: “touguèdeur, pliz,” “rimèmbeur,” “djast toudéy” (1996a: 172–73). The two languages are sometimes melded together, as in the “choutle” construction, which combines the English verb “shoot” with the French direct object pronoun “him” (191) or “soipaweuri,” which fuses the French “sois pas” [“don’t be”] with the English “worry” (174). While certain interlocutions in Molnár’s work convey the difficulty of making oneself heard (Bourassa 134), the above-cited additions create an impression of song humming, which introduces another layer of aura and fosters a sense of intimacy.
(socially defined) bilingual group (Gardner-Chloros 179). With her private perspective on translinguaging, Molnár fosters a new linguistic rapport with her French-speaking readers. The defamiliarizing influence of Hungarian is not consistent throughout Quant à je and has varying degrees of intensity. Given its nonlinearity and the critical role of hazard, each reader may experience the multiple facets of Molnár’s French in a linguistically unique fashion. For example, she sometimes writes in French so heavily inflected by Hungarian grammar that readers can only arrive at an approximative understanding. At other times, French no longer follows its standard subject-verb-object word order. Some passages merely hint at the Hungarian influence through a recurring absence of the subject pronoun. By constantly varying the degree of estrangement, Molnár emphasizes the innately dynamic and fluctuating nature of language. Operating between languages, registers, and modalities, she embraces fluidity and destabilizes the notion of totality in any given idiom.

For the author of Quant à je, rules distract from seeing what language can truly accomplish. She fears what has been previously illustrated through Huston’s allegory: French language as a queen whose fineries—rules and conventions—are supported by literary creations. To counter this, Molnár commits to innovating French through linguistic disobedience. This intent is performed through its medium, as she coaxes French out of its syntactical safety through Hungarian: “Contestable le résultat, faut bien le dire, à certains pourra paraître. Mais, une si délicate situation devant sommes que d’empêcher la langue est nécessaire ses habituelles règles derrière de se cacher” [“Questionable result, it must be said, to some may seem. But, such a situation delicate before are that preventing the language is necessary its rules habitual behind from hiding”] (232). Here, content and form are perfectly harmonized. The subject-verb-object sentence structure of French is disrupted to accommodate

20 Synchronic coexistence of standard and oral French highlights the tension between writing conventions and the fluid environment of verbal interactions. In addition to this, Molnár alludes to the diachronic, historical evolution of language by imitating old French (e.g., the narrative doulcettement). She thereby shows that a language can appear foreign to itself both at any given moment as well as over time.

21 In standard French, the sentence would be as follows: “À certains le résultat pourra paraître contestable, il faut bien le dire. Mais nous sommes devant une situation si délicate qu’il est nécessaire d’empêcher la langue de se cach er derrière ses règles habituelles” [“It must be said that to some the result may seem questionable. But we are facing such a delicate situation that it is necessary to prevent the language from hiding behind its customary rules”] (232). My in-text English translation retains the word order introduced by Hungarian syntax and reverses the noun-adjective order to mirror the effect of strangeness in French. It is difficult to predict the way Hungarian would otherwise ‘contaminate’ English according to Molnár’s creative vision.
a Hungarian construction in which words are rearranged based on what the speaker seeks to emphasize. In linguistic terms, French transforms from being a subject-prominent to a topic-prominent language. The result is an uncanny translanguaging with Hungarian syntax and morphology superimposed onto French vocabulary.

