

THE GONCOURT PRIZE-WINNING “ROMAN NÈGRE”

ABOUT KOSZTOLÁNYI’S HUNGARIAN TRANSLATION OF RENÉ MARAN’S *BATOUALA*

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In 1921, René Maran became the first black author to receive the Prix Goncourt for his novel, *Batouala*. Just one year later, Dezső Kosztolányi translated the work to Hungarian. At the beginning of the 20th century, most Hungarians were unfamiliar with the culture of the Black Continent, and they could not even distinguish between Africans and African American people. Therefore, Kosztolányi not only had to deal with linguistic problems, but he also needed to introduce a completely new culture, otherwise unknown to the wider public. This essay presents the social and political differences between the Hungarian and the French audience, and by comparing the original work and the translation, it examines the linguistic techniques and the translational strategies Kosztolányi used to adapt the work to the expectations of the Hungarian readers.

Keywords: Dezső Kosztolányi, René Maran, translation, Francophone literature, Africa

The Significance of René Maran and his Work

The novel of René Maran, *Batouala*, was published in 1921, and in the same year the book won the Prix Goncourt, thus René Maran became the first black French writer to be awarded by the jury with this prestigious prize. Shortly after receiving the Goncourt, Dezső Kosztolányi (recently more renowned in Hungary than Maran in France) translated it to Hungarian in 1922. Even though Maran is not the most discussed black Francophone writer, *Batoula* is widely regarded as the first African novel in French. Maran later rewrote the novel, and a ‘*définitive*’ version was published in 1938, although János Riesz considers the limited edition (1928) with the illustrations of Alexandre Iacovleff from a textual point of view as a third ‘*intermédiaire*’ version between the two (Riesz 2011, 19).

In *Littératures francophones d’Afrique noire* Jacques Chevrier describes *Batouala* as an *oeuvre fondatrice*, comparing the Prix Goncourt to a “*certificat de baptême à la littérature nègre*” (Chevrier 2006, 40). Chevrier also cites Léopold

Senghor: “*Après Batouala on ne pourra plus faire vivre, travailler, aimer, pleurer, rire, parler des Nègres comme des Blancs... C’est René Maran qui le premier a exprimé l’âme noire avec un style nègre en français.*” (Chevrier 2006, 35)

Instead of the classic novel form, which was unknown in the traditional African literature, oral narratives, like the epic of Sundiata, were performed across the continent. Under these circumstances, it is quite obvious that a work like *Batouala* has become significant for literary critics and the leader members of *Négritude*. Chevrier points out two main characteristic aspects of the birth of the French African novel, which also proved to be decisive in its following development. These aspects appear in the praise of Senghor too. First, *Batouala* is written in French, as the title of Chevrier’s literary history shows through the whole 20th century, and until now, French remains the main language of the written literature in the territory of the former French colonies in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is essential for a Francophone writer to master this European language, even though they were born and live in Africa, but they are members of a Franchophone community for which one of the main aims is to create aesthetical *chefs-d’œuvre* in French. On the other hand, the novel takes place in Oubangui-Chari, the present-day Central African Republic; describes the life of a local tribe, but above all it was written by a ‘colored’ man (René Maran was originally from the French Guiana in South America), thus it shows the way toward a new kind of literature where black authors discuss the problems of African peoples (Chevrier 2006, 41).

Although at that time Kosztolányi could not have foreseen that decades later critics would regard *Batouala* among the foundational works of the modern narrative literature of a whole continent, the Hungarian audience obviously saw the subject (and the origin of the author) as quite unusual and exotic, at the same time the novel was written in a perfect French language. One of the principal questions is how Kosztolányi could accord these two aspects, i.e. to present an unfamiliar culture in Hungary and simultaneously to show that the original novel is in literary French, without being able to use the language, the most important tool of a translator, to emphasize the particularity of the person of the writer and of the subject.

René Maran was born in 1887 into a Guianese family. His father was an administrative officer of the colonies in Martinique, so Maran spent his first years in the Caribbean island. When he was three, his father was relocated to Gabon, and the family moved with him to West-Africa. At the age of seven René Maran was enrolled in a school in France; after his studies, he returned to Africa where he was appointed as an officer like his father in the territory of Oubangui-Chari in 1909. Over there Maran was shocked by the behavior of the white officers towards him and by the desperate situation of the local inhabitants. He had several conflicts with the colonial authorities due to the racism he had to endure, and due to his boredom and illnesses, which influenced his achievements. His superiors were not satisfied with his work and his attitude, above all Maran himself was accused

of violence and of causing the death of a native in 1919. Although Maran refused to be blamed, he was found guilty, and got a fine (Rubiales 2009). After *Batouala*, he felt persecuted by the authorities, so he quit his job and he moved to Paris. He published many novels, essays and poems until his death in 1960 (Lander 2007).

