Italian Canadiana

Dôre Michelut: Voicing One's Linguistic and Existential Hybridity Through Multilingual Writing and Self Translating

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See table of contents

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Article abstract

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Dôre Michelut: Voicing One's Linguistic and Existential Hybridity Through Multilingual Writing and Self Translating

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Summary: This article investigates the practice of self-translation in the context of migration by examining the literary production of Dôre Michelut, a Canadian author of Italian origins. It specifically illustrates how Michelut's writing and translating are rooted in her migrant experience and operate as instruments through which the author can voice her hybrid identity and bridge Italian and Canadian worlds. Michelut's experience of living in-between multiple linguistic and cultural spaces is recreated on the written page, which becomes the site where these multiple spaces are connected and interwoven. The act of writing and translating are thus interrelated in a continuous process of creation that leads to the production of a "hybrid text" and to the enactment of a "hybrid process." In the first case, hybridity emerges through multilingual writing. In the second case, it is articulated around a specific form of self-translation that is in-between writing and translating.

Meeting Dôre Michelut

Dorina Michelutti, better known as Dôre Michelut, is one of the most famous and interesting representatives of Italian-Canadian literature.[1] She was born in 1952 in Sella di Rivignano, a town near Udine, in the region of Friuli. Her family migrated to Canada in 1958 and settled down in Toronto. After graduating from high school in 1972, she spent five years in Florence, studying Italian at the University of Florence. She returned to Canada in 1981, where

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* Part of this article also appears in my monograph *Voices of Women Writers: Using Language to Negotiate Identity in Transmigratory Contexts* (New York: Anthem Press, 2023), chapter 3, pp. 57–83.

[1] She uses the Friulian version of her name.

she continued to study at the University of Toronto. Meanwhile, she began to write and publish in literary magazines. Her first book of poems, *Loyalty to the Hunt*, was published in 1986 by Guernica Editions. In 1994, this book appeared also in the French version, entitled *Loyale à la chasse*. In 1989, she published "Coming to Terms with the Mother Tongue," an essay which will be particularly relevant to the present analysis. In 1990, Michelut published, in cooperation with five writers, *Linked Alive* and the simultaneous French edition, *Liens*. In 1990, she also published *Ouroborous: The Book That Ate Me,* containing poems in English, Italian, and Friulian dialect.[2] In 1993, she published *A Furlan Harvest*, a collection of poems written in Italian, English, and Friulian by women of Friulian descent living in Canada. After 1996, Michelut started travelling and working around the world. In 2005, she received a Master of Arts in Applied Communication from Royal Roads University in Victoria, BC. She died of cancer in Oman in March 2009. There, she was teaching advanced speech and multimedia and technical communication at the Al Akhawayn University, in Ifrane.

Michelut's works have appeared in many literary publications and have been anthologized both in Canada and Italy.[3] Her literary production constitutes a form of experimental fiction, that is, a form of writing defined by its innovative nature. As such, she continually breaks linguistic, narrative, and stylistic norms and conventions, thus combining different styles and discourses. Through this innovative approach to writing, "discursive borders are constantly relativized and transgressed, thereby intensifying the work's migratory character."[4] Her inventive approach is evident in her experimenting with different poetic forms, such as a series of *renga*, an Asian form of social poetry.[5] It emerges also on the level of content; Michelut's poems are thematically obscure, difficult to analyze, and engage the reader with different levels of interpretation. Her self-translating experience, as well as the essays where she explores her multilingualism and narrates what it means to live in-between multiple linguistic and cultural heritages, can be also understood as examples

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[2] Michelut uses the term Furlan; nevertheless, I will be using Friulian, thus adopting the conventionally accepted English version, which is also used by scholars of Italian-Canadian literature, such as Saidero in "Plurilinguismo e autotraduzione," "Self-Translation as Transcultural," and "Self-Translation as Translingual."

[3] See "Dôre Michelut," English-Canadian Writers, Athabasca University, http://canadian-writers.athabascau.ca/english/writers/dmichelut/dmichelut.php.

[4] Frank, *Migration and Literature*, 20.

[5] It constitutes a form of collaborative poetry, as it is written by different authors working together. The collaborative dimension of *renga* gives it a hybrid connotation.

of Michelut's original and experimental writing.[6] "Coming to Terms with the Mother Tongue" and "Il Lei: Third Person Polite" are prominent examples of metalinguistic essays. Here, Michelut describes the relationship with the three linguistic systems constituting her multicultural background: Italian, English, and Friulian. The result is a linguistic polyphony that characterizes her writing and self-translating as instruments to articulate the relations between these languages, thus redefining their spaces of existence and expression, breaking linguistic, cultural, and identitarian borders.[7] To her, bridging Italian, English, and Friulian represents a way to reach personal unity and to regain possession of her pluricultural and plurilinguistic identity.

Against this backdrop, the present article illustrates the link between the life experiences and the literary production of Dôre Michelut. More specifically, this article takes into account the author's migrant experience, demonstrating how the latter emerges in, and through, her multilingual writing and self-translating. The argument is that Michelut's writing and self-translating are intertwined with the experience of moving abroad. The latter constitutes both the object of, and the reason behind, her literary production. Indeed, Michelut resorts to language to negotiate between Italian, Friulian, and Canadian spaces, ultimately finding in the written page the only place where her hybrid identity belongs and can be voiced. She intentionally adopts specific writing and translating strategies that contribute to the creation of a "hybrid text" and to the enactment of a "hybrid process." In the first case, hybridity emerges through code-switching and multilingual writing. In the second case, it is articulated around a specific form of self-translation that is at the juncture between writing and translating. In her poems, "hybridity on the discourse-level" corresponds to "hybridity on the story-level."[8]

The relation with language is essential to understand the personal and introspective implications of writing and self-translating for an author who has experienced a geographical, linguistic, and cultural displacement. In order to analyze this relation, I rely on Yasemin Yildiz's notion of the monolingual paradigm.[9] This paradigm establishes that people possess one language only:

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[6] As Romaine claims in *Bilingualism*, multilingualism enhances metalinguistic skills, that is, the use of language "to talk about or reflect on language" (114).

[7] By "identitarian" I refer to identity, as well as its features and attributes.

[8] Klinger, "Translated Otherness," 116.