Quant à je contains numerous explanations of Hungarian grammar and its distinct linguistic features, yet this didacticism is often thwarted by the aggregate's rhizomatic structure. Readers may not always be exposed to the bottom-up method of a rule explanation followed by its application or other forms of instructional support. For example, Molnár formally introduces the agglutinative nature of Hungarian in the li hongroitt narrative only midway through her text (146). This means that prepositions and possessive pronouns become affixed at the end of words instead of being independent units, and that suffixes also express conjugations and tenses. Gradually applying this to her French, Molnár provides smooth linguistic scaffolding within the folds of this particular narrative, making her fusional principles accessible to the readership (Ori, Plurilinguisme 24–26). While this constitutes an important element of Molnár’s ethos, it is important to note that, given the nonlinear configuration of the aggregate as a whole, readers are likely to experience the agglutination prior to its introduction. It may be encountered as early as in the brief poapoa narrative or in France-vers-dedans écrites lettres. Given the fragmented character of Quant à je, readers may discover ‘tutorials’ on the Magyarization of French in a fortuitous manner, which offsets the narrator’s carefully crafted linguistic guidance within individual narratives. Faced with unconventional structures, francophone readers may be tempted to convert them back to familiar French forms. I posit, however, that Molnár challenges us to avoid sanitizing her transgressive steps. Instead, she invites readers to accept linguistic ambiguity and adjust to approximative and sometimes deferred meaning. As Murphy elegantly puts it, by exposing readers to something different, the text “appelle à ses capacités non pas à tolérer l’étrang(er)été (un discours qui relève de la protection et du renfermement sur soi), mais à y participer, à s’y rendre vulnérable” [“calls for one’s abilities not to tolerate strange(r)ness (a discourse that relates to protection and self-isolation), but to participate in it, to make oneself vulnerable to it”] (Ecouter—voir—sentir 7). While tolerating “strangeness” would simply allow it to exist, Molnár elicits empathy without overidentification, preserving the opacity of the translanguaging subject.

When it comes to linguistic opacity, Anjali Pandey distinguishes between deep and shallow forms of multilingualism in the context of contemporary Anglophone literature. Complying with the demands of a transnational pub-
lishing market, shallow multilingualism consists of an “ornamentalized incorporation of linguistic difference hearkening towards complete semiotic equivalency, and semantic transparency,” which leads to a textually “cosmetic effect” (83). Its logic is one of telling rather than showing. It safely signals a text’s foreignness while minimally interrupting comprehension. Pandey posits that—despite an outward celebration of multilingualism—shallow code-switching and code-mixing strategies are deceptive because they achieve the opposite of what they appear to showcase. They reestablish hegemonic properties of monolingualism by sustaining linguistic hierarchy at the expense of languages that continue to be marked as “peripheral.” In contrast to this “multilingualism-lite” (7), a deep form of multilingualism is rarer, and it occurs at a “discoursal-discursive” level that often resists translation (83). Molnár’s writing undoubtedly belongs to the latter category. Despite her tongue-in-cheek comments on mistakes, she refuses to be limited by the resources of a single language. In Quant à je, Molnár shifts toward an intensive entanglement of her native and adopted tongues with a marginal use of glosses, italics, translations, and other forms of language tagging. Instead of presenting bilingualism as two separate monolingualisms, it validates a linguistic repertoire in its internal fluidity. Throughout Quant à je, Molnár integrates French(es) and Hungarian beyond the word level to the extent that it becomes impossible to neatly separate the two without losing something vital in the process.

Molnár is acutely aware of the danger of pushing her readers away. Comparing books to meals, she laments that the meal “…pourra être trop lourd ou trop fort, un repas déplaisant, indésirable, les invités ne le voudront pas” [“could be too heavy or too strong, an unpleasant, undesirable meal, guests will not want it”] (1996a: 81). She addresses the need to adapt her “meal” by carefully mixing exotic and domestic ingredients (225). As such, Molnár’s Magyarization of French is carefully monitored to challenge without alienating her dinner guests/readers. Discomfort is meant to turn them into active players in the creation of the text’s meaning. The narrator guides us to ensure the text’s accessibility under the condition that a considerable effort is made, without concessions for convenience. This challenge, as discussed earlier, is far from trivial, as Molnár does not provide smooth scaffolding support. Reading Quant à je becomes possible with an understanding that the disquieting alterity of the text is a constant and not something to overcome or master. Her deep multilingualism prompts readers to adjust to a slippery grasp of the text and to approximate its understanding. It must be noted, however, that this ‘didactic’ relationship between narrator and reader is also unstable and open to playfulness, as with the case of error-making.
Undoing the Notion of “Error”