René Maran began to write *Batouala* in 1912 while he was employed in French Equatorial Africa (Geneste 2010). In the novel, the writer draws attention to the misery of the African people and to their bleak future by describing the every-day life of the Bandas (a tribe in Oubangui-Chari). As Chevrier mentions, Maran got to know the local languages during his stay in the colonies, so his presentation of the conditions can be considered more complex and authentic than the itinerary of a European traveller, the author even discusses the white officers without any prejudice (Chevrier 2006, 42).

In the preface of *Batouala*, René Maran openly criticizes the French colonial system, which he holds responsible for the lazy, uninterested, drunken officers (Maran 1921, 14). He contrasts the colonial authorities with the French intellectuals, especially the writers, and by citing Montesquieu, he makes it obvious that the approach of the government towards the Africans is careless and arrogant. He debates the ‘European’ view of civilisation (“*Civilisation, civilisation, orgueil des Européens, et leur charnier d’innocents, Rabindranath Tagore, le poète hindou, un jour, à Tokio, a dit ce que tu étais!*”) and expresses the necessity of the support of his fellow French writers in order to be able to tell the truth, thus to change the situation in Africa and save the honour of France (Maran 1921, 11–3). Although the presence of the whites is palpable in *Batouala*, the main characters are all Blacks, and aside from some references, just one European, an officer, appears briefly as the plot progresses. However, in the preface, Maran introduces Oubangui-Chari as an administrative department of France, and by depicting the region he accentuates the decline of the Bandas. “*Sept ans ont suffi pour la ruiner de fond en comble,*” writes Maran about one of the areas. “*Les villages se sont disséminés, les plantations ont disparu, cabris et poules ont été anéantis.*” He amplifies the sufferings of the natives which are caused by the often unpaid labour, and he points out that the exhausting work makes it impossible for them to even cultivate their lands (Maran 1921, 16–7).

Beginning with the 1960s, the role of the European great powers has changed, they have been staying in the background since the former colonies gained their independence, and they exert indirect influence on the leadership of the African countries. The African novels set in the decolonized period reflect this process, focusing mainly on the obligation of the local authorities. Nevertheless, the question of the effects of the occidental powers is also raised recently, but this does not reduce the responsibility of the African politicians. In contrast, in the first decades of the 20th century, Oubangui-Chari, along with a big part of West-Africa, was under French governance, so even if the role of the only French character is symbolic

in *Batouala*, but the criticism of the standard of living and the hopeless situation equals to a criticism of French politics. Because of the colonial system, no change could have happened without the consent and the decision of the Ministry of Overseas in Paris, so although Maran seems to leave out the whites from the African landscape, just like for example Ahmadou Kourouma nearly fifty years later in *Les soleils des Indépendances*, in reality beneath the surface, he attributes a more important role to them.

The subtitle of the novel also indicates the significance of the African and French relations, however, not as obviously as the preface does. Jacqueline Blanchard and Gérard Pouguet observes that only the title is written on the cover of the first edition, while the subtitle, *véritable roman nègre* appears only in the title page (Blanchard–Pouguet 2011, 2). *Véritable* i.e. ‘real’: but what could this word have signified for the contemporary audience? As mentioned above, this work is one of the first novels written by an African person, thus *véritable* underlines the authenticity of the author and his creation. The novel was published in France, so it was intended for French, or at least mainly European readers, though the majority of them could have had a superficial knowledge of Africa about the process of colonisation, but they did not know well the problems of the Dark Continent, and they considered it merely as an exotic department of France. Maran wanted to show them the colonies without any romanticism or prejudice. From the Hungarian translation, the word *véritable* is completely missing. There is a short reference to the Prix Goncourt: *A Goncourt-díjjal jutalmazott néger regény* (which otherwise could be found on the cover of some later French edition), and the expression *néger regény* (‘roman nègre’) is printed on the title page. The omission of the word ‘real’ gives the subtitle a different context: it does not emphasize the authenticity, but it focuses on the exoticism of the novel.

