

Migrant literature: 1980-2000

Daniel Chartier's *Dictionnaire des écrivains émigrés au Québec* contains 628 names for the period 1800-1999, including over four hundred for the second half of the 20th century. Alongside authors writing in French, there are also those who have chosen English (approximately one-third) or their language of origin (Yiddish, Spanish, German, etc.). Their situation within French-Canadian and Quebec literature has been addressed by Clément Moisan and Renate Hildebrand. The title of their book *Ces étrangers du dedans* (2001) aptly describes the crux of the problem, namely the integration of the difference that foreigners represent.

From the time of its discovery, Canada has been perceived by Europeans, and later by other parts of the world, as a land of immigration. For several decades now, it has welcomed more than 200,000 people a year. Immigration is therefore part of the country's political and cultural horizon. The scale and importance of the phenomenon is reflected in legislation and government activities. In 1971, multiculturalism was established as a principle of federal policy, expressed in the **Multiculturalism Act** of 1988. The modification of this concept is **Quebec pluriculturalism**, introduced after the Charter of the French Language (Bill 101, 1977) secured the dominant position of French in the province.

The terminology dispute between the federal and Quebec authorities needs to be seen in its historical context. Francophones, particularly those in Quebec, felt that multiculturalism meant the abandonment of the policy of biculturalism and bilingualism, which they had only just managed to obtain through pressure. Multiculturalism, in their view, represented a threat to French and the French-speaking minority, as it placed them on a par with other minority languages and cultures - Chinese, Ukrainian, etc. - in terms of cultural diversity. But the major problem, linked to immigration and the majority anglicization of immigrants, was demographic. Until the 1960s, the high birth rate among French-Canadians kept the proportion of Francophones more or less stable. However, the declining birth rate and the **increasing "English" option** among immigrants weakened the situation of French-Canadians at the very time when the concept of multiculturalism was being promoted by the Ottawa government. In 1971, the proportion of immigrant children in Montreal's French-speaking schools was **just 10%**. Over time, French risked becoming a minority language, even in a province where it had until then been the language of the majority. **Multiculturalism was therefore perceived as a threat to identity**, and this was so until language laws, including that of 1977, ensured the francization of immigrants to Quebec, mainly through **compulsory schooling in French-language schools**, but also through other measures - francization of the public space, the workplace, etc. It is this consolidation of identity that has enabled Quebec to declare itself in favor of cultural plurality and respect for cultural difference. The distinction between federal multiculturalism and Quebec pluriculturalism lies mainly in the hierarchy of the Quebec approach, which institutes the promotion of French as the basis of general cultural communication.

Clément Moisan and Renate Hildebrand's study *Ces étrangers du dedans* examines the influence of immigrant authors on French-Canadian and Québécois literature between 1937 and 1997. They distinguish four phases in the penetration of otherness: **unicultural** (1939-1959), **pluricultural** (1960-1974; the term is used here without the political context, to designate a configuration of the literary situation), **intercultural** (1976-1985) and **transcultural** (after 1985). Objections can certainly be raised, including that of the strict segmentation of the stages,

which is too clear-cut to admit an approach that would take account of the returns and variations of the phenomena and offer a less "unidirectional" vision of the general evolution. The latter, however, is clearly indicated by the defining terms that show the dynamics of identity: the essentialist conception based on fixed characteristics of the collectivity (nation) and the individual gives way to the non-essentialist, composite identity of the postmodern and post-national period.

The presence of the foreigner, as subject and object of writing, has multiple implications. It's not just a question of the interaction between "local" Quebec writers and the immigrants who have made Canada their new home. It's also about **worldviews**, the relationship between **cultures**, feelings of **strangeness** or **alienation**. The very distinction we have just used hides, by its dichotomous simplification into blocks, a variety of positions. For we must take into account the diversity (social, political, of opinion or individual) that the label of common origins conceals. Nor should we forget the subtle and complex **hierarchies** that exist between **immigrants of different origins**, and even between different **waves** or **generations**. Encounters are not only between Canadians and "foreigners", but also between the "foreigners" themselves, as critic Pierre Nepveu shows in his *Écologie du réel* (1999). He shows that Quebec literature, with its themes of the *uncertain country* (**Jacques Ferron**) or *literature in the imperfect tense* (**Laurent Mailhot**), unfinished and still in the making, creates a space conducive to welcoming immigrant authors. Their numbers grew, particularly from 1960 onwards, when **Montreal became a major publishing center**, attracting immigrant intellectuals in the same way as Paris had done in the past.

Of the 628 entries in Daniel Chartier's *Dictionnaire des écrivains émigrés au Québec 1800-1999*, 400 belong to authors of the second half of the 20th century. Some of them - the Russian **Jean Bazile** or the Iraqi **Naïm Kattan** - have been active in Quebec since the 1960s. But the main wave came in the 1980s. Brazilian **Sergio Kokis**, Chinese **Ying Chen**, Serbian **Négovan Rajic**, Haitians **Émile Ollivier**, **Gérard Étienne** and **Dany Laferrière**, Lebanese **Wajdi Mouawad** and **Abla Farhoud**, French **Régine Robin** and **Elisabeth Vonaburg**, Chileans **Miguel Retamal** and **Alberto Kurapel**, Italians **Fulvio Caccia** and **Antonio d'Alfonso**, and so on. The massive entry of these authors into the Quebec literary field generated tensions and controversies, including the distinction made at the time between Quebec writers and "neo-Quebecers", and the acrimonious debate surrounding **Monique LaRue's** academic conference and essay, *L'Arpenteur et le navigateur* (1996). In her reflection on Quebec literature, the author revived the archetypal dichotomy of inhabitant/coureur des bois identity in Quebec literature, highlighting the tension between the sedentary, conservative inwardness associated with a 19th-century tradition and the new openness stemming, among other things, from the migratory wave. Monique LaRue has been wrongly accused of xenophobia. In fact, she shares the views of Haitian migrant **Émile Ollivier** (Ollivier, 2001), especially as it was migrant authors who largely introduced the redefinition of migration and immigration, which went from being ethnic and testimonial literature to existential reflection. We should mention the theoretical contributions of **Italo-Québécois and Haitian immigrants** in the magazines *Dérives* (1975-1987; Jean Jonassaint), *Quaderni culturali* (1980-1982; Lamberto Tassinari) and *Vice Versa* (1983-1996; Lamberto Tassinari, Fulvio Caccia), where **Berrouët-Oriol** published the famous article „L'Effet d'exil“. It was the Haitian **Émile Ollivier** who redefined the relationship between the nomadic and the sedentary in favor of the former (*Repérages*, 2001), while his compatriot **Jean-Claude Charles** theorized the notion of "enracinerrance" and **Joël**

Des Rosiers, another Haitian, spoke of "postexilic" writing. The critical force of these notions is influencing Quebecois authors of origin.

