

TRANSLINGUAL FRANCOPHONIE AND THE LIMITS OF TRANSLATION
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Translingual Francophonie and the Limits of Translation begins with the provocative claim that it 'does not care to describe the limitations of the translingual phenomenon' (1). Rather, in what follows, author Ioanna Chatzidimitriou proposes a new critical model that pays careful attention to the liminal environments in which translingual works are produced. What makes Chatzidimitriou's study so thought-provoking, as well as a seminal contribution to the field of literary and translation studies, is her interpretive framework: namely, that of the *estuary*. A convergence between bodies of fresh- and seawater, the estuary is a heterogeneous space wherein new ecological interactions form and coexist. Deploying the 'estuarine lens' as a tool to delimit translational dynamism and the instability of linguistic borders, Chatzidimitriou makes the fascinating argument that 'translational practices...create and sustain a linguistic, social, and cultural ecology similar to that of an estuary: ebb and flow of dissimilar material that create ecosystems to which new varieties of life adapt' (11). Using this imagery as the point of departure for her study, Chatzidimitriou examines as case studies four translingual, non-postcolonial authors who publish in French: Andreï Makine (originally from Russia), Nancy Huston (Canada), Vassilis Alexakis (Greece), and Chahdort Djavann (Iran).

Chatzidimitriou begins by turning to Andreï Makine's *Le testament français* (1995), offering a reading which complicates 'the domesticating vs. foreignizing paradigm that has dominated recent debates in the field of Translation Studies' (29). Examining the ways in which Makine's protagonist Aloïcha and Aloïcha's grandmother Charlotte bestride their Franco-Russian identities, Chatzidimitriou notes how Makine's narrators require a tertiary linguistic space, neither fully Russian nor fully French, in order to realize their self-expression. With Jacques Derrida and Abdelkébir Khatibi among her principal theoretical interlocutors, Chatzidimitriou interrogates questions of monolingualism and linguistic relationality with the Other. She provides persuasive textual analyses of *Le testament* to flesh out Makine's central metaphor of the destabilising 'graft,' ultimately concluding that Charlotte successfully models the phenomenon of the estuary.

Though estuarine environments are often productive and life-giving, Chatzidimitriou does not hesitate to qualify that they also have the potential to become sedimented and downright deadly. Having convincingly established *Le testament* as a work whose central female character embodies the metaphor of the estuary, she then tracks the way Makine's later works (including *Requiem pour l'Est* [2000], *La terre est le ciel de Jacques Dorme* [2003], and *Cette France qu'on oublie d'aimer* [2006]) subsequently degenerate into an 'utterly hypoxic environment' (65). The most overtly political of his writings, *Cette France* posits a societal binary which pits Makine's idealized, 'Voltarean' France against the multicultural and multilingual France of today. To make sense of his perspective, Chatzidimitriou returns to the central concept of the estuary, which, at its boundary, risks suffocating the 'other' with which it comes into contact. Understood through this framework, those who exemplify difference—namely, immigrants or those whose *francité* ('Frenchness') is deemed insufficient—must homogenize or risk utter exclusion by their new environment.

If Makine's later work precludes all estuarine interaction, Nancy Huston's *Trois fois septembre* (1989) and *Limbes/Limbo: un hommage à Samuel Beckett* (2000) (Chapter 2) allow for a more promising, albeit at times precarious, ecology. A delicate interplay between

voice and silence, Huston's bilingual project is described as a 'double palimpsest' that remains open to estuarine encounters despite the instability of language. Borrowing from Deleuze and Guattari's vocabulary, Chatzidimitriou treats Huston's writing as 'a force of minorization,' a notion otherwise described by the 'deterritorialization of the major language, [the] disappearance of the subject behind the collectivity, and [the] politicization of personal labor' (73). Particularly compelling are Chatzidimitriou's close-readings of select passages, in both French and English, which elucidate how Huston's corpus situates itself within the criteria of minorization, as well as highlight the significant 'Beckettian resonances' (97) present in *Limbes*.