At that time, Hungary did not have any important connection to Africa due to its geographical position, so the Hungarian audience did not have as much preconception about the continent as its French counterpart. In Hungary, therefore, the aim of the novel was not to change the public opinion on Blacks, but to establish one (or complete the existing image), this could have been a reason why the translation of the word *véritable* is missing from the Hungarian subtitle.

Of course the origin of Maran was also considered a curiosity in France, and several critiques written in the 1920s express racism towards Maran, as Elsa Geneste elaborates on this matter, discussing René Trautmann’s *Au pays de Batouala. Noirs et Blancs en Afrique* (Geneste 2010). Lourdes Rubiales also accentuates the importance of the author’s personality, citing Véronique Porra: “... la personnalité de l’auteur perçue dans le cadre de raisons de politique nationale qui l’a emporté dans les premières réactions.” Rubiales notes that the first opinions were affected by the post world-war discourse, which tried to legitimate the efforts of the African troops (particularly the *tirailleurs sénégalais*).

Porra points out two other major events that greatly influenced the popular opinion in France. The first one was the Goncourt, the rivals of Maran felt frustrated over losing such a prestigious price (Rubiales 2005, 127). To make the situation worse, according to Rubiales, the other main favourite of the vote was Jacques Boutelleau under the pseudonym Jacques Chardonne, one of the editors of the publisher Stock. Rubiales presumes that a combat of authors and editors might have been behind awarding Maran (Rubiales 2005, 143).

Besides the Prix Goncourt, the German version also made an impact on the reception of *Batouala* in France. The novel was translated to German in 1922, and later it was used to support the anti-French propaganda in Germany. Véronique Porra notes that Maran was considered responsible of going against the interests of France as an officer, but his ethnicity did not play a role in these discussions (Rubiales 2005, 127–8).

As it can be seen above, the novel of René Maran had a notable political significance for different reasons, and the race of Maran was not the only and main cause of the debates. The paranoid fear of Germany, the conflict of interest in the literary world, and the animosity of the French colonial office kept it in the spotlight. The following anecdote illustrates how intense attention had been paid to the novel even before it had been awarded by the Goncourt Academy. Pierre Loiselet describes the story of Henri de Régnier, who strongly recommended *Batouala* to the members of the committee. One day a French admiral came to see him and he told the writer to stop promoting René Maran. When Régnier asked why he should not support the novel of the author, the admiral replied that because *Batouala* was an *abominable* book. Régnier firmly said: ‘I would not allow to myself, admiral, to make a judgement on boats... but for books, I have the ability’ (Rubiales 2005, 142).

Kosztolányi was far from these acrimonious disputes, so he could have read the novel without any prejudice or, properly, he saw the Africans with no more bias than an average European at that time. Before Dezső Kosztolányi, it was very rare in Hungary that a writer with such a good reputation had been interested in black culture, or in the artistic achievements of black people. In 1853, just some months after the publication of the Hungarian version of Harriet Beecher-Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Ira Aldridge, the famous African-American actor of the 19th century, visited the Hungarian National Theatre. He played various roles in Shakespearean tragedies (e.g. Othello, King Lear), and his performance attracted a lot of attention (Kicsindi 2006, 220–2). Even Mór Jókai wrote a short critic about his acting. (He praised his talent when Aldridge performed Othello with the help of drinking a bottle of wine, however, according to Jókai, two bottles proved to be a little too much for him.) (Jókai 1900)

During the second half of the 19th century, black musical entertainments became very popular in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and at the beginning of the

20th century, black artists often participated (Egyed 2011). Ilona Egyed emphasizes the presence of the operettas which contained black roles in the 1920s, like the composition of Ernst Krenek (*Jonny spielt auf*), which was first staged in Budapest in 1928. According to Egyed, the premiere provoked a scandal at the Városi Theatre. Of course the reason for the outrage was partly the jazz, the new contemporary music genre, and, as either the essay of Kicsindi or the writing of Egyed shows, black performances were considered closely related to the American culture. Kicsindi draws the attention to the blurring of the boundaries between the African and American Blacks in the Hungarian press (Kicsindi 2006, 222), and the black music of the first decades of the 20th century, like the jazz or Joséphine Baker, who was to perform in Hungary in 1928 (Egyed 2011), had also American origins.