Could this be a sign that Quebecois territorialization and anchoring, still strongly present in the modernism and postmodernism of the Quiet Revolution, have entered a new phase? Could this be a sign of a transformation and a different axiological arrangement of identity-based spatiality? Can we expect a reassessment of the opposition between here and elsewhere, in a kind of denationalized exterritoriality moving towards a kind of transnationality? Are we dealing with a specific narrative semiosis, notably in the relationship to characters, action and narration? No doubt a historical overview would be useful to see that the present is situated in a continuity of past elements.

The presentation of "those from home" and "those from elsewhere" varies according to who is watching and who is speaking. Several partial aspects can be addressed. While the example offered by Gabrielle Roy (*Rue Deschambault*, 1955; *Street of Richies*) allows us to view the situation of foreigners and immigrants through the eyes of the sedentary "native-born", Yves Thériault (*Aaron*, 1954) opts for the opposite perspective, presenting the assimilation of immigrants from his point of view. Noël Audet (*La terre promise, Remember!*, 1998) and François Barcelo (*Les Plaines à l'envers*, 1989) analyze the disintegration of the essentialist conception of nation and nationality. Finally, writers from "elsewhere" will be given a voice, in the person of Émile Ollivier (*Passages*, 1991).

Let's start with a genre that is supposed to express the specificity of the Canadian-Quebecois character - the roman du terroir. Here, foreigners and elsewhere figure as part of the confirmation of native identity - home, terroir, parish, native land. In Louis Hémon's *Maria Chapdelaine* (1914 in print, 1916 in book form), the native/foreign dichotomy characterizes the cast of characters. Of the beautiful Maria's three suitors, two represent the elsewhere, the faraway place that attracts and invites departure. While François Paradis embodies the Canadian far-off - the adventure and wild life of the coureurs des bois, Lorenzo Surprenant is the one who let himself be drawn to the urban civilization of the United States - by "[...] *the mirage of beautiful distant cities and the life it offered, rich with unknown wonders*". The two suitors were pitted against the sedentary settler Eutrope Gagnon. After François dies in a snowstorm, Marie must choose between the sedentary Canadian countryside and the American city. The country of her birth wins out - at the end of an internal struggle. For Marie was drawn to the American elsewhere before "*the voice of the land of Quebec*" presented her with the decisive argument: "*Over there, it was foreign: people of a different race talking about a different thing in a different language, singing different songs... Here...*". The two universes exclude each other, and the exclusion is reinforced by the collective nous that the voice of the country of Quebec adopts to enunciate itself:

We came three hundred years ago, and we stayed...[...] Around us came foreigners, whom we like to call barbarians; they took almost all the power; they acquired almost all the money; but in the land of Quebec nothing has changed. Nothing will change, because we are a testimony.

The identity paradigm of the defensive national model is crystal clear. The exclusion of the other and the us/them and here/elsewhere antagonism structure the topics in sharp opposition, whether in terms of ethnicity, language, culture, political or economic power, or the question of seniority. The essentialism of identity is weighed down to the point of immobility. The vision of an unchanging country, anchored in the past, is reinforced by the theme of encirclement by foreigners and barbarians. The connotation is one of imminent danger and

resistance. It's important to note that this nationalist representation was formulated not by a Canadian, but by a Frenchman, a "*foreigner from within*", originally from Brittany, who, before arriving in Canada, had worked for several years in London (1903-1911). English and Irish themes run through almost all of his work. He spent only the last two years of his life in Canada and Quebec, and only a few months of that, in 1912, among the settlers of Lac Saint-Jean, where *Maria Chapdelaine* is set. Nevertheless, it was with Louis Hémon's vision that French-Canadian culture was able to identify for a time, before questioning and refuting it. While **Félix-Antoine Savard**, in *Menaud, maître draveur* (1937), associates the foreigner (the Englishman) with the dispossession and loss of the native land, graduating the conflict to a duel between the defender and the French-Canadian traitor who has gone over to the service of the Englishman, **Germaine Guèvremont**, on the other hand, uses the theme of the foreigner to highlight the metamorphosis of the traditional rural world. The stranger in her novel *Le Survenant* (1945) is the catalyst for the changes the community unconsciously desires. Once gone, the stranger leaves a wound, or a void, in people's hearts. The old order of things has lost its unquestioned legitimacy, and the rural Beauchemin family is disintegrating. A similar theme is addressed by **Yves Thériault** in *Le Montreur d'ours* (1951): the stranger's animality electrifies the women and men of a hitherto peaceful mountain village. In comparison with Louis Hémon's novel, there's a noticeable shift in the definition of the foreigner: neither English, nor American, nor barbarian, he presents himself as one of us, an otherness within us.

This qualitative evolution indicates a shift from exclusion to inclusion in the realm of structuring relationships. We can trace this in **Gabrielle Roy's** prose. The author's sensitivity to the presence of the foreign can be traced back to her childhood in Manitoba, contemporary with the colonization of the prairies, in an environment where the French-speaking minority was confronted with the English-speaking majority and immigrants of diverse origins. As a result of the assimilationist Manitoba School Act of 1916, which allowed only English-language schooling, Gabrielle Roy's education differed from that of Quebec intellectuals. Her relationship with English culture - and that of the Other in general - therefore has a different tenor and tone. The eighteen stories in *Rue Deschambault* (1955; *Street of Richies*) are set in her native Saint-Boniface and on the Manitoba prairie. Some - "Les deux nègres", "Le puits de Dunrea", "L'Italienne", "Wilhelm" - develop the theme of the foreigner or immigrant. What they have in common is the problem of the shifting boundary between understanding and incomprehension, and the question of "distance" from the other and from oneself. In this respect, there is also an analogy with *Maria Chapdelaine*. In Louis Hémon's novel, it is not the protagonist who pronounces on the identity and strangeness of the other, but "the voice of the country of Quebec". Gabrielle Roy deploys this distancing focus in a number of ways. „Le puits de Dunrea" („The Well of Dunrea“) recounts the trauma of the author's father, an administrator in charge of the Ruthenian settlers, who, during a catastrophic fire on the prairie and in the village, unwittingly causes the death of his best collaborator. The misunderstanding is not due to language, but to the difference in cultural values and representations to which language refers. The father's trauma is not presented directly, in the first instance, as it is a secret he has confided to the narrator's sister. The narrator narrates what has already been narrated; between her narration and the events, there are two instances, two different views. A similar narrative situation characterizes *Rue Deschambault's* very first short story, "Les deux nègres" ("The Two Negroes"). Christine - the narrator - is split between her adult situation and that of the child she once was. The child's view, not yet burdened by prejudice, is told from a distance and filtered through the adult's ironic yet understanding approach. The story's plot, as the title suggests, is