*Quant à je* aestheticizes, dramatizes, and complicates the notion of error. The text opens with a note in which Molnár dares her readers to assume the role of linguistic experts by correcting her mistakes with colored pencils, directly on the page: “Quand tu corriges mes fautes, utilise des couleurs, il y en a beaucoup et de très belles, je t'en prie, tu choisis tes couleurs et comme ça, tu auras un livre coloré à ta manière” [“When you correct my mistakes, use colors, there are many and very beautiful ones, please, choose your colors and thus, you will have a book colored your own way”] (9). Whereas Ausoni interprets this as a reaction to “le fétichisme des francophones natifs à l’endroit de leur langue” [“the native French speakers’ fetishism towards their language”] (178), it is also important to recognize its playful undertone, since it is the reader who is placed in a language learner role for the remainder of the text. Tongue in cheek, Molnár stages a rapport of pseudo-linguistic inequality between the ‘foreign’ writer and the ‘native’ reader who is capable of correcting her mistakes and writing evaluations.22 This dynamic, however, is quickly destabilized by a witty invitation to play along: instead of fixing errors, readers are encouraged to make their own. If *Quant à je* is like a meal merging familiar and new ingredients, then the readers are called upon to make their own culinary imprint on the recipe. Whatever the readers’ intention may be—correcting mistakes or making new ones—they are asked to interact with the text, weaving their own voice into the aggregate’s polyphony. They are thus refused the possibility of passively consuming the author’s linguistic insecurities, becoming instead active participants in the formation of a shared linguistic milieu with joint vulnerabilities.

Molnár wonders what would happen if she were to embrace her proneness to mistakes and take pleasure in making them deliberately. While an involuntary production of errors is “un peu bête, frustrant, désagréable” [“a bit silly, frustrating, unpleasant”], intentional mistakes become a virtual playground, a mischievous space of interaction between reader and author (115). Her freedom from rules and parody of standard practices are reminiscent of Bakhtin’s carnival. As Shanti Elliot reminds, Bakhtin’s philosophy of carnival fuses the sacred and

22 Readers may, in fact, come across several grammar mistakes, such as “jé devenu” [“ay haz bikum”] (77), among others. The “Notes” reveal that these mistakes belong to the intertextual voice of the Hungarian Austrian composer György Ligeti. Molnár implements it in *Quant à je* without conventional signposting, blurring it with her multiple other voices. The narrator also confesses that her editor has already corrected her own mistakes, though she appears regretful of this.
the profane to subvert established structures of power, all in a constant “state of becoming” (130). It “shakes up the authoritative version of language and values, making room for a multiplicity of voices and meanings” (129). Molnár displays a carnivalesque commitment to the undoing of restrictive boundaries between languages and registers, in addition to subverting the insider/outsider, native/foreign binaries and the power asymmetry they imply. In Molnár’s oeuvre, errors function as a form of reinvention rather than deviation from code. Faithful to her word, she transforms flaws into virtues put on display:

[S]urtout peur ai des poètes qui à la correction linguistique tiennent (tous pourtant presque y tiennent) et pour qui de la langue des parfaits usagers les poètes doivent être car la poésie de concevoir des langagières faiblesses avec pas possible n’est (seulement quant à je pleinement ai ces faiblesses par conséquent nullement quant à je me concevoir ne puis sans elles.

[A]bove all fear poets who linguistic correction value (all although almost value it) and for whom of the language perfect users poets must be since poetry to conceive linguistic weaknesses with not possible is (only as for I fully have these weaknesses therefore in no way as for I conceive myself cannot without them.