Kosztolányi shared his view on the novel in Pesti Hírlap in 1922. His approach of *Batouala* attests a very personal stance toward the author. He stresses the fact that his opinion on African people is not influenced by the clichés of the operettas or black musicians, but it is based on his own – although limited – experiences. Contrary to Jókai, Kosztolányi focuses on the writer rather than on the work of art. He creates his concept of the African writer by abstracting from the personality of Maran, mixing facts (e.g. his love of books) and imagination (*“Ha egy csöpp tinta hull ujjára a tollából, bizonyára töltőtollából, nem látszik meg rajta.”* “If a drop of ink falls on his finger from his pen, certainly from a fountain pen, it could not be seen.”). As opposed to the popular stereotypes mentioned above, he thinks of ‘the black writer’ as a representative of the African continent, and the African people. He does not blend the idea of Africans and African-Americans, he makes quite clear that both he and Maran discusses the Black Continent and its inhabitants (Kosztolányi 1922, 4–5).

Kosztolányi defines the importance of René Maran by the same two aspects which are accentuated by Jacques Chevrier decades later. He emphasizes the widely spoken language of *Batouala*, and he points out that this is the first novel ‘available’ to the greater public written by an African, besides he highlights the location and the subject of the story, Africa and the African reality. But he considers Maran above all as a writer, who is equal to his European counterparts regardless of his origin (Kosztolányi 1922, 4–5).

The Comparison of the Translation of Dezső Kosztolányi and the Original Novel of René Maran

Kosztolányi thinks of Maran primarily as a writer, whose main aim is creation. Despite the authenticity of the translation, he did some minor changes in the Hungarian version of the preface. In the second paragraph, Maran writes: *“J’ai mis six*

ans à y traduire ce que j'avais, là-bas, entendu, à y décrire ce que j'avais vu." (M, 9)¹ Kosztolányi interprets it in the following way: "Hat évig tartott, míg összefogtam azt, amit ott lenn hallottam, míg leírtam azt, amit láttam." (K, 3) As it can be seen above, the word *összefogni* 'to summarize' stands for *traduire* which contains the meaning of 'to translate'. In the Hungarian version the emphasis is on the creative, narrative role of the author, while in the original work Maran focuses on the transmission of the reality. At the end of the preface, Maran describes his novel as a *roman d'observation impersonnelle* (M, 18) (i.e. 'a novel of impersonal observation'). Kosztolányi uses the expression *személytelen-tárgyilagos regény* (K, 12) which means 'an impersonal-impartial novel', thus he reflects on the narrative act of the author, contrary to Maran who puts in the foreground the significance of the true presentation of the colonial life. (Of course in both cases the reader can find a subtle irony.)

In the beginning of the preface, René Maran compares his work to the succession of *etchings* (*eaux-fortes*, M, 9). However, Kosztolányi uses the word 'watercolor paintings' (*vízfestmények*, K, 3) instead of it. While an etching is characterized by clearly defined outlines, and by the possibility of reproduction, the lines of watercolor paintings could be blurred, the painters can use wide variety of colors, and the picture is a unique piece of art. The two different painting techniques – although they may be combined – represent two different approaches to art. According to Maran, the main aim of his novel is to transcribe the most prominent features of Africa, which are clearly visible for everyone who observes closely the life of the people living in this continent. He does not deny the artistic merits of his work, but he puts them into the service of describing the 'reality', he wants to show a 'permanent' truth, which could be recognized and identified by anyone who saw a similar situation or character. Through an individual story, he would like to draw the lines of existing features, reproduce the already existing elements of reality, just like the printing of an etching reproduces the pattern of the plate. With the watercolor painting comparison, Kosztolányi emphasizes the difficulty of capturing the reality, the particular and imaginative point of view of the author and the irreproducibility of the literary work.

The metaphor of the etching artist appears two more times in the preface. In the middle of it Maran writes: "*Et, plus tard, lorsqu'on aura nettoyé les suburres coloniales, je vous peindrai quelques-uns de ces types que j'ai déjà croqués, mais que je conserve, un temps encore, en mes cahiers*" (M, 13). Maran uses the word *croqués* 'sketched' in connection of his way to describe the characters, and he makes it evident that he would not paint (*peindre*) them (i.e. he would not create a more colorful, detailed picture) before the life changes for the better in the colonies.

On the last page of the preface, the following sentence can be read: "*Voilà, décrite en quelques lignes, la région où va se dérouler ce roman d'observation*

impersonnelle” (M, 18). In French *ligne* (‘line’) is a multiple meaning word, among other things it means ‘a horizontal row of written or printed words’ but it could also be ‘a contour or outline considered as a feature of design or composition’,² and because in this case Maran uses it regarding to the presentation of the landscape, the expression *décrite en quelques lignes* reminds the reader more of a drawing with contours than of a painting.