built around the presence of two black tenants, Canadian Pacific Railway employees, in the narrator's family and neighbor's home. The story's protagonists are the two rival mothers, each of whom boasts of housing "the better of the two Negroes". Narrative distance not only produces an ironic effect, but also brings intellection and understanding through interposed comments. What's more, it helps to establish an appearance of objectivity by placing French-Canadians and foreigners at the same distance.

The emulation between the narrator's mother and Madame Guilbert is based on social status. As both families are not wealthy, renting becomes an economic necessity. Except that the tenants, first in one family and later in the other, are the two Negroes. The strength of both women's prejudices - their own and those around them - lends itself to manipulation. Faced with Mrs. Guilbert's indignation at having accepted a black tenant, the narrator's mother turns the argument on its head:

"I could have rented my room a hundred times, two hundred times to someone white," says my mother. There's no shortage of white people here.... But I understood that it was more humane, more Christian, if you like, to take this poor Negro whom some people, do you understand, would refuse to treat as one of their own."

Treating a Negro as a "fellow human being" is not a matter of course and, above all, does not mean equality. Acceptance of the other comes "from above", dictated by a sense of superiority. The white man defines the evaluation criteria that the black man must meet. That's why Mrs. Guilbert asks if her neighbor's tenant washes properly, makes his own bed, if he's "in his place". It's on these criteria that the black tenant is accepted and becomes less of a stranger. But "foreigners are rarely as foreign as we think...". We make them our own. But the appropriation of the other is still influenced by superiority. Christine's mother speaks of "my Negro", who for the family is "our Negro". And when Madame Guilbert in turn takes on a black tenant, the narrator's mother declares, "You'll see that Madame Guilbert will now claim to have a better Negro than ours." Then there's an argument about which of the two blacks is blacker, better behaved, more polite - until one of the daughters from each family starts dating the respective Negro. The narrator's humor and irony highlight the superiority complex with which both families attempt to mask their fear of the judgment of those around them.

What about the two black men? They seek to break their solitude, to get closer to the two families. They learn French, bring small gifts. They find a common language in music, on the piano. But neither this universal language, nor the information Christine's family learns about the tenant's American past, slavery and African roots, can bridge the gap. Gabrielle Roy finely suggests this through the appellations: Christine's Negro will remain "Mister Jackson" and her friend and collaborator "Buddy" - as if, together, they represented a single person with a first and last name - a Stranger. A stranger, however, to whom the door has been opened, with whom it is possible to share the home life, to talk, to have fun - provided, however, that he accepts the values of the house and conforms to them.

Cultural difference is examined from another angle in **Yves Thériault's** novel *Aaron*. The perspective is that of immigrants, confronted with the society into which they are integrating, and the uprooting that is the consequence. The foreigner leaves the objectal position of Rue Deschambault for the subjectal position. The world of the "home Quebecers" is observed through the eyes of the foreigner, the other. This reversal of perspective is diversified: while grandfather Moishe holds fast to Jewish orthodoxy and tradition, grandson Aaron Cashin

dreams of succeeding by integrating into modernity. These are two contrasting, conflicting visions.

The story of grandfather and grandson is set against the backdrop of the catastrophes of the 20th century. After fleeing the Minsk ghetto and the violence of the Russian Revolution, Moishe Cashin eventually settled first in San Francisco, then in Montreal. Allusions to the concentration camps and the internment recounted by Viedna, a young Jewish girl with whom Aaron falls in love, situate the beginning of the action in the early 1950s. Montreal, an apparent haven of peace, is not immune to racism either. Aaron is confronted with it in the street, on his way to school:

Under a lamppost, Marie Lemieux, her brother and the Pole were waiting.
The stinking Jew!" declared Marie. He won't come out..."
He always goes in early anyway," said the Pole sarcastically. He's a sissy!"
I can't smell him!" declared the little girl. He's not finished with the rest of us..."
"Dirty little Jew," spat the Pole. He ain't through yet!"
And he added, in even worse French, out of indulgence for Marie: "C't'une maudite Juif, c'est toute!"

The youth gang simply imitates the racism of the adults. Aaron comes face to face with it, sometimes in its crudest form - when a janitor spits contemptuously at him - sometimes in a softened form, but barely veiled by the good advice given to him by his work colleague:

If you don't want to pass for a Jew, change your name, call yourself English or French-Canadian, and the promotions will come in addition....

This is the path taken by Viedna, who changes her name to Cécile to blend in with her French nationality and shed the weight of her Jewish status. She wanted to live like everyone else. Aaron ends up following her example, of which he disapproves at first.

From childhood onwards, Aaron's life is marked by an in-between, both a boundary and a line of passage, whether in terms of language (see above the children's conversation in English and French), culture or religion. The linguistic boundary runs through the personality, as it plays a part in the choice of first and last names (major marks of identity), and characterizes the environment surrounding the Jewish boy and teenager. The ghetto's remote alleyway - between avenue Mont-Royal, rue Sherbrooke, boulevard Saint-Laurent and rue Saint-Urbain - lies close to the modern city. The sounds of modernity penetrate Aaron and Moishe's dingy home:

But he [Aaron] slept badly. The humid heat of Montreal bathed him, wrapped itself around him, crushed him. And yet, above the city's voice, a continuous hum, dominated Moishe's voice, emerging from the shadows, without belonging, eternal and unchanging, the grandfather transmitting the essential science to the child. The Negev and its ancient names, the hills of Judea and the land of the twelve tribes came alive.