[9] Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue*. Her investigation deals with the German geo-political context, where the monolingual paradigm has played a fundamental role. The focus on this context allows her to illustrate in depth the effects of this paradigm, and the

their mother tongue. The relationship with the mother tongue is believed to set the boundaries defining who we are. It links us to a well-defined and exclusive ethnicity and culture, affecting the way we operate and function within a specific community.[10] The movement between different languages and cultures, therefore, breaks the constitutive relation between language and identity. It disrupts the grounding of the self in the mother tongue, forcing migrants to renegotiate and redefine their selfhood and to rethink taken-for-granted concepts, such as home and belonging. For this reason, migrants have often been defined as "translated beings."[11] In order to function within the new community, the way they perceive and relate to reality has to be redefined and transferred from one linguistic and cultural dimension to another.

Yildiz's notion of the mother tongue is particularly relevant to this analysis for two reasons. First, Yildiz highlights the defining and constitutive relation between individuals and their mother tongue, thus proposing a definition of mother tongue that goes beyond the purely linguistic dimension, instead embracing its personal and collective significance as well. Yildiz's definition therefore allows me to investigate the relation between individuals and their mother tongue on the level of identity, addressing the impact of displacement on the self. Second, Yildiz debunks the existence of the monolingual paradigm and its influence on people and society. This aspect emerges clearly in the case of Michelut; because of both Italy's and Canada's multilingual connotation, Michelut's life experience and literary career continuously question and dismantle the efficacy and validity of the monolingual paradigm. Exactly like the authors studied by Yildiz in *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition*, Michelut's case study demonstrates that a purely monolingual condition does not exist.

Within this scenario, I analyze how Michelut's move to Canada redefines her relationship with the mother tongue. I specifically illustrate her writing and self-translating as practices that allow her to overcome "the problematic of *inclusion* into the monolingual paradigm,"[12] to escape from the mother tongue's (motherland's) claims to exclusivity and to establish affective and creative connections with Friulian, Italian, and English spaces.

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changes and transformations brought by new forms of multilingualism. For instance, she illustrates the work of Kafka, highlighting the role played by Yiddish in his literary and intellectual activity.

[10] Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue*, 2.

[11] Cronin, *Translation and Identity;* Polezzi, "Translation and Migration."

[12] Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue*, 121.

Rethinking and Rewriting the Relationship with the Mother Tongue(s)

Michelut was born and spent her early childhood years in Italy, a country that can be understood as inherently multilingual, because of the coexistence of dialect and other languages alongside standard and regional Italian. Given this complex linguistic situation, in his book *Mother Tongues and Other Reflections on the Italian Language*, the linguist Giulio Lepschy states that "there are some questions concerning the mother tongue that seem to be even more disturbing for Italian than for other languages."[13] This aspect is evident in Michelut's initial perception of Friulian as her exclusive mother tongue, whose innate and spontaneous dimension is seen in contrast with the artificial and mediated connotation of standard Italian.

   Michelut's relation with the mother tongue is further complicated when she moves to Canada, a country with two official languages, English and French. In such contexts, concepts such as mother tongue and monolingualism are challenged, acquiring new significances and connotations. Taking this assumption as a starting point, in this article I precisely illustrate why and how the concept of a monolingual paradigm acquires a specific significance for Michelut. Reconstructing her linguistic biography, I will demonstrate that her transmigrant experience undermines notions and beliefs that are affected by the monolingual paradigm.

   Michelut offers an interesting case study because, given the immersion in these multilingual contexts, she was "never firmly *included* in the monolingual paradigm."[14] Nevertheless, her initial approach to language shows that she conceives of herself as monolingual and, despite her multilingual makeup, attempts to build links with one exclusive linguistic system; essentially, she refers to a monolingual "conception of subjects, communities, and modes of belonging."[15] Her rethinking of the concept of a mother tongue, in both her personal and literary experience, comes at a later stage and as a result of a process of negotiation between a multilingual and a monolingual paradigm. As her life events make her realize and experience the impossibility of the monolingual paradigm, she eventually challenges her claims on an exclusive mother tongue and opens up channels of connection and identification with multiple mother tongues. First, her physical movement from Italy to Canada coincides with a linguistic movement from Friulian to both

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[13] Lepschy, *Mother Tongues*, 17.

[14] Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue*, 121.

[15] Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue*, 31.

Italian and English. Second, the transition to Italian occurs because in most cases migration acted as an instrument of linguistic unification for a country, like Italy, characterized by linguistic fragmentation. Mobility increased the importance of Italian for speakers of dialect, because they had to resort to Italian to overcome the linguistic barriers posed by their dialects. Thus, Italian ended up constituting the language that, beyond dialectal and regional differences, granted them a form of national belonging. Indeed, it became an instrument to achieve understanding and communication on a national level.[16] However, it is necessary to specify that, in this context, I do not refer to standard Italian. Indeed, first generation Italian migrants were normally poorly educated and expressed themselves mainly or exclusively in dialect, or in their regional Italian: "Popular Italian, a fossilized interlanguage between dialect and Standard, served frequently as H variety for first generation immigrants."[17] Once living together abroad, migrants affected each other's speech, thus ending up creating and speaking a highly heterogeneous variety of Italian.[18] One more level of complexity was added by the combination and merging of Italian and English, which was the birth of a specific linguistic variety known as Italiese.[19] Therefore, the concept of the Italian language, with its inherent complexity, acquired even more specific features within migrant communities. The Italian spoken by migrants was "made up by the dialect, dialectal Italian, and an Italian-based mixed variety due to contact with English'[20] Indeed, "language contact with different dialect groups promoted intra-regional cohesion, and inter-dialect communication furthered the use of popular Italian as H variety."[21]

After migrating to Canada, Michelut has to adopt Italian as the dominant language, while Friulian is "relegated to a circumscribed private territory" where she can still sense its "feeling and presence" but where it has become "speechless":[22]

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[16] Auer, "Italien in Toronto"; Haller, "Varieties, Use, and Attitudes."

[17] Haller, "Varieties, Use, and Attitudes." The letter "H" signifies standard variety, the one that is usually used in official settings.

[18] When talking about Italian, then, I do not refer to the fixed and literary idiom, but to the heterogeneous and mutable variety that is spoken across the peninsula.