In the Hungarian version, the words *levázolni* (K, 7) ‘to sketch’ and *megrajzolni* (K, 12) ‘to draw by some lines’ can be found at these parts, and they indicate that the translator finally chooses to be more faithful to the original text than in the beginning. However, while Maran uses the sustained metaphor of the etching artist throughout the preface, the Hungarian translation omits the most important part of it. Presumably not because Kosztolányi ignores the significance of the metaphor, on the contrary, he seems to make the changes deliberately. As discussed above, both the political background and the view of the African people were very different at that time in France and in Hungary. Maran wanted to improve the life of the natives in the colonies by his novel, Kosztolányi’s aim was to focus on the African writer, therefore on his artistic ability, and on his creation itself. The reasons for this are not merely artistic, Kosztolányi’s interpretation was influenced by the contemporary political situation (or rather the absence of the Hungarian political interests in Africa) as well as the distinction between the stereotypical image of African people in France and in Hungary. Both writers revolt against the clichés of the African, and, as Kosztolányi states in his article of Pesti Hírlap, for him the stereotypes are primarily the black music performers deprived of their individuality, or just simply roles of operettas (Kosztolányi 1922, 4). For this reason, it is logical that he accentuates the creativity of the African author, and he neglects the social dimension of the novel.

In the middle of the preface, just where Maran declares that he will only paint detailed pictures of the natives when their living conditions change, the *futur simple* dominates. In the following two paragraphs, Maran discusses the actual hopeless situation in the colonies, and he identifies the origins of the problems in the past. The tenses of the verbs follow a similar pattern. First, Maran mainly uses *présent*, and then mostly *passé composé*. Finally, in the fourth paragraph as he calls for changes, he uses *présent*, *futur simple* and *futur proche*. Kosztolányi translates the present and past tenses in Hungarian, but he generally chooses to use an adverb of time (*majd*, e.g. ‘then’) + present tense instead of a tense to indicate the future. Although in Hungarian the future tense of the verbs in most of the cases are expressed by the auxiliary verb *fog* + infinitive, which would have led to repetition in the text, but this could not be the reason for Kosztolányi’s change, since he still does not avoid it by using the word *majd* so often.

René Maran contrasts the possible future, the presence and the past of the African colonies, the three different tenses emphasize the need for change. There must

be a progression in the future, and in French the verbs conjugated in *futur simple* differ from their form in *présent* or *passé composé*, therefore they can also mark a desired social development. Kosztolányi blurs a little bit the facts of the present and the prospect of the future by using the verbs referring to the future in present forms. Besides the Hungarian political interest Kosztolányi could have been influenced by the context in which Maran uses the future tense. The French author writes that he will paint a picture later about the characters that he has already sketched in the novel – and as it can be seen above, in the beginning of the preface Kosztolányi considered *Batuala* as a succession of watercolor paintings. By using a different tense here in connection with the opposition between the present work as a sketch and a future – not yet published – novel as a painting would only draw attention to how his original watercolor metaphor is distinct from the etching metaphor of Maran. Therefore, Kosztolányi has his own artistic and not just social reasons to avoid the enhancement of the tenses.

The names of the places and African tribes can be found without major changes in the Hungarian version. Kosztolányi adapted to the rules of the Hungarian pronunciation, for this he gave the title *Batuala* to the novel instead of *Batouala*. The native names – apart from one or two like *Bangui*, the present capital of the Central African Republic – were not (and are not) very common in French. For this, it is a justified choice to modify the orthography in the Hungarian edition.

Kosztolányi makes only one major change, when he has to explain the meaning of the name *Banda*. The French *filet* (e.g. ‘net’) (M, 17) does not translate literally into Hungarian as *tőr* (e.g. ‘trap’, ‘snare’, K 11), but the essence is the same (to catch animals with a hidden tool). The word can be found here as the part of the expression *törbe csal* (e.g. ‘entrap’, K, 11), which has been mainly used in a figurative sense. If the aim of Kosztolányi was to give an anthropologically accurate description, he could have written a brief explanation of hunting with net in Africa. However, Kosztolányi uses a well-known Hungarian expression, which refers to a traditional Hungarian hunting method, but which does not really reflect to the original African process. Thus Kosztolányi does not translate only the novel, but he ‘translates’ the culture, and he subordinates the authenticity to the adaptation.