As we can see, the frontier cuts across toponymy (Montreal/Negev), the perception of time (modernity/change/tradition/immutability), the perception of space (humid heat/desert), the perception of life (stifling present/recovered past). Aaron, raised by his grandfather, tries to come to terms with tradition. He sees the strength of roots that could provide him with a rich and solid identity. But he also wants to live with others, to have a modern life, to succeed. Hence his revolt, which is also expressed through his linguistic identity. When his grandfather forbids him, in Yiddish, to go out with his friends, he attacks him in English:

Why do you speak Yiddish to me? Isn't English good enough? Why don't you speak white, like everybody around here?

The key expression "speak white" refers to the language of power, that which constitutes the norm and "normality". Aaron's violent reaction reminds him, with a backlash, that by excluding his grandfather's language, he risks not only losing the richness of Jewish tradition, but also denying himself and losing his identity by submitting to the other. The in-between situation reinforces the effects of exclusion and inclusion. Aaron is constantly confronted with exclusion - from both sides: from non-Jews and from his Orthodox grandfather. Moishe sees his life in Canada as a continuation of the exile, an exile that is undoubtedly less troubled than elsewhere and that would enable him to perpetuate tradition by passing it on, intact and petrified, to his grandson. Aaron, on the other hand, seeks inclusion: he attempts to reconcile the two worlds on either side of the border, tradition and modernity. Tradition, however, limits his individuality and does not allow him to choose his career freely. In the end, it's exclusion that wins out, as Viedna shows him that Canadians will never accept his inclusive attitude: "*Canadian Jew! You have to say: 'Canadian Jew', always a Jew*". And it's grandfather Moishe who consummates the ostracism. He disowned his grandson and chased him out of his house: "*Get out! Take your laundry, your books, everything, go away! There's no more room for you in my house! [...] Go away, I don't know you anymore, I don't know your name...*". All the essential traits are involved - tradition, memory, family, home, name, language. As seen by the immigrant Aaron, integration can only be achieved through acculturation. Two passages in the novel refer to the Reform Jewish religion, which seeks to conform tradition to modernity. The novel's conclusion does not suggest that this is the path chosen by Aaron. He has changed his name, his identity, his home and his job. He starts his life again on the other side of the border.

The two prose works analyzed - "Les deux nègres" and Aaron - are complementary in their cross-perspectives and their treatment of the problematic of the foreigner and the immigrant. **What they have in common is the essentialist conception of identity. Identity essentialism - particularly that which characterizes "pure wool" ethnicity - was an obstacle to the integration of New Quebecers in the 1980s and 1990s, at a time when language laws and the Charter of the French Language (1977) proposed an open, civic conception of Quebecity.** This was a gradual process, as the abandonment of the essentialist conception necessitated the re-evaluation, or at least relativization, of identity references - history, language, literature, ethnicity and so on. This trend characterizes, among other things, the historical novel and prose that fictionalizes history. This is also the case with novels by François Barcelo and Noël Audet.

Among **Barcelo's** playful prose, which transforms historical narratives, *Les Plaines à l'envers* (1989, *Plains upside down*) is undoubtedly the most identity-rich. The novel recounts the traumatic moment of the French defeat on the Plains of Abraham on September 13, 1759. It is, however, a cinematic "remake" of the story. The film script was mistakenly proposed to little-known publicist and writer Noël Robert, who was to collaborate with fellow Toronto writer Alice Knoll. The project had federal funding and required the cooperation of French- and English-Canadians. Alice is more interested in the present and her colleague than in working on the script. Attempts at seduction - the Toronto woman's amorous siege and the Quebecer's resistance - form the erotic and humorous backdrop to the re-enactment of historical events. While the Montreal screenwriter documents his work conscientiously, his attention is drawn

less to the figures of the two antagonistic commanders, as is the case with nationalist interpretations, than to two navigators, later to become famous, James Cook and Antoine de Bougainville, who were pitted against each other on the battlefield by the vagaries of armed service. The decisive character in the novel is a young, complexed soldier from Quebec, assigned to guard the arsenal of the Quebec garrison. He joins the list of comparses to re-enact the battle of the Plains of Abraham - not on the French side, but on the English - because for once, he wants to be one of history's victors. To be on the safe side, he incorporates the mechanics of the modern machine gun into his model of the historical rifle. Coming late to the gathering of his English compatriots, he is drafted into the French army. In front of the cameras, his machine gun loaded with real bullets causes panic in the English army. For once, the battle of the Plains of Abraham was won by the French. The relativization of historical trauma - its affirmation through negation - derives not only from the ironic distancing of the protagonist-narrator, but also from the multiplication and crossing of points of view. The same historical facts are given different meanings in the eyes of Bougainville, Cook or the young Quebec soldier, or they make no sense at all to the Toronto co-writer. The rewriting of history never came to fruition - at least in the terms of the initial project. In the end, the film was shot by Hollywood professionals, and the historical truth was buried under the camouflage of a commercial product.

Noël Audet's *La terre promise, Remember!* (1998) is also characterized by a plural narrative perspective and playful irony. The book can also be read as a humorous historical novel. The list of bibliographical references in the appendix refers to both historical sources (Jacques Cartier, Samuel Champlain, Gabriel Sagard) and contemporary historians (Marcel Trudel, Jean Provencher). The title suggests the complexity of the task. "La terre promise" alludes to the Bible, to the biblical component of the American myth (of the New World) and to the Quebec sovereigntist dream, "Remember" being the English form (but French etymology) of the national motto *Je me souviens*. Except that this reference to the French filiation of the Québécois heritage is used, in the novel, as the name of the Doucet **family's breeding boar**. This is no ordinary boar: as in fairy tales, he has the gift of speech and the ability to travel through time. On the back of his boar, painter Emmanuel Doucet travels through the history of Canada from Jacques Cartier to the present day. Historical events are inserted into a double narrative framework, in the form of dialogue or double commentary, so that Emmanuel's assertions are subverted by Remember's irony. Memory itself (Remember) thus deconstructs the doxa that Roland Barthes saw as a constitutive element of modern myths. The relativization, even subversion, of historical certainties and truths is the response to a motivation of identity: Emmanuel undertakes the journey to question the past and find an answer to the divisions that oppose members of his own family at a decisive historical moment - between the Parti Québécois seizure of power in 1976 and the 1995 referendum on sovereignty-association. The journey through time takes the form of a series of visits to different generations of the Doucet family. Yet the two pillars of essentialist Quebec identity - family and ethnicity - do not provide clear, unambiguous answers. Interpretative diversity is further underlined by the playful conception of the text itself, where the attentive reader discovers, scattered throughout, some twenty allusions to the canon of French-Canadian and Québécois literature (Louis Hémon, Jean-Charles Harvey, Réjean Ducharme, Paul-Émile Borduas, etc.). The novel can also be read as a subversive metatext of national literature.