The translanguaging (or, more aptly, ambilingualism) of Vassilis Alexakis (Chapter 3) is unique when considered in light of the author's Greek origins and the diglossic particularities of the Modern Greek language (116). Alexakis' self-translative practice, which Chatzidimitriou examines through his texts *La langue maternelle* (1995) and *Les mots étrangers* (2002) replicates the estuary's tendency to preserve individual ecologies even as they converge at contact zones. Indeed, the French and Greek editions of *La langue maternelle* propose a border-to-border contact site wherein each language preserves its particular elements while simultaneously giving rise to something entirely new. Chatzidimitriou engages theorists such as Emily Apter, Walter Benjamin, and, once again, Abdelkebir Khatibi in order to further her own novel claim that Alexakis' self-translation is a 'critiquing or undoing of the self' as much as it is an 'elucidating (or completing) [of] the other' (118). What results from the translative interaction in *La langue maternelle* is Alexakis' seminal commentary on the complexities of Greco-Kurdish political tensions as they would be understood by both his hellenophone and francophone readers; the text becomes, then, an estuary 'of potential political repositioning in the presence of but not necessarily in relation to one another' (125).

Whereas the estuary might provide a successful framework for understanding *La langue maternelle*, in *Les mots étrangers*, the next object of Chatzidimitriou's study, such relationality seems difficult to sustain. One character's motivation to study Sango, the dominant tongue of the Central African Republic, fails to successfully incorporate the non-European into its ecological model, ultimately subjecting the 'other' to a potentially hypoxic environment. Chatzidimitriou goes as far as to say that 'even within those passages where the narrator most privileges the formation of linguistic estuaries, namely...[those]...in which he documents his acquisition of Sango, interlingual translation verges upon appropriation' (139). Indeed, such passages called to my own mind the inherent tension of language-learning captured by the French phrase *maîtriser une langue*—meaning to acquire, yet literally *to master*, the language. Should we, like Chatzidimitriou, conceive of the narrator's treatment of Sango as a (perhaps inadvertently) appropriative act?

Chatzidimitriou concludes her study by returning to a second female author, Chahdortt Djavann (Chapter 4). Djavann's trilogy *Comment peut-on être français?* (2006), *Je ne suis pas celle que je suis* (2011), and *La dernière séance* (2013) focus on the immigration of a young Iranian woman to France, her struggle to learn French, and her experiences undergoing psychoanalysis in her second language in an attempt to resolve her fragmentary identity. The narrator—named Roxane in the first novel and Donya in the second and third—often suppresses her Farsi-self in order to privilege her new 'Frenchness,' thereby modeling failed estuary; she inhabits a situation so hypoxic and deadly that it culminates in her suicide attempt. What is salvific, argues Chatzidimitriou, is the tertiary space, the neutral interlocutor, who presents himself in different forms throughout the three installments and who is capable of balancing the narrator's two dissident identities. These third-party 'arbiters' offer the narrator a new kind of reconciliation, one which dismantles the competitive, hypoxic binary in favor of a more symbiotic space: 'it is only when [Roxane/Donya] moves

beyond dichotomies and dualities that she enters a space of non-hierarchical, estuarine relationality, a space that is productively silent' (156).

Chatzidimitriou then nuances her analysis by questioning whether this 'productivity' can also be found in *La muette*, a fragmented, quasi-diary style text. Tracing the traumatic histories of both Fatemeh and her non-verbal aunt, *la muette*, and returning to the voice/silence binary in novel ways, Chatzidimitriou makes the fascinating argument that translation 'as a framing device dilutes the estuarine potential of eyewitness testimony reducing a productively resistant muteness to silence deprived of agency,' thus complexifying the estuary's role in Djavann's wider corpus.

In sum, Ioanna Chatzidimitriou proposes a stimulating new critical framework for understanding the phenomenon of translingualism and the tensions present in the work of translingual authors. *Translingual Francophonie* certainly leaves the engaged reader wanting to further analyze, and perhaps extend, the central estuarine metaphor to other authors and literary epochs.