In addition to this, *tőr* is a multiple meaning word in Hungarian, besides ‘snare’ it could also mean ‘dagger’. Therefore the word *tőr* carries a sense of romanticism and violence, which qualities could be attributed to the Bandas by the readers. As it turns out in the novel, this is not without any foundation, but *filet* suggests also an emphasis on the technical skills of the tribe, and because in Hungarian *tőr* and *törbe csal* have rarely been used as ‘trap’/‘snare’ or to describe the traditional method, the translation focuses more on the romantic side of the Bandas than to their exceptional technical abilities. (Kosztolányi could have chosen *lép* (e.g. *birdlime*), which word also has very similar origins as *tőr*, and it has been used

mainly in a figurative sense similarly to *tőr: lépre csal* (e.g. ‘entrap’). *Lép* also has multiple meanings, but none of them is so violent like *tőr*. Therefore, it seems that Kosztolányi deliberately opted for *tőrbe csal*, because with this, he could prepare the readers for the passionate actions.)

The translation of the novel closely follows the original text. Although just a few separate sentences are missing from the Hungarian version, four or five longer parts are omitted as well. These parts can be sorted into two groups. Longer missing descriptions of the nature belong to the first group, like the depiction of the night (M, 62 / K, 53), or in the beginning of the 8th chapter the reflections on the opposition between the permanence of the Sun and disappearance of human beings (M, 112–3 / K, 97). The latter is especially interesting, because after omitting seven paragraphs, Kosztolányi starts the chapter with the words [*e]llenben Lolo*, ‘[i]n contrast, Lolo’, (of course with [*c]ependant, « Lolo »* Maran continues his previous thoughts). This means that Kosztolányi did not even try to conceal that something is missing from the beginning, which may indicate that some parts could have been deleted from the Hungarian version after the translation.

The naturalistic and erotic scenes form the other group. For example, Kosztolányi almost completely omits the description of the excision of the women, four paragraphs are missing here (M, 89–90 / K, 77), and he also did not translate the nearly five paragraphs which contain the most erotic moments of the dance of Yassiguindja and her female partner (M, 92 / K, 79), and some further sentences of the following orgy (M, 93 / K, 79).

Even though the translation is adequate, it is not always consequent. Occasionally at different parts of the novel Kosztolányi translates the same French word differently. Sometimes it has a semantic reason, as the French word *anciens* signifies both ‘deceased ancestors’ or ‘living elders’, thus Kosztolányi translates it as *űik* ‘forebear’, ‘great-great-grandfather’ (M, 180 / K, 155) or as *öreg*, ‘elder’, referring to Batouala’s still living father (M, 60 / K, 70). Other times there is no such an explanation, nevertheless Kosztolányi uses different Hungarian variants for the same French word (e.g. *maïs*, ‘corn’ is can be found as *kukorica* (M, 42 / K, 35), or with a folkloric overtone as *tengeri* (M, 50 / K, 41) in the Hungarian version). Kosztolányi might have wanted to make the language of the novel more vivid.

Kosztolányi also modified the structures of the folk songs in *Batouala*. While in the French version each line has different number of syllables without rhymes, Kosztolányi uses rhymes and traditional Hungarian rhythmic patterns (e.g. 5/5, 4/4), thus he makes the songs similar to Hungarian folk songs.

He does not translate most of the African words from French, but he adapts them to the rules of the Hungarian pronunciation, especially in the cases of the animals (e.g. *bassaragba*, *bassaragba* (M, 155 / K, 133)). However, the name of some musical instruments are changed to well-known Hungarian words, therefore the reader cannot recognize the original object, but this method brings the text

closer to the Hungarian audience. *Balafon*, a percussion is translated as *kürt* ‘horn’ (M, 21 / K, 14), as well as *olifant* (M, 134 / K, 115), which is really a ‘horn’. As the translation is very precise, Kosztolányi may have not know what *balafon* is, and he could have believed that it is similar to *olifant*. In addition, *balafon* appears at the first time in the novel with *koundé/kundé* (a chordophone, which is akin to the guitar), the possibility of the alliteration *kürtök és kundék* (K, 14) could also have influenced Kosztolányi.