[19] To expand upon this point, refer to Clivio and Danesi, *Sounds, Forms, and Uses.*

[20] Haller, "Varieties, Use, and Attitudes," 59.

[21] Haller, "Varieties, Use, and Attitudes," 67.

[22] Michelut, "Coming to Terms," 63–64.

> When my family emigrated to Canada, my parents decided that
> Furlan was such a minority language that it would not be of
> use to their children in the future. Therefore, in our house, our
> parents spoke Furlan amongst themselves and they spoke what
> Italian they knew with the children.[23]

In nullifying the bond with Friulian, Michelut's parents attempt to forge, for their daughter, a specific identification with one language only: Italian. What Michelut perceives as her real mother tongue, Friulian, is replaced by what she identifies as an artificial mother tongue, Italian. Her parents' attempts at imposing the latter as the native language undermines her perception of the mother tongue as given. The L1 (i.e., the native language) is not necessarily the language that individuals naturally possess, but it can be acquired through a mediated process. As her parents suddenly refuse to talk to her in Friulian, Michelut is symbolically denied any access and relation to what to her represents the actual language of the mother. Friulian ceases to function as a site of familiar belonging, as the family becomes the site where it is contested and rejected. This process takes a step further when English begins to conquer spaces of existence and expression in her life. Over time, even if she can still understand both Friulian and Italian, she starts to reply in English only, because she cannot express herself well in neither Italian nor Friulian: "It took only a few years for me to reply to both languages exclusively in English. In my teens, I could understand both Italian and Furlan, but I spoke them badly."[24]

The "speechlessness" of these languages – that is the impossibility and inability to speak them – is also existential, as they are unable to voice events that are now lived in a different language. At this stage, Michelut experiences a role reversal between her three linguistic systems. English replaces both Friulian and Italian, and what used to be a background noise eventually became foregrounded.[25] As I have stated in another article, "Her need to master English is related to its perception as the only instrument that can grant her access to, and participation in, the new community."[26] More importantly, it grounds itself in her search for a space for freedom and autonomy. The definition of the mother tongue as "a unique, irreplaceable, unchangeable biological

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[23] Michelut, "Coming to Terms," 65.
[24] Michelut, "Coming to Terms," 65.
[25] Michelut, "Coming to Terms," 65.
[26] Spagnuolo, "Italian Mothers," 16.

origin that situates the individual automatically in a kinship network and by extension in the nation"[27] becomes particularly evident in Michelut's essay "Il Lei: Third Person Polite," where the identitarian and social legacy of the L1 is explored through the metaphor of the mother–daughter relationship:[28]

> Furlan is my mother tongue. […] In Furlan, I can still focus on anything and say "no" with utter certainty. Perhaps that's the reason I lose the capacity to speak Furlan when we emigrate. When my mother speaks, I reply in English […] Mother's iron grip is loosened; she can't reach me in English, I can stop the nos she insists on passing on.[29]

Moving beyond Friulian and towards English for Michelut means "to abandon the legacy of the mother (tongue, land) and to re-ground in a free space, where she can express her voice; to interrupt the emotional involvement that the use of the L1 entails and to overcome its formative influence. Her linguistic freedom also determines her existential freedom":[30]

> Such complete re-immersion into an unknown body of sound […] reminds me of my birthright, that I have a choice, that I can be anything, that I am free to feel life surging. […] In English, I feel the surge again, and I let myself be carried out, over and above the dams, released from all those excavated places.[31]

Within this scenario, the return to the mother tongue can be articulated only by rethinking its identitarian and social legacy, thus ceasing to perceive its rooting and defining power:

> A turning point comes when mother finally learns to say the word *love* in English. In Furlan there is no equivalent, tender words happen in an intimate space that acknowledges a difference conquered from familiarity. The English word for love is an

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[27] Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue*, 9.

[28] The metaphor of the mother that represents the mother tongue is quite common among bilingual writers.

[29] Michelut, "Third Person Polite," 113.

[30] Spagnuolo, "Italian Mothers," 15.

[31] Michelut, "Third Person Polite," 113.

awareness that the other is another, and responds independently. The moment mother utters the words *I love you*, the countess within her starts to decay.[32]

The emergence of a multilingual paradigm coincides with her rejection of the notion of mother tongue as unique, primary, and overarching. Indeed, "through the metaphor of the mother being able to utter the words 'I love you,' Michelut is weakening the identitarian charge of the mother (tongue), which gives up on a dominant role and eventually acknowledges the presence and the autonomy of 'the other.'"[33]

The redefinition of the mother-daughter relation functions as a starting point for a reconfiguration of the relationship with the native language. Free from "the original emotional servitude,"[34] Michelut can finally return to the Italian "mother tongue." To this end, she spends five years in Florence, in order to study Italian at the University of Florence. A parallelism can be drawn here between the return home and Michelut's return to Italian. Both processes respond to a need to reconnect with one's origins and both are destined to fail, because they are based on false and misleading grounds. Michelut realizes how poor her knowledge of Italian actually is, as Italian seems "to be another language altogether."[35] She finds herself in the paradoxical condition of having to learn her L1 as if it were her L2 (i.e., the second language). As her years in Florence go by, though, Italian gains space, to the detriment of English: "I suspected that my English had become insufficient so I went back to university in Toronto searching specifically for courses similar to those I had taken in Italy."[36]

Once again, linguistic relations and dynamics are overturned. Michelut has to constantly rebuild her linguistic competence in all of the systems, in a continual movement where neither language can be identified as maternal and intimate, as it undergoes multiple processes of othering. She experiences the mother tongue as "inescapably uncanny, rather than familiar, as the paradigm would have it."[37] Her relation to it, in fact, is characterized by her continuous attempts to refamiliarize herself with it and at redefining its position

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[32] Michelut, "Third Person Polite," 115.

[33] Spagnuolo, "Italian Mothers," 16.

[34] Beaujour, *Alien Tongues*, 170.

[35] Michelut, "Coming to Terms," 65.

[36] Michelut, "Coming to Terms," 66.

[37] Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue*, 35.

with respect to the other linguistic systems.[38] The monolingual paradigm is replaced by a multilingual one that contemplates the coexistence and coexpression of her multiple mother tongues: Friulian, Italian, and English.