Both authors - Barcelo and Audet - illustrate the changing perception of national certainties. Essentialist univocity is called into question, and relativization frees up access to the truths of

the other. Without this relativization - on the part of Quebecers - it would be difficult to envisage, in its proper proportions, the acceptance of the otherness of the neo-Quebec authors who have had a considerable influence on Quebec literature since the 1980s.

Several stages can be discerned in the cultural and axiological integration of neo-Quebec writers. **The first is marked by the sometimes traumatic experiences of their countries of origin:** the war in Lebanon, Brazilian or Chilean prisons, Polish or Yugoslav totalitarianism, etc. The works of immigrant authors enrich Canadian culture with their testimonies, broadening its horizons. **The second phase underscores the confrontation between the old and the new,** between the culture of origin and the Canadian culture, which hold up a mirror to each other. Witness **Ying Chen's** *Les Lettres chinoises* (1993), **Dany Laferrière's** *Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer* (1985) and **Régine Robin's** *La Québécoise* (1983). **The third stage** consists of axiological interaction and interpenetration - of the culture of origin, of the immigrant milieu, of Canadian or Quebec society - reflecting the complexity of the immigrant condition. Such is the case of **Marco Micone** and his trilogy *Gens du silence* (1982), *Addolorata* (1984), *Déjà l'agonie* (1988).

Haitian immigrant **Émile Ollivier's** evocatively titled novel *Passages* (1991) combines the three phases of identity interaction. The action takes place in three places, three complementary environments: (1) Haiti, where the exile-immigrants place their roots and which is the image of social cohesion; (2) Montreal, one of the places of the Haitian diaspora, where their community cohesion is polarized and progressively decomposed under the influence of the Canadian environment; and (3) Miami, which, more than Montreal, represents globalization - its composite and fragmentary character at once, its frustrations and superficial contacts between individuals who rub shoulders without meeting:

Haitian emigration is represented in two thematic threads. The first tells the story of the inhabitants of Port-à-l'Écu, impoverished and terrorized by the dictatorial regime, who decide to build a boat - La Caminante - to cross the sea and seek a better fate in the United States. The boat sinks in a storm: twenty of the sixty-seven castaways are washed up alive on the Florida coast and interned in a camp for illegal immigrants. The second strand focuses on the biography of Normand Malavy, a Haitian intellectual who emigrated to Canada for political reasons. As a child, he had witnessed the torture and death of his father, and this trauma made him a stubborn and persistent opponent of the Haitian dictatorial regime. After twenty years of activism, he felt worn and burnt out. His last commitment, shortly before his death, was to help the shipwrecked crew of La Caminante in Miami. He obtained their release. He also recorded the story of one of them, Brigitte Kadmon. This recording was made just as Jean-Claude Duvalier's regime was overthrown. In the novel, this testimony is partially included in the dialogue between Leyda and Amparo, Normand Malavy's widow and lover respectively, as Amparo, who witnessed Normand's death, visits her friend's wife in Montreal. The rest of the story is told by one of Normand's friends, Régis, who, as character-narrator, forms the cornerstone of the narrative structure.

Period testimonies are not essential. *Passages* is an existential novel, a novel of the quest for oneself and for others. It has already been indicated that the quest has two poles - collective (migration of the Haitian community) and individual (differentiated situations of intellectuals of the Haitian diaspora in Montreal). In both cases, the existential dimension is accentuated by non-existence - death. First, the bitter, resigned and unillusioned death of Port-à-l'Écu

community leader Amédée Hossange, then that of Normand Malavy. The two narrative threads present them - post eventum - in an attempt to understand them and explain their lives. But any noetic effort is limited to the uncertain: the two characters do not reveal themselves directly, and their words and deeds only reach us relativized, through others, as integral parts of their subjectivities. Unreliability is the subject of Régis's reflections on his testimony. The uncertainty of words is repeatedly countered by the evocative power of silence and music.

The two universes - collective (Haiti) and individual (Miami, Montreal) - are differentiated by language. The recording of Brigitte Kadmon's story has the stylistic expressiveness of orality, in tune with the collective representations - myths and legends - of the rural community that lives in close dependence on nature. Orality tends to heroize and transform real events in Haiti into legends - as in Normand's recollection of his brother Ramon, an unrivalled dancer and irresistible seducer who confronts a dangerous killer and, although seriously wounded, pursues him, terrorizing him, through the back alleys. Haitian orality is contrasted with the cultivated language of the Montreal milieu, that of the Western tradition, whose existential dimension is underscored by philosophical reflections.

The linguistic and stylistic doubling contributes to the highlighting of cross-perspectives. On the one hand, impoverished Haitians look to the United States and Canada as promised lands. On the other hand, Haitian emigrants long to return to the land of their birth, even if they suspect that their childhood and youth are nothing more than an unreal memory, a kind of dream, and that their myth of roots will shatter on the first confrontation with reality, unless they save the myth by not recognizing reality itself:

Amparo had just returned from Cuba. She hadn't really come back. She'd come back from Cuba without coming back. In this, she resembled those who, having found Jerusalem, continue to search for it elsewhere, eternally, to the end of the world, to infinity, even beyond.

It is this retrospective gaze and the motif of returning that reveal the difference between the two universes. While Brigitte Kadmon decides to return to Port-à-l'Écu after her husband's death, because for her, the disillusionment of emigration is a greater evil than uprooting, Norman no longer dares to return to his native Haiti, even after the change of regime: *"The fall of this regime came too late in my life, although God knows I waited for it!"* (P 160) He is skeptical of the television reports on the popular uprising, which he sees as "surface agitation" by a people who have no control over their history, which others, more powerful, are imposing on them. The émigré's disillusionment leads to distancing and a feeling of alienation and dispossession.

Who are these immigrants/emigrants for whom there is no way back, and who meet in Montreal or Miami? How do they see themselves? First and foremost, they're individualists from mixed cultures, with no attachment to one place. Amparo Doukara, for example, comes from a Syrian family that first emigrated to Havana, then to the United States. Her parents live in Manhattan, she in Vancouver. Her ex-friend is a Chilean who fled the Pinochet dictatorship and is now leaving Canada to try to return home.