Molnár fears poets who strive for linguistic perfection and disguise their linguistic frailties. By writing this lament in French hybridized by Hungarian, she directly faces this fear. The hierarchical role of linguistic authority is dispersed; the notion of a mistake is flipped upside down. The narrator deliberately exaggerates her linguistic ‘contagion’ and transforms her weakness into an aesthetic credo. Molnár thus takes poetry outside of its protective, sanitizing case of correctness, making it something to play with rather than preserve, even at the cost of (or, rather, with the hopes of) producing ‘imperfect’ literature. The idea of having a more colorful—meaning, more participatory—text is more vital than having a correct one.

The notion of an error becomes quickly inoperable in a text that willfully bends French to the demands of its own register variety and external grammar. This is reminiscent of Molnár’s observations on linguistic correctness in “Dla-lang”: “La langue n’est jamais fautive: ses exceptions, ses phénomènes contradictoires, ses confusions font partie de ses règles” [“Language is never at fault: its exceptions, its contradictory phenomena, its confusion are part of its rules”] (1996b: n.p.). Simply put, exceptions are formally sanctioned mistakes, which
means that “la correction linguistique n’est rien d’autre [...] que le respect, baouï! lerèsè des fautes autorisées” [“linguistic correctness is nothing but [...] respect, weyée! rispekt of authorized mistakes”] (n.p.). If this is the case, why not authorize her own ‘mistakes’ as new rules and compel readers to adapt to them? Molnár’s acknowledgment of mistakes performs the desire to continue making them while also interrogating what should be viewed as one. Once we accept the approximate nature of Molnár’s language, error becomes part of a new langscape, where it is impossible and unadvisable to restore normativity. “Langscape”—a portmanteau combining “language” and “landscape”—aptly characterizes Molnár’s language as a distinct territory with unique features in need of remapping.

Molnár applies this logic to endorse her literary translanguage. She draws on the visual authority of traditional grammar charts by creating her own pseudo-didactic graphs, which, instead of determining clear-cut rules, parody the format and involve musings on errors and linguistic insecurities. Her playful yet disruptive expression of doubt in a visual space that typically designates authority further emphasizes Molnár’s idea that no one holds a firm grasp over language. In this way, she once again challenges insider/outsider linguistic paradigms to emphasize that all language eludes proprietary claims.

**Plurilingualism and Multimodality**

Epistemological flexibility at the core of translanguaging has generated new reflections in the field, leading to a more recent interdisciplinary concept of “translingual arts.” Expanding translanguaging beyond verbal modes of expression (often tied to named languages), they explore connections between plurilingualism and multimodality. In this context, Adam Jaworski convincingly argues that the study of multilingual writing “needs to be complexified in view of its typography and orthography, relationship with other modalities, intertextuality, non-parallelism of bilingual elements, occasional parallelism of cross-modal elements, and cross-linguistic as well as cross-modal punning” (349). From the perspective of translanguaging, both linguistic heterogeneity and multimodality embrace the fluidity between available semiotic resources for the purposes of meaning-making. In *Quant à je*, linguistic experimentalism interacts with images, symbols, drawings, photographs, as well as varying

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23 The *International Journal of Bilingualism*, for example, dedicated a special issue (2014) to the topic of translingual arts.
typographic fonts and sizes. Compared to language, the visual dimension of Molnárian texts has received considerably less critical attention. Multimodal in-betweenness (visual and verbal), however, is as integral to Molnár’s project as the interplay between languages and registers.

By occasionally writing in an increased font size, Molnár’s language gains a distinctly visual dimension. Words get plucked from their original context and rearranged into new sequences. This visual avant-garde technique invites readers to connect expressions that would not be otherwise related.

In Figure 1, for example, the narrator meditates on the fact that her book can only be ‘inaccurate’ or ‘faulty’ regardless of the language it is written in. Instead of hiding her writerly flaws, Molnár embraces and emphasizes them with a larger font size. This typographic disruption further impacts how we read the page by creating a dual message. The word “unlivr” [“abuk”] is significantly smaller and closer to the margins, which makes it less noticeable and channels attention towards another cluster of meaning: “moi fôtif” [“me faulty/inaccurate”]. This contagious spread of deficiency from the oeuvre to its author’s identity would be imperceptible if the text were written with homogenous typography and read in a conventionally linear manner. Molnár’s typographic experimentation thus complicates the signification process. It invites readers to lean into the associative power of juxtaposition, searching for new meanings, sometimes in a vain promise of a secret code.