Michelut resorts to linguistic means in order to create a space of connection and encounter among her languages. She initially resorts to bilingual writing which, nonetheless, makes her feel like "two different sets of cards shuffled together, each deck playing its own game with its own rules."[39] The same happens with translation, perceived as "a puny effort in such a struggle; something always seemed betrayed."[40] Both writing and translating fail because they cannot offer her simultaneity of existence and expression: "It was as if the languages had been amazingly attracted and yet unable to touch and penetrate […] Feeling their exclusiveness, I could commit myself fully to neither."[41]

Both practices make her feel a lack of coincidence between what she lives and what she narrates. In addition, they reinforce the distance between her linguistic systems, because each system seems unable to translate or narrate the experience lived in the other one. Through bilingual writing and translating, the language of narration is split, which results into the splitting of the experience as well: "What was lived in Italian stayed in Italian, belonged to it completely. And vice versa."[42]

Eventually, Michelut resorts to self-translation, which puts her languages in a reciprocal relation, thus allowing both of them "to see each other" within her.[43]. In self-translating, she manages to bring her linguistic systems and her life experiences together. The fragmentation of the individual is overcome, because self-translation breaks the split between existence and narration. The experience lived in a language is no more nullified or annihilated by the other; on the contrary, as it is told in both systems, it is eventually multiplied. The possibility to develop her works in parallel grants her the possibility to achieve unity, simultaneity, and continuity:

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[38] This aspect is also stressed by another Italian-Canadian author, D'Alfonso, (1996: 60), who claims in *In Italics*: "Your mother-tongue sounds as foreign to you as any language you do not understand. Forgotten as the life-style you once had" (60).

[39] Michelut, "Coming to Terms," 66.

[40] Michelut, "Coming to Terms," 66.

[41] Michelut, "Coming to Terms," 66.

[42] Michelut, "Coming to Terms," 67.

[43] Michelut, "Coming to Terms," 67.

> Mine was a process of self-translation: I spanned the languages
> within my awareness simultaneously while each experienced the
> other in a "felt" relation. I was generating a dialectical experience
> that was relative to both languages, and yet, at the same time, I
> was beyond them both […] By translating myself into myself, by
> spinning a fine line in-between states of reality, I transcended the
> paralysis of being either inside or outside form.[44]

Self-translation puts not only her linguistic systems but also her multiple
selves in a dialogical relation. Together with her polyphonic writing, it can be
seen as an attempt to establish connections to several mother tongues. Given
that Michelut is not complete in one language only, she can achieve unity
only by combining her languages. In order to exist in both worlds, she has to
be able to express herself in both linguistic systems, that is, to translate her
multiple existence into a multiple language.[45]

Self-Translation as a Hybrid Process

What does the relation with the mother tongues(s) entail on a linguistic level
and how does it affect both writing and self-translating? In order to answer
these questions, I will analyze two collections of poems by Michelut: *Loyalty
to the Hunt* and *Ouroboros: The Book That Ate Me*. I have selected these col-
lections because they present a high number of self-translated poems, as well
as several examples of code-switching.

The analysis of these collections will allow me to illustrate my concepts of
"hybrid text" and "hybrid process." Hybrid text refers to a text that is based on
the exchange between the languages involved; for instance, traces of the source
language appear in the target language, through code-switching or the pres-
ence of words and structures built on the model offered by the other language.
Hybrid process refers to a specific form of self-translation that is in-between
writing and translating. The act of self-translating constitutes a continuation
of the act of writing, as they share the same "authorial intentionality."[46] The
authorial voice emerges from the author's multiple mother tongues. The lat-
ter are combined and interact on the written page, creating a final complex

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[44] Michelut, "Coming to Terms," 67–68.

[45] Part of this analysis has been used in one of my previous articles, "Italian Mothers."

[46] Fitch, *Beckett and Babel*, 125.

product. For this reason, the two or more versions of the text do not stand on their own, but continuously communicate and affect each other. The "original" act of writing continues with the act of translating, which allows the author to rethink the text from new linguistic and cultural perspectives.

This process of rethinking and rewriting is fully expressed in what Verena Jung calls the "revisional changes." They are an example of "the actual decision of the author at any specific point to rewrite his text, rather than translate the original."[47] And as Hokenson and Munson point out, they "defeat any effort to explain them linguistically."[48] Revisional changes are not determined by the recontextualization of the source text. Their presence in the text does not comply with any grammatical, syntactical, or semantic needs emerging in the transfer from one language to another. They emerge from the author's continuation of the creative process and express his/her desire to further explore and exploit the text, as well as his/her linguistic and cultural repertoire.

Loyalty to the Hunt and Ouroboros: The Book That Ate Me

Dôre Michelut engaged with self-translation throughout her entire life. Her self-translated poems are gathered in two collections: *Loyalty to the Hunt* and *Ouroboros: The Book That Ate Me*. *Loyalty to the Hunt* was published in 1986 by Guernica Editions.[49] The collection is divided into four sections, each one exploring different themes. For instance, the last section, "Letters," is made up of four poems dedicated to her family members. In this article, I will analyze the third section, "Double Bind," consisting of self-translated poems. As I will illustrate, this section can be read as a metalinguistic reflection. Michelut explores and narrates her relationships with her three linguistic systems: Italian, English, and Friulian. The decision to self-translate seems to emanate rightly from the nature of the text itself. The linguistic means contributes to put forward and express a specific discourse. In Michelut's case, this hybrid language is used to recreate and represent her movement towards a multilingual paradigm.

Ouroboros was published in 1990 by Éditions Trois. It is a collection of poems of various genres. Michelut scatters around several reflections on

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[47] Jung, *English-German Self-Translation,* 49.

[48] Hokenson and Munson, *Bilingual Text*, 198.