Deprived of fixity, identity can become fluid. Youyou, a Haitian and friend of Normand's, seduces women in Montreal bars by fabricating stories about his exotic origins:

On Monday, we were born on the banks of the Congo River [...]; on Tuesday, we were Malagasy; on Wednesday, pure-bred Peulhs [...]; on Thursday, Ethiopians; on Friday, Zimbabweans; on Saturday, Sudanese from Kartoum; and for you, madam, today, I'm descended from a mother from Martinique, illegitimate daughter of an Oriental fakir. She was brought from Fort-de-France to Port-au-Prince by a Corsican kidnapper with an Italian name, who was fleeing conscription during the last world war. [...] I have the privilege and the disgrace, Madame, of occupying a special place in the West Indian repertoire of métissage and bastardisation.

Similarly - as in "countless expatriations" - Amparo is in love with Janush, a Polish student in Paris.

Or identity can be multiple. When asked by an immigration official in Miami, "*Where do you come from?*" Normand replies, "*From Canada, but I'm Haitian. The misunderstanding is only cleared up when the employee looks at the Canadian passport: "You're a Canadian, for God's sake! since your passport is Canadian."*

This is the Gordian knot of the problem of identity, according to Ollivier, and it's akin to the phenomenological understanding of Martin Heidegger and Paul Ricœur. Here, Ollivier's text seems to allude to the distinction between **sameness**, which is the persistence of identity over time, and **ipseity**, maintained and confirmed incessantly by acts. It is exile and wandering that facilitate the perception of this identity ambiguity. Normand and Régis's awareness of identity is shared by Leyda:

You see, the world is made up of two great races of men: those who take root, who weave themselves a mineral destiny in a dream of stone, and those who think of themselves as pollen (P 62).

The theme of roots and uprooting recurs throughout the novel. In the course of their nocturnal adventures, Normand and Youyou use their arguments and fictions to strip their lovers of their roots and identity. By making them like themselves, they make them experience their own existential feelings. Normand gives up writing his memories, which Leyda refers to as "disenchantment" and "disengagement. But it is perhaps Régis who comes closer to the truth when he asserts that "*the human being never stops inventing himself*".

Phenomenological, existential identity is thus opposed to essentialist identity. The negation of memory leads to a spatialized conception of temporality, reduced to the time of travel or wandering, or to the time of **incessant self-invention**. Exile is a journey of no return. But exile is also the very image of existence, as indicated by two references in *Passages* to Søren Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, and through him to the story of Heraclitus, whose sentence about the impossibility of entering the same river twice elicits the comment from one of his pupils: "*Master, you can't do it even once*". Which is why, in Kierkegaard's words, "*[i]t is necessary to go beyond*".

While Quebecers **Barcelo** and **Audet** have relativized the essentialist model of identity (with its strong references to history, memory and the cultural canon), **Émile Ollivier**, who represents migrant writing in a number of ways, formulates a non-essentialist, postmodern approach. As for the problem of identity, one observation is clear: the non-essentialist, postmodern approach changes the nature of structuring relationships. If exclusion and inclusion appear, the dichotomy loses relevance, if only because the dichotomous opposition between the individual I and the collective we also fades, at least as far as the representation of the Haitian diaspora in Canada

is concerned. Normand's distrust of history does not exclude altruism. But it is a "universal" altruism that is no longer motivated by an awareness of a collective historical mission. The category of nation is absent. The exiles in the novel are mostly of Haitian origin. They note their differences, without pointing to any common exclusivity that would be a source of collective specificity. The disappearance of the nation modifies the topics of identity - country, land, time and history, religion, language, immigration. The awareness of an open existence weighs heavily on the characters. Their search for themselves and for the other within themselves is a process, a becoming. For this reason, they find Canada and Montreal a suitable place to coexist. As he wanders around Montreal, Normand draws strength from the diversity of its neighborhoods and immigrant communities. His identity has no roots; it's rhizomatic, gliding across the surface, feeding off everywhere as it goes.

The linguistic plurality and plurality of identity that it assumes indicate that French-language can go beyond the national model, both defensive and integrative, and come closer to a post-national, rhizomatic identity. A comparison with Italian-Quebecer Antonio d'Alfonso is in order:

Nativo di Montréal
raised as a Québécois
forced to learn the tongue of power
viví en Mexico como alternativa
figlio del sole et della campagna
par les francs-parleurs aimé
finding thousands like me suffering [...] (L'Autre Rivage)

Ying Chen (20.2. 1961 Shanghai, China)

Ying Chen studied English, Japanese and Russian at Shanghai Fudan University (1983) and worked as a translator at the Astronautical Research Institute. She moved to Montreal at the age of 28. As soon as she graduated from McGill University, she turned to writing. Her novels - written in refined, classicist French - immediately won her critical and literary acclaim. She begins by evoking a distant China, which she projects onto the image of her grandmother Lie-Fei - in *La Mémoire de l'eau* (1992). *Lettres chinoises* (1993) follows the classic pattern of the epistolary novel: the fiancés are separated by distance; Sassa is in China, her fiancé is in Montreal. The story of the break-up is psychologically ambiguous. Chen has combined the subtlety of Chinese ceremony with the rhetoric of litotes - hint, don't tell. The lucid language conceals depths that the attentive reader suspects without knowing their precise content. In the end, Sassa skilfully introduces her fiancé Yuan to her friend Da Li, while she herself remains dying in China. The epistolary exchange is also a confrontation between two worlds, two civilizations.

Ingratitude (1995) is set in China. It's the story of a girl who suffers from an authoritarian mother and a rigid social etiquette in which her love and place in life are pre-planned and ritualized. Out of hate for her mother, she commits suicide to punish her - personally and socially. But the traces of the suicide are concealed: the mother imposes on those around her the image of an accident and family grief.

A nuanced, emotional drama, *Immobilité* (1998) is the story of an archaeologist who explores the past and a woman who resurfaces memories of her past lives, which both revive and destroy their relationship. The confrontation of two worlds - the new and the traditional - is the subject

of *Champ dans la mer* (2001): the protagonist feels uncomfortable in her role as a modern woman, returning in her memories to the love of her childhood in the Chinese countryside during the Cultural Revolution. Another novel, *Querelle d'un squelette avec son double* (2003), is about disconnection and the search for identity in affinity with the fate of the other. Here, a crazed anorexic communicates with her double, who dies near her son under the ruins of a house destroyed by an earthquake. The line between life and death is blurred here, as is the difference between a dream and reality.