24 Molnár’s font variation and letter spacing are reminiscent of modernist practices. While nowadays, at least in graphic design, it is no longer surprising to see many of Dada’s revolutionary techniques, it is uncommon to find them in a novel-length text.

25 For more on this, see Murphy (Ecouter–voir–sentir, Poétiques hétérolingues).
Another striking example of Molnár’s visual language can be found in her dispersed poem *dézormè*, which also merges Hungarian syntax/morphology and phonetic spelling. Throughout *Quant à je* are sprinkled popular names and explanations of plants and animals, which are literally translated from Hungarian alongside their Latin equivalents. Scattered in a haphazard way, each of these dictionary-like entries appear unrelated to adjacent narratives and are therefore missing a clear sense of purpose. In *dézormè*, they are brought together on a single page (Figure 2).

Perplexing words leap off the page. While we may understand some individual units, others are less of a meaningful signifier, and the overall message is elusive. To apprehend it even approximately, the reader would have to diligently track the meaning of each concept throughout the aggregate. For exam-

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26 An explanation of several Magyarization tactics applied in *dézormè* is nested within the *questions idiotes* (*jeu de société*) narrative.
ple, “nèjkouleureu zourspapillon” [“snowkulard bearbutterly”] (63) is a popular Hungarian name for the water ermine (Spilosoma urticae). Its literal translation emphasizes the moth’s softness, size, and blinding whiteness. “Adorable frizépetitt” (Asplenium trichomanes) refers to small fern (29), “velouté trikolomm” (Tricholomopsis rutilans) indicates a mushroom with an incredibly soft texture (41), and “niouçi-mouçi” is an affectionate term for the Easter bunny (74). Besides sharing an organic theme, these words appear otherwise disconnected. As if in a scavenger hunt, part of the answer is cleverly disguised inside a different narrative, where Molnár explains that the animals and plants were selected “en fonction de la charge émotionnelle qu’ils dégagent et non pour ce qu’ils désignent” [“based on the emotional charge they give off rather than for what they designate”] (220). Their consecutive list-like order and enlarged typography, however, compel us to search for a more robust link beyond the narrator’s affective association. Preceded by “seréje” [“aywilbi”], they come together as an enigmatic self-portrait that focuses on sensory representations of smoothness, silkiness, and sweetness. A direct translation of these botanical and zoological terms into French would rob the text of meanings derived from Hungarian, thereby altering their poetic nature. While the adjectives are overall non-threatening, the poem as a whole remains daunting. If left undeciphered (or viewed as undecipherable), these expressions would function more as a collage-like, material presence on the page. Though their decipherment clues hide in plain sight, the words may still linger as part of a ‘foreign’ voice in the linguistic multiplicity of Quant à je.

Molnár playfully yet rigorously polyphonizes French. Some passages are written in phonetic French, others in French disrupted by Hungarian, and some are additionally othered through typographic changes and iconography.27 While various modes of estranging French are often associated with specific narratives (e.g., je, a recurring tale of poetic fears, is consistently inflected by Hungarian syntax), they are not without connections and overlaps, and none is more significant or impactful than the rest. Consider the drawing in Figure 3, which pertains to one of the shortest narratives in the aggregate, entitled lettre sibérienne [Siberian letter]. I suggest that it self-reflexively illustrates multiplicity and linguistic cross-contamination that characterize Molnár’s oeuvre.