[49] This publishing house has played an important role in the emergence and affirmation of the Italian-Canadian literary movement.

life and human relations, politics, identity, language, and so on. The poems are quite enigmatic and surreal. They seem to be the result of a spontaneous and uncontrolled stream of consciousness. In fact, at the end of the book, Michelut adds a few reflections about the creative process that led to the creation of *Ouroboros*. She specifically identifies a relationship between the act of writing and the act of dreaming: "The first part of the book was poetry, the second, dream. Both sections rendered two complementary conscious states at work: one in wakefulness, one in sleep."[50] She also explains the reason behind the title, which overtly refers to the cannibalistic nature of the book. An ouroboros is the snake that bites its own tail, so Michelut cannibalizes herself through writing and self-translating, "relentlessly demanding, from the page, nothing less than life itself."[51] Her words reinforce the relationship between living and writing and support the ontological dimension of her literary activity. She redefines and renegotiates herself through the process of telling her story. Michelut ascribes the cannibalizing dimension of her writing and self-translating to her gender: "I suspect that I struggled with the page to such an extent because I am female: my body has a womb, a certainty that it can generate life."[52] Through the image of the womb, she refers to a bodily and more intimate relationship between the subject and the activity of writing. It is a connection that goes back to origins and roots and therefore entails the total involvement of the subject in writing.

Analysis of Loyalty to the Hunt

The collection *Loyalty to the Hunt* is divided into four sections: "About Flight," "Loyalty to the Hunt," "Double Bind," and "Letters." I will focus on "Double Bind" because it contains three examples of self-translation. I have no information about the chronological precedence of either the English or Italian version and the directionality of the translation. Therefore, all my comments derive exclusively from my analysis of the parallel versions in the collection.

The three poems in this section can be read as "language memoirs." In each one, Michelut engages with metalinguistic reflections on her relation to her linguistic systems: Friulian, Italian, and English. Through the poems, therefore, it is possible to reconstruct her linguistic trajectory and highlight the different phases of the process leading to the emergence of a multilingual

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[50] Michelut*,Ouroboros*, 132

[51] Michelut*,Ouroboros*, 141.

[52] Michelut, *Ouroboros*, 141.

paradigm. More specifically, the whole section narrates how Michelut eventually moves beyond the initial opposition between her Italian and Canadian backgrounds, and manages to re-site and rework these linguistic boundaries, finding a space for her "third Friulian voice" to express itself. My analysis begins with the first poem in the section, "Tra l'incudine e il martello/Double Bind."[53] Here and in the following examples, I will reproduce the texts adopting exactly the same graphic and formatting style that appears in the book.

Tra l'incudine e il martello	Double Bind
Il mattino di Bloor Street spaventa i miei sogni. Di giorno riemergono, campane che osservano il dimenticare. Mantengo il passo. Materia grigia. Pezzi di carne truciolata e grigliata. Scola il sangue, voglio salsa rubra.	Bloor Street mornings frighten my dreams. By day, they return like bells to observe the forgetting. I keep the pace. Matter is grey. Pieces of meat get ground and grilled. Drain the blood. I want ketchup.
L'arancione di Firenze mi penetra. Faccio all'amore e la notte si spiega dall'utero di mia nonna, mi lega, aggroviglia nomi e tempo, è la mia voce, urla il dolore di donne dilaniate che si vestono l'anima di carne.	In Florence, orange light arouses me. I make love and the night unfurls from my grandmother's womb. It binds me. It tangles names and time, is my voice, howls the pain of lascerated [sic] women that dress their souls in flesh.

The title anticipates the main topic of the poem: the torment of the individual who is pulled between two linguistic, cultural, and geographical contexts that, in this specific case, are constituted by Italy and Canada, Italian and English.[54] At this stage, Michelut's relation to her languages is still shaped by the monolingual paradigm. She perceives the relation between these languages according to a dialectical framework that makes it impossible for her to establish a dialogic relation between them. This fracture is recreated in

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[53] Michelut, *Loyalty to the Hunt*, 32–33. This title belongs to both the opening poem and to the entire section.

[54] I refer to Italian and do not include her Friulian in this analysis because she overtly refers to Florence, the city where she lived and studied Italian.

the poem that is built around different levels of opposition. From a visual perspective, its structure is articulated into two big and separated blocks, thus appearing to reproduce and convey this idea of being caught in-between different push-and-pull factors. A physical opposition also marks the linguistic opposition between Italian and English. Michelut refers to, and narrates, experiences that took place in two different geographical sites: on the one hand, she mentions Bloor Street, in Toronto; on the other hand, she recalls the famous Italian city, Florence.

This poem demonstrates well how, in Michelut's linguistic trajectory, the redefinition of a mother tongue in terms of mother tongues entails the recognition and acceptance that her linguistic systems occupy different spaces in her personal and literary spheres. She conceives of her Friulian, Italian, and English languages as separate entities that contribute to her identitarian narrative in different ways and to varying degrees. This aspect is expressed rightly through the revisional changes, clear examples of how the author's subjectivity is shaped and expressed differently in each language. For instance, in her poems, her languages often express diverse "concepts or sensibilities."[55] This distinction emerges clearly in "Tra l'incudine e il martello/Double Bind." In the title, the movement from Italian to English corresponds with a movement from the metaphorical and abstract, towards the rational and concrete. In Italian, Michelut opts for an idiomatic expression: tra l'incudine e il martello. In rendering this sentence in English, however, she decides to use a less figurative image: a double bind.[56] Figurative language is particularly useful in communicating and describing emotional states and experiences: "the subjective nature of emotional experiences appears to lend itself to figurative expression."[57] As such, Michelut's choice of a metaphorical language when writing in Italian suggests a stronger and deeper emotional attachment to it.[58] This assumption seems to confirm the monolingual belief

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[55] Michelut, "Coming to Terms," 70.

[56] Alternative idiomatic expressions would be "between a rock and a hard place"; "between the hammer and the anvil"; "between the devil and the deep blue sea"; "have the wolf by the ear."

[57] Fussell and Moss, "Figurative Language," 1.