In the Hungarian version, some proverbs or expressions are translated nearly literally (e.g. *le manioc sans sel n’a pas de saveur* / *Mert a sóttalan manioknak se íze, se bíze*. (M, 75 / K, 64)), but Kosztolányi found Hungarian proverbs or words instead of others (*Bombance!... / Hegyen-völgyön lakodalom...* (M, 43 / K, 36)) Kosztolányi equally transforms words or expressions which typically refer to Africa, and words or expressions which are peculiar to the French colonial life into common Hungarian words. Kosztolányi interprets *couleur de latérite* as *tégla-vörös* ‘brick red’ (M, 56 / K, 48), and the word *tégla* ‘brick’ does not render the local particularity of laterite, which can be found in the tropical areas. On the other hand, he translates *quelques bouteilles de pernod* as *néhány palack ürömpálinka* (M, 65 / K, 55). Pernod was a French company which was famous for its absinthe (as *abszintes-üveg* ‘absinthe bottle’ also stands for *bouteilles pernod* in the Hungarian version (K, 82 / M, 96)), but with the omission of the name of the French brand, he transforms a historical piece of the colonized reality into a reference of the European and Hungarian drinking habits.

Kosztolányi tried to create an aesthetical text, so it was a difficult task to interpret the conversation between the African sergeant and the white commandant. In *Batouala*, African people always speak without any major linguistic errors. Apart from one or two cases (e.g. *doctorro*, (M, 38)) Maran expresses the thoughts and the talks of the Bambas in literary French mixed with African words or proverbs. However, in this conversation Sillatigui Konaté speaks that kind of French language what really could have been used by the majority of the uneducated Africans. He cannot even pronounce the basic words, his vocabulary is limited, he cannot conjugate the verbs correctly. Kosztolányi does not emphasize the wrong pronunciation, although in the beginning of the scene he translates *Ine... deille!*, ‘One... two!’, as *Ed... ketto!* (M, 95 / K, 81), but in the Hungarian version later the sergeant almost perfectly pronounces the words, and his vocabulary does not differ from the vocabulary used at the other parts of the novel. Kosztolányi demonstrates the linguistic incapacities of the native African speakers mostly by the incorrect use of the definite and indefinite (objective or subjective) conjugation. In the Hungarian version Sillatigui Konaté does not confuse the suffix which marks the person or the time, as it happens in the French original (e.g. *Tu voir pas... / Látod...* (Emphasis mine, M, 96 / K, 82) – in French the sergeant usually says *y’en a* + infinitive, e.g. *Moi y’en a croire*, ‘I believe’ (M, 96)), generally he just cannot

use the definite or indefinite conjugation correctly (e.g. *Jelentek parancsnok úrnak, Bula megint marhaságot csinálta*. (Emphasis mine, K, 82) It should be: *jelentem, csinált*).

The vocabulary plays a significant role in the translation. (Maybe this is why Kosztolányi does not use it to emphasize the linguistic errors of Sillatigui Konaté. For him, the vocabulary has more importance than to make it the centre of attention just for two pages.) The characteristics of the vocabulary of the Hungarian translation could be divided into three major groups.

The first one is the lyricism. Kosztolányi makes the most ordinary words particular, even if it does not seem to be the intention of René Maran. For example, instead of *clôture* ‘closed’ he writes *megkoronázta* ‘crowned’ (M, 51 / K, 43). Kosztolányi even interprets the alliteration with elaborate words (e.g. *Et produisent les arbres un frisselis de mille feuilles mouillées. / Ezer és ezer nedves levelükkel halkan összeborzonganak a fák*. (M, 32 / K, 24)), so he uses vocabulary as a replacement of a literary device.

The amplifications/insertions belong to the second group. Kosztolányi replaces words and expressions by Hungarian expressions or proverbs (e.g. *Un raté. / Csütörtököt mondott*. (M, 164 / K, 141)). He rarely adds some extra words, as it can be seen above he translated *produisent les arbres un frisselis* as *halkan összeborzonganak a fák*: *halkan* ‘silently’ was not a separate word in the original text, and it does not modify the meaning of *összeborzong* ‘tremble’. These amplifications have an aesthetic purpose, and they make it easier for Hungarian readers to understand the story, as they have less linguistic and cultural obstacles to overcome.

The third and most numerous group contains the translations of the repetitions. René Maran often uses the same word twice or more very close to, or after each other. Sometimes the repetition has no special function, Maran simply might have not wanted to seem to be too lyrical as he supposed to concentrate on the story and not on the expression, but at other parts, it serves as accentuation. Kosztolányi consistently eliminates the repetitions, instead of them, he uses synonyms (*aboie, aboie/ugat, csahol* (M, 50 / K, 42)), coordinative compounds (e.g. the compound of two words: *Ses idées allaient, allaient. / Gondolatai jöttek-mentek*. (M, 141 / K, 121), or a compound of an existing word and a similar sounding, but non-existent form *petit, ce tout petit / icipici* (M, 115 / K, 97)). Sometimes he omits one word: *le blanc rampa vers eux, lentement, lentement / [a] fehér lassan feléjük kúszott* (M, 163 / K, 141). Although Kosztolányi removed most of the repetitions of the original work, he created new ones. He uses the same word twice to emphasize it (*Les blancs, encore eux! / Újra jönnek a fehérek, megint a fehérek...* (M, 73 / K, 62)), and he replaces single words or expressions by coordinative compounds (e.g. the duplication of a word: *presque pas / alig-alig* (M, 72 / K, 61)), figura