Ying Chen now divides her time between Vancouver, Montreal and Paris. She continues her career as a novelist with *Une enfant à ma porte* (2008), *Blessures* (2016), *Rayonnements* (2020).

Dany Laferrière, real name Windsor Kléber Laferrière (13.4. 1953 Port-au-Prince, Haiti)

He grew up in the village of Petit-Goâve, whose atmosphere - like that of his native island - is etched in his memory and in his novels. The son of a diplomat forced to emigrate by the dictatorial regime of François Duvalier, he too had to emigrate to escape the repression in 1976. In Montreal, he worked for several years in a factory, then as a journalist, mainly in television. In his prose, he observes with critical humor, tinged with cynicism, the cultural conflicts that make up Canada's postmodern, multicultural world. The autobiographical tendency of his work takes him back to his native Haiti. He lives between Montreal, Florida and Paris, since being elected a member of the Académie française (2013).

In Quebec, he made his name with *Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer* (1985), a novel that takes an original approach to the usual immigrant theme of cultural conflict, setting the story in a bohemian student milieu and replacing intellectual reflections on otherness with sexual confrontation. The narrator shares a squalid apartment on the Saint-Denis street with a certain Buba, who tries to meditate on the synthesis of Freud, jazz and the Koran. Their main entertainment is the erotic hunt for female students. The only serious occupation is the novel the narrator is writing. Racial discrimination is portrayed here with cynical, upside-down exaggeration. This best-selling novel has been adapted for the screen.

Cultural confrontation, eroticism, sensuality, autobiographical elements, as well as colorful expression and humor, characterize the "American autobiography" that oscillates between Haiti, Canada and the United States: *Chronique de la dérive douce* (1994), *Éroshima* (1987), *L'odeur du café* (1987). 1991), *Le goût des jeunes filles* (1992), *Le charme des après-midi sans fin* (1997). A new chapter begins with the intersection of existential, political and personal issues in *Le cri des oiseaux fous* (2000) and *L'Énigme du retour* (2009).

Marco Micone (23.3. 1945 Montelongo, Italy)

The theme of immigration and the search for a new identity is based on personal experience. His father left Italy to work in Canada when Marco was six. The family didn't settle there until seven years later (1958). The trauma of an absent father is inscribed in Micone's work, as is the contrast between Italy, Italian-Quebecers and Québécois. Micone graduated from Loyola High School (1968) and studied drama at McGill University. He then went on to teach Italian and Italian culture in high school, while becoming involved in the Italian-Canadian community. He can be considered the Michel Tremblay of Italian-Quebecers. He portrayed their destinies in

his trilogy *Gens du silence* (1982), *Addolorata* (1984) and *Déjà l'agonie* (1988), which retraces in Brechtian scenes the changing environment and evolving mentalities from the first arrivals in the 1950s to the grandchildren already born of mixed marriages. *Les Gens du Silence* are not only the first generation, who, deprived of a voice in a foreign environment, struggle to build a new identity, but also their children, confined by their parents to the ghetto of the Italian community, where strict rules protect the community from outsiders, but also condemn it to rigidity. Only sons are allowed to go out and succeed. That's why Mario is sent to an English school, while Nancy-Annunziata learns French, because education doesn't count for girls. In the end, it's Nancy who leaves the family. *Addolorata* is a story of the second generation: at its heart is the conflict between Giovanni-Johnny, who wants to maintain the tradition of a closed family and community, and his wife Addolorata-Lolita, who refuses to continue playing the role of submissive wife and mother after the death of her parents. The play combines two temporal levels ten years apart: it confronts the hopes of a young girl in love with the reality of a new family prison similar to the one she wanted to escape by marrying. Addolorata leaves her husband and becomes independent. Micone's linguistic code subtly characterizes the differences in attitudes. The masculine world ensures the division of spheres: at home, Italian, the language of domestic domination, and outside, English, the language of the masters. Addolorata, for her part, wants to make a linguistic and social impact in a French-speaking environment, because for her, this means equality. The final part of the trilogy reflects the alienation of the third generation, already born in Quebec: they have lost their relationship with the old homeland and have yet to find their place in the new one. Micone dealt with a similar theme in his prose poem *Le figuier enchanté* (1992). Among his poems, he became famous for *Speak What* (1989), a pastiche of Michèle Lalonde's poem *Speak White* (1974).

Wajdi Mouawad (October 16, 1968 Deir-el-Kamar, Lebanon)

Rooted in the Christian culture of Arab Lebanon, he studied in France, where his family settled (1978). His work reflects the multicultural, modern face of Quebec, where his family eventually settled (1983). He studied dramaturgy and works as an actor, director and theater manager. He infuses Brechtian avant-garde dramaturgy with a moral and cathartic appeal based on a reflection on the forms of evil in modern times. Unlike Micone, he does not refer to concrete reality; he leads the cultural confrontation on a symbolic level. The trauma of civil war in Lebanon and the collapse of interpersonal relations and values form the unacknowledged background to his works - *Journée de nocces chez les Cromagnons*, (1992), *Alphonse* (1993), *Willy Protogoras enfermé dans les toilettes* (1993), *Les Mains d'Edwige au moment de la naissance* (1995), *Littoral* (1999). The theme of this last piece is the search for a plot of land where Wilfrid can lay the body of his deceased father. It's both a return to his roots and a journey to a country ravaged by war: the drama of the relationship between a son and his father and the indictment of history are rendered in a totally postmodern way, like the subject of a film set. A similar theme is treated in *Incendies* (2003), the drama that served as the screenplay for Denis Villeneuve's film. The word *Pacamambo* (2002) in the play's title refers to another world - a place where the dead dwell, and where little Julia wants to visit her grandmother as she lingers near her decomposing body in the cellar: by exacerbating the link between death and life, old age and youth, the psychological framework of the drama acquires a metaphysical dimension.