[58] Such an emotional use of Italian is confirmed by the fact that, most of the times, swearing and vulgar expressions appear in this language; for instance, the use of "Porco Giuda" (Judas the pig) in *Loyalty to the Hunt*, 12.

that the mother tongue is the language of emotions.[59] Indeed, several studies[60] have investigated the perception and expression of emotions in both L1 and L2; that is, whether individuals perceive, express, and convey emotions in different ways, depending on whether they express them in the L1 or the L2. These studies all point out that the second language is normally perceived as less emotional than the first one.[61] This aspect has been explained in different ways and attributed to distinct factors, such as the time and context of acquisition[62] or cultural differences.[63]

Michelut's different use of emotional and figurative language in Friulian, Italian, and English has to be read against the specific reconfiguration of the mother tongue that has emerged throughout this research. Her use of Friulian, Italian, and English expresses different "concepts and sensibilities" because they voice interrelated yet diverse aspects of her identity. This aspect has been thoroughly analyzed and described by Michelut in "Coming to Terms with the Mother Tongue." In the following quotation, she explains how Friulian and English affect her persona in different ways, to the point that she becomes a different person in each language:

> It might be fruitful to explain the person I become in these languages in terms of what I can imagine within them. For example, in Furlan, the thought that beyond highway 11 in Ontario there are no other roads going north, only a vast expanse of forest wilderness, makes me panic. I cannot enter into relation with this threatening

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[59] Ortony, "Why Metaphors," and Ekmand and Davison, *Nature of Emotion*, claim that metaphors and idioms are often chosen to talk about feelings and emotions because they add intensity and completeness to the message that one wants to transmit.

[60] See Dewaele, "Psychological"; Altarriba, "Does *Cariño*"; Wierzbicka, "Bilingual Lives"; Pavlenko, *Emotions*; Opitz and Degner, "Emotionality."

[61] As Opitz and Degner point out in "Emotionality," the same perception is reported "even by highly proficient bilinguals, not just beginning learners or poor speakers of a second language" (1961).

[62] Pavlenko, *Emotions*, claims that individuals establish affective ties with languages they learn first. L2, therefore, is perceived as less emotional. Also, Altarriba, "Does *Cariño*," argues that the acquisition of a language in a formal context is believed to prevent the development of emotional ties and connections between the individual and that language.

[63] Altarriba, "Does *Cariño*," states that an individual's different linguistic expression of emotions is the reflection of different cultural practices. Some scholars also affirm that different languages do not only determine different ways of expressing emotions, but they actually establish different ways of perceiving them (see Wierzbicka, "Bilingual Lives"; Pavlenko, *Bilingual Minds*).

emptiness unless I think of hewing out a plot of land, building solid shelter and planting a garden for food. I would worry about how to get seeds and nails. Perhaps when things become stable I would tame a wild creature, a bear comes to mind. If I approach the same territory in English, I do not worry about food and shelter, somehow they are granted to me and do not cause anxiety. I would perhaps learn to fly so I could enter into some kind of relation with the immensity before me. It would not occur to me to tame animals, I would rather observe them in their natural state and learn small things about myself through watching them.[64]

As she states, in Friulian she is completely overwhelmed by emotions such as panic, concern, and feelings of emptiness. In English, instead, she recovers control over life. While in Friulian Michelut is overcome by the "vast expanse of forest wilderness" around her, in English she manages to "enter into some kind of relation with the immensity" before her. Michelut uses these metaphors to illustrate how Friulian and English shape and convey different approaches to life, different values and ideas. Her diverse use of figurative and concrete expressions in each language, therefore, is a way to re-create, through linguistic means, the different role and function that each language plays in her identitarian narrative.

In "Tra l'incudine e il martello/Double Bind," the emotional connotation of Italian is clearly expressed through other linguistic devices. For instance, the Italian verb "penetrare," that is, "to penetrate," which is opposed to the English "to arouse," seems to hint at a deeper and more intimate connection between Michelut and the Italian space. Such a connection is further reinforced by the image of the "womb.". The latter is to be understood in relation to the figure of the "grandmother." Since the womb refers to concepts of motherhood and giving birth, it inserts the Italian language into a discourse about origins and roots. The womb conveys the idea of a physical and biological linkage, as if the language was directly emanating from the individual. This connotation is reinforced through the image of the grandmother. In Italian families, the grandmother plays a very important role, as she represents the original ancestor.[65] Through these references, therefore, Michelut attempts to express the connection between the Italian language and the family unit,

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[64] Michelut, "Coming to Terms," 70.

[65] For an account of the role of the grandmother in Italian families, see Bona, *Claiming a Tradition*.

further expanding the concept of origins and reinforcing the connotation of Italian as the familiar language.

Michelut also employs syntax in a way that embeds the two texts with different emotional charges. In English, the structure of the sentence follows a linear and simple subject-verb-object syntax: "Matter is grey. Pieces of meat get ground and grilled." In Italian, by contrast, the verb is often omitted and nominal constructs are preferred: "Materia grigia. Pezzi di carne truciolata e grigliata." Such a syntactical choice creates a less linear and neutral tone that, in turn, achieves a greater poetic effect. Consider also the following lines:

Di giorno riemergono, campane che osservano il dimenticare.	By day, they return like bells to observe the forgetting.
Faccio all'amore e la notte si spiega dall'utero di mia nonna, mi lega, aggroviglia nomi e tempo, è la mia voce	I make love and the night unfurls from my grandmother's womb. It binds me. It tangles names and times, is my voice

The omission of the conjunction "like," together with the change in punctuation, through the shift in the position of the comma, further contributes to creating a suffocating and pressing tone. The English text appears as more systematic and structured than the Italian one, whose syntactical organization conveys a feeling of anxiety and pressure that seems to overwhelm the reader. This specific use of syntax can be better understood in relation to Michelut's linguistic biography. As she declares in "Coming to Terms with the Mother Tongue," after some time in Canada, she stopped speaking both Friulian and Italian. Her rediscovery of Italian came at a later stage, coinciding with her decision to study it in Florence. Against this backdrop, the more pressing rhythm of the Italian text seems to convey Michelut's anxiety and pressure to retrieve and express her silenced Italian voice.

This aspect also explains her different use of punctuation. In examining punctuation in these texts, I refer to psycholinguistic research, which "shows punctuation to be a […] locus of translational control, the place where translators assert the most authority."[66] On these grounds, analyzing the role of punctuation can give interesting insights into how the author uses punctuation to exert her agency. By playing with punctuation, Michelut aims to

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[66] May, *Translator in the Text,* 6.

dictate the reader's pace, thus managing to convey and express a specific sense of existence. In English, the extensive use of the full stop breaks the rhythm and gives the poem a more regular structure. In Italian, instead, words and sentences flow all together. As such, punctuation indicates when and where the reader should breathe. In Italian, the comma allows the reader to pause for a shorter time before moving on to the following sentence. Thus, he/she experiences a sustained rhythm, which seems to reproduce Michelut's uninterrupted movement between her multiple linguistic spaces.