etymologica: *il y a de cela très longtemps* / [h]át régen volt, valamikor réges-régen... (M, 142 / K, 123).

Why did Kosztolányi produce new repetitions when he tried to avoid the existing ones? He could have had two reasons to do so. First, as it can be seen from the above, vocabulary played an important role in the translation. Kosztolányi wanted to create a homogenous text in the terms of the vocabulary: he did not emphasize the linguistic incapacities with wrong pronunciation or with non-existing forms of the words, he used mainly syntactical errors. While he replaced repetitions by coordinative compounds in some sentences, he added new coordinative compounds or repetitions in the others to compensate, and thus to have an aesthetically balanced text. On the other hand, Kosztolányi uses repetitions where he would have liked to accentuate the importance of something. He adds *figurae etymologicae* mostly in connection with or for duratives (e.g. *allait grandissant* / *nőttön-nőtt* (M, 173 / K, 148), *marche* / *megy-mendégél* (M, 128 / K, 110)). Kosztolányi might have found the descriptions of certain actions too slow, and he wanted to accelerate the rhythm with the *figurae etymologicae*.

Conclusions

The significance of the vocabulary shows that Dezső Kosztolányi concentrated on the smooth writing style during the translation. Although he keeps the majority of the African words adapted to the Hungarian pronunciation, his main aim was not to present the most prominent features of Africa, as the Hungarian version of some musical instruments, or the numerous Hungarian proverbs or expressions show.

Regardless of the omitted parts, *Batouala* closely follows the original work, Kosztolányi often translated literally sentence by sentence. His synonyms make the Hungarian version more lyrical than the novel of Maran, thus the emphasis is transferred from the message of the text to the reception and the public. As it can be seen from the transformation of the folk songs into Hungarian metric, Kosztolányi expands the particularity of the African culture to a general level, which is based on a collective human knowledge.

The attitude of Kosztolányi also expresses a different artistic point of view. With omitting the more erotic or naturalistic parts of *Batouala*, focusing on the lyricism and considering the work as the succession of watercolor paintings, the Hungarian version is an impressionist interpretation, whereas Maran wanted to truthfully represent the African reality, and he wrote his work in a naturalistic style. Jacques Chevrier even compares the naturalism of René Maran to Zola (Chevrier 2006, 41).

Kosztolányi makes the language of the novel homogeneous and unified. He modifies the vocabulary of the narrator and the African person in the same way to adjust them to the Hungarian literary language, thus – contrary to Maran, who focuses on the accurate description of Africa, and to represent the peculiarities of the Bambas and the effects of the French colonialism – Kosztolányi lays the emphasis on the creativity of the author. The narrator and his work get in the centre of attention; the characters, the events and the scenes are seen through his eyes. The use of the language skills has become more important than the regional features. While Maran wanted to provoke a political change with his precise representation of the ‘reality’, the main aim of Kosztolányi was to make the novel easily accepted by the Hungarian public with the help of the Hungarian (and the Western) literary traditions.

In contrast to the political and historical relevance of *Batouala* in France, the Hungarian audience could have more embraced the value of universality. Kosztolányi represents Africa with the story and not with ‘African’ peculiarities, and even if he interprets adequately the characters, the events and the scenes, he would like to introduce Africa as part of a collective heritage. Instead of the diction of René Maran, he uses his own elaborate vocabulary combined with Hungarian proverbs, with the intention of proving to the contemporary Hungarian public the linguistic originality of the novel and thus showing the universal talent of the black author.

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All URLs were accessed on November 5, 2013.

Notes

- ¹ In the comparative part of the essay I refer to Maran’s novel and Kosztolányi’s translations by the initials of the two authors. M = Maran, René, 1921. *Batouala*. Paris: Albin Michel. K = Kosztolányi, Dezső, 1922. *Batouala*. Budapest: Légrády Testvérek.
- ² Both explanations are from the Oxford Dictionaries. <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/line>