The image depicts several plume pens of different shapes and sizes pointing both downward and upward. Scribbles resembling text come out of a few of them in a cloud-like shape; elsewhere, the ink is bleeding. Some pens are joined at the top through map-like passages, crossroads, and bypasses. Others

27 This linguistic polyphony mirrors the rhizomatic multitude of narrative strands in Quant à je, which are filled with intra- and intertextual references.
are linked through a crossroad symbol to suggest a constant flow. The notion of sharing ink creates a powerful image of interconnectivity and multivoicedness. If we are to rely exclusively on Molnár's explanation, this image supports an intertextual reference to the book Viktor Dracsuk: Évezredek útjain [Viktor Dracsuk: On the Roads of Millenia].

The caption of the drawing in the margins points to a pen that had presumably been used to write a letter from this book, which was then incorporated in Quant à je. This explanation, however, is incomplete as to the meaning of the illustration as a whole. What can we make of the rest of the pens and their intricate network? I posit that it demonstrates the aggregate's narrative, intertextual, and translanguaging polyphony, the many voices and languages that shape its storytelling. One of these pens

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This explanation only becomes available to readers when they consult “Notes” at the end of Quant à je. The English translation of the title is mine. Molnár’s reference may contain an error, however, as it suggests that the italicized name—Viktor Dracsuk—is part of the book’s title. In reality, it is the author’s name: Dracsuk Viktor. Évezredék útjain: amiről az írásjegyek mesélnek (Budapest: Móra; Uzsgorod: Kárpáti K., 1983).
belongs to the reader who adapts to Molnár’s literary translanguage, adds their own mistakes and doubts, and thus collaborates in its meaning-making process. Following the author’s imperative, we could even imagine drawing an additional pen to embody the text’s participatory nature and one’s personal imprint on it.

**Conclusion**

In *Nord perdu*, Nancy Huston compares linguistic assimilation to wearing a mask that conceals one’s true face in an effort to be part of a community: “[J]’essaie de parler *comme* vous afin de pouvoir parler *avec* vous” [“I try to speak *like* you so I can speak *with* you”] (35). Molnár pursues a radically different path in her writing. Far from disguising her linguistic otherness as an integration measure, she boldly injects her native Hungarian into the host language, all the while demonstrating the internal plurality of French. Rather than erasing differences between languages, she builds on their tensions and continuity. Not limited to the entanglement of different languages (Hungarian, French, English, German) and registers (oral/standard), her writing also relies on the oscillation between visual and verbal forms of communication. An encounter with this multimodal text generates a new perception of language at the intersection of its three domains—visual, verbal, and auditory. With a homophonic resemblance to “contagieux” [“contagious”], *Quant à je* artfully performs the agenda concealed in its title. Its interweaving of registers, languages, and visual modalities ‘infects’ the host language until the concept of a mistake is no longer an operative term. This ‘contamination’ shows disregard for linguistic borders and exposes the impossible oneness of language. Pushing its limits, Molnár unapologetically undoes the notions of monolingualism as a monolithic entity and bilingualism as a set of two separate monolingualisms, embracing the hybrid, the playful, the carnivalesque.

The aggregate’s literary take on translanguaging compels readers to build a new relationship to French beyond the “language memoir” genre. Without an opportunity to observe the writer’s second-language learning journey from a safe distance, they are directly implicated in the construction of the text’s langscape. *Quant à je* makes ‘native’ speakers uncomfortable in their own language by disallowing its function as a transparent vessel for content transmission. On the surface, Molnár turns her francophone readership into learners of her unique translanguage: indeed, *Quant à je* challenges us to navigate through linguistic opacity and consent to a slippery grasp of the text. Closer examination reveals that, instead of merely transferring the “language learner” role
from herself to her readers (which would only replicate the insider/outsider binary), Molnár transforms her text into a carnivalesque space of co-creation that interrogates the notion of belonging and makes linguistic vulnerability a shared condition. Entwining her ethical and aesthetic considerations, Molnár calls for decentering, empathy, and cooperation. This collaboration, however, does not relieve us of the text’s relentless defamiliarization. Grounded in the unstable materiality of language and the interplay between different semiotic modes, Molnár’s oeuvre hinders easy recognition yet makes it impossible to let go of the text.

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