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Natalie Edwards, *Multilingual Life Writing by French and Francophone Women: Translingual Selves*. New York and London: Routledge, 2020. viii + 176 pp. Notes, references, and index. \$160.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9780367150327; \$48.95 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9780429054877.

Review by Julia Elsky, Loyola University Chicago.

Natalie Edwards situates *Multilingual Life Writing by French and Francophone Women* not only in the global turn of French Studies but also in a translingual turn, referencing Jacqueline Dutton's expression and the work of Charles Forsdick.[1] Edwards looks at authors who write a translingual French—that is, a French that incorporates aspects of another language through the use of untranslated (or sometimes translated) words and expressions, as well as grammatical forms and syntax. She focuses on the “*trans* in translingualism,” studying how languages interact with each other (p. 15). Reading six writers, who all come from and live in different parts of the world and have different relationships to (the French) language, Edwards moves away from an approach that places France at the center of French Studies. In so doing, she takes up the challenge posed by Charles Forsdick and others to change the perspective of French as a monolingual language and to move beyond the “linguaphobia” that “shackles a nation to a language” (p. 14). This translingual approach builds on the global, as Christie McDonald and Susan Rubin Suleiman define it in their collection *French Global: A New Approach to Literary History*. [2]

Edwards's book focuses on six women authors who incorporate translingualism into their life writing in French, in texts published from the 1990s to today. Edwards gives an open sense of what life writing might constitute, from self-reflective essays to autobiographical fiction and intimate epistolary exchanges. Edwards explains that this open definition of the genre shifts from conceiving of life writing as it has been theorized in what has often been called the Western tradition to including many other forms of life writing from around the globe. Edwards states that in her research, she has discovered that women writers, more often than their male colleagues, incorporate other languages into their life writing along the lines of her translingualist framework. She thus argues that translingualism presents “another way in which female authors disrupt established models of subjectivity and of life writing” (p. 19).

In the introduction to the book, Edwards provides her theoretical framework, as noted above, as well as a review of some of the major work on the global and translingual turns in French Studies. She presents criticism from the United States, England, and France, showing the different ways in which scholars in these countries define translingual writing. Translingualism as a critical concept most closely resembles, in France, the *interlingue* as Jean-Marc Moura has theorized

it.[3] This review will be of great interest to students and scholars alike. The rest of the book is divided into six chapters that each focuses on a single woman writer, each working in vastly different contexts.

Both chapter one, “Lydie Salvayre: Translanguaging, Testimony, and History,” and chapter two, “French-Vietnamese Translanguaging in the Work of Kim Thúy,” focus on writings about refugees in which translanguaging transforms native and adopted languages. In the first chapter, Edwards analyzes *Pas pleurer* (2014) by Salvayre, a French-born author and the daughter of two refugees of the Spanish Civil War, as a work that blends historical fiction, autofiction, and testimony. Translanguaging in Salvayre’s text takes the form of “a multilingual tapestry” that incorporates Spanish words and grammar into the French text (p. 30). Edwards provides careful readings of the way Spanish and French come together in the text’s dual narrative: the book is told from the point of view of Lidia, the French-born daughter of a refugee of the Spanish Civil War who now suffers from Alzheimer’s, but the text is also interlaced with the mother’s memories (told in the first person) and George Bernanos’s antifascist writings. Studying memory, trauma, and even referring to the neurological impact of Alzheimer’s on bilinguals, Edwards presents “a hybrid grammar that creates a textual space” (p. 30) in which Salvayre not only narrates her story but also becomes a “multilingual mediator” who transmits her mother’s traumatic memories (p. 48). One might connect this transmission of memory to Élisabeth Gille’s “dreamed memoirs” of her mother—Irène Némirovsky, another woman writer who was multilingual—in *Le Mirador* (1992).[4]

In her discussion of Kim Thúy’s loosely autobiographical novel *Mãn* (2013), about a Vietnamese refugee to Quebec in the 1970s, Edwards explores other forms of translanguaging: bilingual inscriptions (in which French and Vietnamese appear side by side, or rather, Vietnamese above the French); the interweaving of French and Vietnamese words and grammar in both directions (Vietnamese into French and vice versa); and translation practices. In fact, the very subject of *Mãn*, Edwards argues, is language itself. In Edwards’s reading, it is through translanguaging that Thúy resists not only monolingual writing but also the traditional understanding of bilingualism. Furthermore, Thúy challenges the notion of the hierarchy between languages, which Edwards presents as standing in opposition to Pascale Casanova’s theory of languages as existing in a hierarchy based on symbolic power.[5] Edwards might have dwelled more on this point, and on the role of cultural capital in Casanova, here and elsewhere, as it touches on a key issue that comes up throughout the book—that is, how authors respond to or reject the power dynamics of French in postcolonial writing, as well as the role of Paris as an important center of francophone publishing.

Turning to French and English in chapter three, “‘En Australie, je parle une langue minoritaire’: Catherine Rey’s Franco-Australian Life Writing,” Edwards sheds light on a writer who has not previously received critical attention. This chapter provides an overview of Rey’s life writing and interviews in French and in English, with a central focus on *Une femme en marche* (2007), a work that combines life writing and travel narrative. Translanguaging here is shown in terms of “peppering” (p. 81), the French language with English words in “one hybrid form” in which the two languages “interact to provide a more nuanced reflection of this author’s self-narrative” (p. 84). Translanguaging allows Rey the freedom to write the self across languages. Edwards points out that Rey writes as a French woman who has immigrated to Australia—that is, from a different perspective than many of the other writers in her study who engage with French in a postcolonial context. Here Edwards talks about the dominance of French and English. Nevertheless, this

move to read to the postcolonial alongside other literatures of migration is precisely part of the translingual and global turns in which Edwards inscribes *Multilingual Life Writing by French and Francophone Women*.