The analysis of this poem, in conclusion, has revealed that, in the English text, Michelut follows a specific linguistic pattern that is described as "rationalisation" by Antoine Berman.[67] As he explains, this tendency affects features such as sentence structure, order, punctuation, avoidance of figurative language, and tendency to generalization. These grammatical, lexical, and syntactical choices aim to make the text clear and more organized. Going back to the assumption that the self-translation of the text coincides with the translation of the self, it follows that, in rationalizing the English text, Michelut is translating and transposing her English identity on the page. The second poem in the collection is "La terza voce diventa madre/The Third Voice Gives Birth":[68]

Ricerco categorie per dar voce al preciso agro del diospero. L'inglese impazzisce: borbotta, mi spinge verso strade desolate, ordite di teste di amori mai avuti o perduti in quel posto dove le cosce non si riscaldano mai; dove stormi di uccelli neri ancora afflitti da languori vespertini farfallano, prigionieri di un quadro di de Chirico. Sento l'odore di sogno morto. O Susanna tal biel cjastiel di Udin with the tanti pesciolini e i fiori di lillà don't you cry for the deer and the dead buffalo…	I research categories to give voice to the exact bitterness of the persimmon. English goes mad. It mutters. It pushes me towards desolate roads, strung with heads of lovers that never were, or that got lost in the place where thighs never get warm, where swarms of black birds still afflicted with the languors of vespers flutter, prisoners of a de Chirico painting. I can smell the dead dream. *O Susanna tal biel cjastiel di Udin with the tanti pesciolini e i fiori di lillà don't you cry for the deer and the dead buffalo…*

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[67] Berman, "Translation," 288–289.

[68] Michelut, *Loyalty to the Hunt*, 34–35.

"Per questo sei scappata?"	"Was it for this you ran away?"
"Per questo. Per ciò che era scritto. Come Corto Maltese cambiai il mio destino. Con una lametta, ne ritagliai un altro."	"For this. For what was written. Like Corto Maltese, I changed my fate, with a blade, I cut in another."
"Allora riposiamoci. Il diospero s'addolcirà."	"Then we can rest. The persimmon will sweeten."

The third voice is represented by her Friulian, whose maternal connotation derives from the fact that Michelut received this language directly from her mother. As I will illustrate further, it also originates from Friulian's rooting connotation, that is, from its capacity to establish an alternative linguistic family romance that also includes Italian and English. At the beginning of this poem, Michelut is still caught in-between Italian and English. The metaphor of her researching categories "to give voice to the exact bitterness of the persimmon" refers directly to this point. Her English tongue "goes mad" and "mutters" in the attempt to express a sensory and intimate experience that brings Michelut back to her life in Italy. In this existential and linguistic struggle, her Friulian voice suddenly erupts on the page and allows Michelut to find routes to the other two languages as well. The following lines illustrate this point well: "O Susanna tal biel cjastiel di Udin with the tanti pesciolini e i fiori di lillà don't you cry for the deer and the dead buffalo…" Combination is achieved on two levels: on the one hand, through the actual presence of the three linguistic systems in the same page. On the other hand, through the juxtaposition of three folk songs: the famous American song "Oh Susanna," itself a mixture of a variety of musical traditions. The banjo, which is mentioned in the opening lines of the song, is an instrument normally used in folk and country music. The rhythm of the song, however, is a polka. The Italian song is "La casetta in Canadà," which tells the story of a man building a house in Canada. The latter is a song belonging to the Friulian musical repertoire. As stated by Saidero, "the juxtaposition of lines from three well-known folk texts functions, in fact, to recover a polyphonic dimension, that incorporates intercultural and interlinguistic elements."[69]

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[69] Saidero, "Self-Translation as Transcultural," 35.

In defining Friulian as "the third voice which gives birth," Michelut identifies it as the purely maternal mother tongue from which the others emanate. Friulian constitutes the language that allows her to find a common ground between her two acquired languages, Italian and English. The latter eventually manage to "touch and penetrate" because they both "can happen in the light of Furlan and, when possible, vice versa."[70]The combination of her three linguistic systems guarantees Michelut a simultaneity of existence and expression that, in turn, gives continuity to her identitarian narrative. The image of the sweetened persimmon represents the fact that Michelut is finally able to perceive and exploit the advantage of her linguistic hybridity: "I find that when a poem or a story has passed through the sieve, gone from English to Furlan and back, from Furlan to Italian or Italian to English and back, each language still speaks me differently, because it must, but each speaks me more fully."[71]

This specific recognition of Friulian is pointed out in the last poem of the section, which is self-translated between English and Friulian. Its title is "Ne storie/A Story." In this poem, which I do not reproduce here, Michelut describes her reconjunction with her dialectal mother tongue. This reconjunction is narrated through the image of the prodigal son. Michelut imagines a dialogue with her Friulian mother tongue that celebrates the return of her prodigal daughter: "I shudder as this suffering history greets me with kisses, tells me I've been bad, says: 'Where have you been? We'll settle this at home.'"[72]

Analysis of Ouroboros: The Book That Ate Me

The poems in this collection constitute a perfect example of Michelut's experimental writing. Indeed, the author plays with language on many levels, creating poems that are linguistically and thematically quite obscure and complex. The collection is also particularly interesting from the perspective of multilingual writing and self-translation, as Michelut scatters around poems in her three languages and makes wide use of code-switching. The latter emerges in relation to specific semantic domains, such as food and cultural

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[70] Michelut, "Coming to Terms," 64–66, 71.

[71] Michelut, "Coming to Terms," 71.