Naïm Kattan (26.8. 1928 Baghdad, Iraq)

He was one of the first to introduce the theme of the clash of civilizations and integration into French-Canadian and Quebec literature. He combines a Jewish background with experience of the Arab, European and American worlds. He graduated in law, which he studied in his native Baghdad (1945-1947), before studying literature in Paris (1947-1951). He left France to settle in Canada (1954). He established himself as a journalist and author of essays on intercultural relations: "Les Juifs et la Communauté française" (1965), "Juifs et Canadiens" (1967). He also edited the *Bulletin du Cercle juif de langue française* in Montreal for several years, and put his intercultural experience to good use as a member of the Commission d'enquête sur le bilinguisme et le biculturalisme (1963). He drew comparisons between Arab and Western civilizations in his essays *Le réel et le théâtral* (1970) and *La Mémoire et la Promesse* (1978), in which he attributes to Arab culture a sense of concrete reality, whereas in European and American culture, the relationship to reality is mediated, converted into image, into appearance. Kattan is a member of the Royal Canadian Academy and the Académie canadienne française. He has also chaired the Canada Council for the Arts.

He has described his immigrant experience in a series of short stories and a trilogy of novels in which he takes on the persona of Méir, a Jewish intellectual from Baghdad. The first volume, *Adieu, Babylone* (1975), is set in Iraq at the time of the Second World War, where young intellectuals - Jews, Sunni Christians and Shiites - live, despite internal conflicts and erotic setbacks, in shared expectation of liberation by the British, prepare to build their country, and develop a national literature. Kattan describes the disintegration of Baghdad's Jewish community after the creation of Israel. The second volume, *Les Fruits arrachés* (1977), is set in post-war France. Méir comes into contact with Camus, Breton, Gide, Béguin - and with émigrés from all over Europe. He undergoes an erotic and literary initiation. The last part *La Fiancée Promise* (1983) depicts the difficult beginnings in Canada, the search for a job, the closed society for which he is a mystery: a Francophone, but not a Catholic, a Jew who doesn't know Yiddish. Eventually, he is accepted by the Jewish community. This basic trilogy is loosely followed by the other, already Canadian, stories - *La Célébration* (1997), *L'Amour reconnu* (1999), *Le Silence des adieux* (1999), *L'Anniversaire* (2000). Kattan is a traditional narrator. The novel *Farida* (1991) and some of his short stories also return to intercultural themes. Others already deal - often critically - with Canadian issues.

Sergio Kokis (6. 5. 1944 Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)

At the age of nine, he was sent to a children's institution for vagrancy. He studied philosophy at the Universidade do Brasil (1966) and graduated from the Academy of Painting. He was arrested and sentenced for his activities and membership in revolutionary organizations fighting against the Brazilian dictatorship of the time. A grant from the French government enabled him to travel and change direction. He obtained his bachelor's degree in psychology in Strasbourg (1969) and his doctorate at the University of Montreal (1973), where he emigrated (1969) and where he also obtained citizenship (1975). He worked in psychiatric hospitals (1969-1975) and also studied fine art at the École d'art et de design and the Saidye Bronfman Centre in Montreal. Since 1975, he has divided his life between painting and his work as a clinical child psychologist. He has also taught in the psychology departments of the Université de Montréal and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Since 1997, he has devoted himself exclusively to painting and writing.

His philosophical and psychological training enables Kokis to create works that are intellectually rich and stimulating. His experiences in Brazilian prisons and his travels in Europe and Canada have been translated into philosophical reflections. His novels are also thought-provoking essays. The painter Kokis - and illustrator of his own books - has the gift of a concrete, detached vision of things; the playwright Kokis invents thrilling plots, mysteries and unexpected endings.

Kokis's specificity is also expressed in novels typical of migrant literature - those in which the new homeland comes face to face with the old one and the countries the author has crossed. Personal experiences can be projected onto the character of a self-stylized, autobiographical foreigner - as in *Le pavillon des miroirs* (1994) - or embodied in fictional characters, as in *Negão et Doralice* (1996) and *Errances* (1997).

Among his philosophical novels, two stand out: *L'Art du maquillage* (1997) and *Le Maître de jeu* (1999). The former tells the story of Montreal painter Max Willem, who originally wanted to make a performing painting. However, he is discovered by a mafia of art dealers, who force him to serve them. They move him to Europe where, in Antwerp, the master Guderius teaches him the art of perfect plagiarism, dragging him into the traps of sentimental plots, forcing him to produce a series of forgeries of Dix, Klee and Rothko for the American market. But Max manages to turn the tables on the merchant mafia, compromise them, earn money and thereby gain the independence to become his own master. The novel, which can also be read as a satire and critique of the shameless art trade, raises at least two issues - on the one hand, the dialectic of appearance and reality, and thus the problem of knowability, and on the other, the question of the nature of art, imitation, artistic tradition and originality. What is the uniqueness of the creator, if it can be captured and reproduced?

The Game Master is a postmodern rewriting of Dostoyevsky and, at the same time, a reflection on the writer's ethical responsibility. The narrator is Ivan Serov, a well-informed theologian and philosopher: he cares for his friend Tiago Cruz, who suffers from psychological trauma after undergoing inhuman torture in the prisons of a Latin American dictatorship. To overcome the trauma, Tiago recounts his life, and Ivan thinks it would make a fascinating book if it weren't for a certain Lucien - omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent. Lucien's diabolical nature is far more likely, as we recognize him behind both Tiago's torturer and Ivan's lover. But such is also the power the author has over the characters, and thus Ivan over Tiago! This theological drama about evil and free will ends in a double rebellion - Tiago commits suicide and Ivan rejects Lucien's advances. In the light of previous theological discussions, it's impossible to know whether this act of will was not predetermined. For who is and who is not the master of the game? Black humor is the spice of the novel.

Saltimbanques (2000) raises the question of the status and role of artists in society. In this case, we're talking about circus performers who leave impoverished Europe after the Second World War and set sail for Argentina. Europe moves to the New World, but on board the ship, war criminals hide in disguise, while circus performers serve only as fronts for high politics. Once in America, the fight for art and freedom must go on. The trilogy is completed by *Le Kaléidoscope brisé* (2001) and *Le Magicien* (2002).

Les Amants de l'Alfama (2003) can be seen as a musical and poetic variation on Portuguese fado and the poet Pessoa, set in the melancholy atmosphere of a rainy night. The lovers, separated by a falling-out, are looking for a way to reunite. This is the setting for the fate of a

couple separated for years by political repression, who are unable to heal the wound of their love. Only fiction - literature and its stories, in this case mainly by Camões - can provide a model for making sense of a meaningless existence, telling it over and over again to prevent the pain.