Chapter four, devoted to the œuvre of Gisèle Pineau, deals with the evolution of the author's representation of Creole in her novels over the course of her literary career. First, in *Un papillon dans la cité* (1992), Pineau incorporates Creole words and expressions, using footnotes to explain the Creole. Edwards argues that this typographical practice puts French and Creole on the same page, creating a "seamless reading process" of a "hybrid" text (p. 95). Names of foods and regional dishes in Creole come up here, as in fact they do throughout the book, as part of the translingual practice. Nevertheless, for Edwards the text still shows Creole as its own language and does not ignore "the differences between the dominant and dominated languages" (p. 98). Four years later, in *L'exil selon Julia* (1996), Pineau presents Creole words in italics but provides no translation. Edwards characterizes this shift as Pineau presenting "a marker of unknowability" (p. 101) that serves to "reinforce the notion of ignorance" on the part of the non-Creole-speaking reader in her critique of French racism and racist French policies that marginalize minorities, including linguistic minorities (p. 102). This is an important point, and it would have been useful to know more about the specific policies she addresses here. Finally, in *Mes quatre femmes* (2007), Pineau uses Creole in the first section of the book and in the character Julia's speech, but the words are neither italicized nor translated. Although Edwards acknowledges that there is a surprising lack of Creole in the book, she writes that when it is used, French and Creole are treated in the same way, underscoring the ways in which Creole is "a crucial element of Caribbean subjectivity" and is not separated from French in everyday life (p. 111).

In chapter five, "Staging Resistance to the Language of the Colonizer: Chantal Spitz's Translanguaging," Edwards adds to a growing body of scholarship on Francophone writing from the Pacific region. In this chapter, Edwards more explicitly shows an example of life writing that breaks from norms of the genre, including by mixing poetry and prose, and by constituting a kind of biography of Tahiti that is based on real people (including Spitz) and events, recording "an alternative version of the official written history" that depicts oral tradition (p. 117). In Edwards's readings, the texts *L'île des rêves écrasés* (1991) and *Hombo. Transcription d'une biographie* (2002) resist a mixing of languages; this approach varies from those of the other authors treated in *Multilingual Life Writing by French and Francophone Women* and presents a counterpoint chapter. French and Tahitian are used separately in Spitz's work; at times Tahitian words interrupt the French, and at other times we read long monolingual passages in Tahitian and then long passages in monolingual French (as in the striking opening pages of *L'île des rêves écrasés*). This practice "presents the two languages, cultures and histories as completely separate: the source of difference, trauma, ill health, damage to the land and to the psyche, and intergenerational conflict" (p. 134). And this bilingual treatment of language in turn shows the impossibility in Spitz's texts of resolving "bicultural identities" (p. 135).

Finally, chapter six, "Hélène Cixous's Franco-German Translanguaging in *Une autobiographie allemande*" is devoted to Cixous's use of German and other languages in an epistolary text that she co-wrote with Cécile Wajsbrot and published in 2016. Here, again, translingual takes the form of the inclusion of German words and plays on words with German, French, Arabic, English, Spanish, and Yiddish, as Cixous reflects on her multilingual upbringing in Algeria. Edwards argues that the use of German and the reflections on her plurilingual heritage in *Une*

autobiographie allemande “resolve some of her identity at a particularly difficult time in her life (as she is mourning her mother) and [allows] the reader a renewed perspective on her story” (p. 150). In fact, relationships between mothers and daughters, and grandmothers and granddaughters, constitute a thread that can be followed throughout *Multilingual Life Writing by French and Francophone Women*. In this final chapter, Edwards limits translanguaging French to the presence of non-French words, expressions, and syntax, and does not extend it to Cixous’s writing throughout her career, in which word play within the French language has an important role. As such, Edwards distinguishes her view from Laura Corbin’s reading of Cixous’s word play as intimately linked to her multilingual heritage.[6]

From metropolitan France to Vietnam, Quebec, Australia, Guadeloupe, New Caledonia, Algeria, and Germany, Edwards covers a diverse range of female voices writing the self in different languages that come together in translanguaging French. Her readings of six authors further the work of studying French in the translanguaging turn, showing a productive shift in the field of French Studies. Edwards’s book opens up important areas of research in translanguaging in a time that, as she so rightly states in her conclusion, bears “witness to unprecedented levels of migration, mobility, population growth and multilingualism” (p. 168).

NOTES

[1] See Jacqueline Dutton, “World Literature in French, *littérature-monde*, and the Translingual Turn,” *French Studies* 70.3 (2016): 404–418; Charles Forsdick, “Global France, Global French: Beyond the Monolingual,” *Contemporary French Civilization* 42.1 (2017): 13–29.

[2] See Christie McDonald and Susan Rubin Suleiman, eds., *French Global: A New Approach to Literary History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

[3] See Jean-Marc Moura, *Littératures francophones et théorie postcoloniale* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2013).

[4] Élisabeth Gille, *Le mirador: mémoires rêvés* (Paris: Presses de la Renaissance, 1992).

[5] See Pascale Casanova, *La langue mondiale: traduction et domination* (Paris: Seuil, 2015).

[6] See Laura Corbin, “The Other Language, the Language of the Other in the Work of Assia Djébar and Hélène Cixous,” *MLN* 129.4 (2014): 812–828. Another important study is Ronnie Scharfman, “Narratives of Internal Exile: Cixous, Derrida, and the Vichy Years in Algeria,” in H. Adlai Murdoch and Anne Donadey, eds., *Postcolonial Theory and Francophone Literary Studies* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), pp. 87–101.

Julia Elsky
Loyola University Chicago
jelsky@luc.edu

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