[72] Michelut, *Loyalty to the Hunt*, 36–37. The reference to such an image reinforces the parallel between mother and mother tongue.

references. For instance, Michelut uses words such as *polenta*, *sugo, torto*,[73] or gives Italian titles to poems written in English: "Tu parti ed io"; "Cappero in fiore"; "Scirocco".[74]

All these poems are dedicated to someone called Cesare. I do not know who Cesare is, but the dedication seems to stress the emotional connotation of these poems. Michelut is using language to build a connection; writing in the language of "the other," she expresses her desire for closeness and understanding. At the same time, her use of English in the same poem conveys her will to bridge her Italian and Canadian worlds, finding a space where she can fully feel and express "her self." On page 69 in the collection, Michelut translates part of the song "Caro amico ti scrivo," by the popular Italian singer Lucio Dalla. As the song was probably unknown to her Canadian readers, Michelut engages herself and her audience with an act of cultural translation, in a further attempt to bridge Italian and Canadian worlds. The journey into the Italian culture continues in the poem "The Worm Is Coming." The following passage is particularly interesting: "Everyone suddenly became Italian and I started singing *Terra Straniera*, a soppy, nostalgic Italian song. I surprised myself by remembering the words. It brought tears to everyone's eyes, so I was lifted out of the water to sing *Fratelli d'Italia*, the national anthem."[75]

Here, the reference to the songs achieves a twofold effect. On the one hand, it inscribes the Canadian reader in an Italian cultural space and connects Michelut and her audience on an emotional level as well. Immersed in an Italian atmosphere, the reader ends up being part of Michelut's experience of estrangement and uprooting, as expressed by the author's statement that her song "brought tears to everyone's eyes." On the other hand, singing helps Michelut to connect with her Italian origins, expressing both a feeling of nostalgia – with *Terra Straniera* – and a sense of pride and belonging – with the national anthem. The act of singing Italian songs, exactly like the act of writing and self-translating, is a strategy of regrounding.

Other striking examples of Michelut's use of code-switching are constituted by spelling and grammar "mistakes." I consider them as markers of this process of interference and contact between two linguistic systems, as well as authentic expressions of the hybrid personality of the author. The poem "A

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[73] Michelut, *Ourobouros*, 80, 50.

[74] Michelut, *Ourobouros*, 54, 64, 100.

[75] Michelut, *Ourobouros*, 97. The song was sung by Claudio Villa. It is about a migrant who feels nostalgic for his native land.

Baldin/For Baldin" presents an interesting example.[76] In line 12, the Italian word "Curdi" is misspelled as "Kurdi," The model provided by the English term "Kurds" overtly influences the word Michelut uses. In the poem on page 114, in the same collection, the probable spelling mistake "culture" instead of the Italian "cultura" unconsciously suggests a further connection and combination between Italian and English that, here, appear on the page even beyond the writer's conscious decision.[77] These terms show that English is the language Michelut masters better, as its influence is stronger than the one exercised by Italian. However, her "mistakes" show that both languages are activated when bilingual people communicate, and how this interaction affects the writing and creative process. Even if the author is expressing herself in one language, the presence of the other one becomes tangible, evident, and concrete. These "mistakes" therefore indicate Michelut's attempts "at translating the self and at legitimizing her transcultural identity in the interface among languages."[78]

The poems in *Ouroboros* also confirm the pattern that I have identified in *Loyalty to the Hunt*. For instance, Michelut's style is more figurative in Italian and Friulian. An example of this is offered by the poem that appears on page 17, in *Ouroboros* (the poem has no title). It is written in both Friulian and English. Here, Michelut narrates a bad event experienced by her mother, who used to work for a guy who "had a reputation for ruining young girls." In talking about the guy in Friulian, Michelut uses more metaphors and idiomatic expressions, as well as bad words:[79]

ere grant come un ors (he was as big as a bear)	was twice my size
Tocjis un cjavêli dal cjâf di me fie	if you ruin my daughter
Bastart di un bastart	Omitted in the English text

The use of a bad word in the Friulian text seems to refer to the studies conducted by Dewaele.[80] He specifically analyzed the use of swearwords and

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76 Michelut, *Ourobouros,* 98.

77 This poem has no title.

78 Saidero, "Self-Translation as Translingual."

79 Michelu, *Ouroboros*, 17.

80 Dewaele, "Psychological and Sociodemographic" and "Blistering Barnacles!".

found that the perception of the emotional force of the word is higher in the L1, as well as in contexts where the language acquisition occurs in a natural and uninstructed context. The higher emotional force perceived by Michelut in Friulian is clearly illustrated by the omission of the bad word in English.[81]

Conclusion

In this article, I investigated the writing and translating strategies used by the Italian-Canadian author Dôre Michelut. Taking as a starting point the assumption that writing and translating are expressions of the authorial voice, I investigated and reconstructed Michelut's linguistic biography. Against the backdrop of the monolingual paradigm,[82] I analyzed how the experience of migration redefined the author's relation to the mother tongue. Yildiz's concept of the monolingual paradigm was particularly useful as it helped me illustrate how Michelut, despite never experiencing a truly monolingual condition, initially operated through a monolingual framework. The transmigrant experience, however, undermined this paradigm, as it relocated Michelut in a new territory and led to the emergence of multilingual necessities. Indeed, for Michelut, "moving beyond the mother tongue" meant to establish relations with multiple mother tongues: Italian, English, and Friulian.

I then illustrated what this movement entails on a linguistic level, specifically addressing and illustrating my definition of self-translation as a hybrid process, looking at the revisional changes in the text. I also considered the presence of code-switched terms and other linguistic peculiarities that shape Michelut's poems as examples of "hybrid texts." The different formal, linguistic, cultural, and syntactical strategies that Michelut employs in her texts demonstrated that she is aware of the differences between her linguistic systems, as well as of the diverse ways in which these linguistic systems affect her subjectivity. As she claimed in "Coming to Terms with the Mother Tongue," she is a different person in each language, because each language contributes to her identitarian narrative in different ways and to varying degrees. In Michelut's own words, each language "speaks differently to [the individual], because it must, but each one speaks […] more fully."[83] This as-

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[81] As stressed by Saidero, "Self-Translation as Transcultural," 36–37, this specific language is also determined by the fact that "the Friulian account reproduces the flavour of the peasants' oral speech pattern."

[82] Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue*.

[83] Michelut, "Coming to Terms," 71.

pect has emerged in this analysis, which has illustrated how these multiple linguistic identities manifest themselves differently on the page, thus recreating what it means to migrate linguistically. Michelut's literary work emerges from the constant interaction of her multiple voices that merge through the act of writing and self-translating. This merging creates a space where these multiple voices are joined in the act of a reciprocal narration, through which they make the subjectivity of the author unitary and condensed.

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