



## MOBILE BORDERS IN CONTEMPORARY FRANCOPHONE CANADIAN LITERATURE

If mobility has not always been explored in connection with a metaphysical context of self-transcendence, but rather in connection with geography (the border, the territory), the power relations (hierarchies, social classes), cultural studies and anthropology, since 2000, the “new mobility turn” in Anglophone studies links mobility and immobility to surpass the somewhat essentialist imaginary of a planetary condition marked by mobility, fluidity, and liquidity.<sup>1</sup> In her article “Mobility,” Mimi Sheller states:

The new mobilities paradigm suggests a set of questions, theories, and methodologies rather than a totalising description of the contemporary world. It delineates the context in which both sedentary and nomadic accounts of the social world operate, and it questions how that context is itself mobilized, or performed, through ongoing sociotechnical and cultural practices. (Sheller, “Mobility”)

Adina Balint  
University of Winnipeg,  
Manitoba, Canada



<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-2126-1716>

Transgressing the dialectics that movement would be superior to immobility or vice versa is also the aim of contemporary writers who favour “the third space” (Bhabha). The question of the binary opposition mobility-immobility, process-fixity, and path-sedentary is an essential component of contemporary literary studies as it allows us to reflect on differences and similarities among various Francophone Canadian writers today. This article explores how Québécois writers with multiple origins, as well as contemporary Canadian Francophone minority writers, think about the topic of the return to a homeland linked to identity changes, border crossing, and mobility. We notice

<sup>1</sup> Mimi Sheller states that, “we do not insist on a new ‘grand narrative’ of the global condition as one of mobility, fluidity, or liquidity” (2011).

that such a return (physical or imaginary) generates a certain number of conflicts between the one who returns and his or her first community. These conflicts are closely tied to various transformations in the narrative subject/narrator due to his or her being away, which also leads to questioning one's identity and relations to alterity and reflecting on how one defines oneself in relation to others when it comes to feelings or impressions of belonging or exclusion to a given group or community. Above all, the identity rethinking and regeneration process appears to be at the core of the homeland return narratives.

In Québec, a contemporary writer like Dany Laferrière (born in Haïti, based mostly in Montréal since 1976, and a member of L'Académie française since 2015), in his novel *L'Énigme du retour*, explores the conventional topic of identity but with the intention of transgressing it through cultural encounters and a “third space” likely to generate new connections and knowledge marked by ambiguous events, self-doubt, and complex emotions. *L'Énigme du retour* tells the story of a narrator who is a writer in Montréal and who returns to Haïti for the funeral of his father, who had been long exiled to the United States. The post-modern structure of the novel composed of an alternation of narrative and lyrical passages covers the narrator's trip from the North (Canada, Montréal) to the South (Haïti, Port-au-Prince), his feelings towards the political situation of his native country, the evolution and changes of his relationship with his family, as well as his views on life in general and on the broad ontological question “who am I?”, more particularly. The trip – and by extension, the concept of mobility itself—becomes a pretext for exploring the narrator's “becoming” (Deleuze and Guattari) in contrast with an impression of political and social stagnation in his homeland. Even if the narrator attempts to explain how he feels by making connections with notions such as hybridity and nomadism—without being limited by them—there always remains a part of incompleteness, which characterizes who he is and who he has become, and which allows the reader to delve into the meanings of ontological border crossing and the nomadic subject.

THE “OTHER” BORDER:  
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## THE NOTION OF THE NOMADIC SUBJECT

In her essay *Nomadic Subjects. Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, the contemporary philosopher and feminist theorist Rosi Braidotti examines the notion of “nomadism” in relation to subjectivity. In search of non-normative feminist knowledge, Braidotti comes up with the concept of a critical and creative feminism based on nomadism. According to her, the nomadic

subject incarnates a “political fiction” capable of blurring borders: “The nomadic subject is a myth, that is to say a political fiction, that allows me to think through and move across established categories and levels of experience: blurring boundaries without burning bridges” (Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 4). If Braidotti chooses the mythical and iconoclastic figure of the nomad, it is because it brings about a perspective against the settled and conventional nature of theoretical and especially philosophical thinking, opening up new complicities and new forms of interaction beyond partiality and intermittence:

The choice of an iconoclastic, mythic figure such as the nomadic subject is consequently a move against the settled and conventional nature of theoretical and especially philosophical thinking. This figuration translates therefore my desire to explore and legitimate political agency, while taking as historical evidence the decline of metaphysically fixed, steady identities. One of the issues at stake here is how to reconcile partiality and discontinuity with the construction of new forms of interrelatedness and collective political projects. (4)

Moreover, the figure of the nomad also signifies the subversion of conventions and not directly the physical act of travelling: “The nomad does not stand for homelessness, or compulsive displacement; it is rather a figuration for the kind of subject who has relinquished all idea, desire, and nostalgia for fixity” (4). The very essence of the nomadic subject is thus being “post-identitary”: “nomade est un verbe, un processus à travers lequel nous dressons la carte des transformations multiples et des multiples modes d’appartenance [...]” (Braidotti, “Sur le nomadisme”),<sup>2</sup> or else: “[t]he nomadic subject [...] is not devoid of unity; his/her mode is one of definite, seasonal patterns of movement through rather fixed routes. It is a cohesion engendered by repetitions, cyclical moves, rhythmical displacements” (Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 22). A sense of cohesion emerges through the repetitions of the nomadic subject and his or her cyclical movements inspired by seasons, for instance. However, contrary to the farmer, the nomad gathers, picks up, and exchanges; he or she does not exploit. This kind of practice, respectful of the environment, resonates with the lifestyle and the thinking of Indigenous peoples of Canada as they appear in Leanne Betasamosake Simpson’s essay, *As We Have Always Done*. The latter claims a “land-based pedagogy” (22). This process will likely lead to a better revaluation of the Nishnaabeg knowledge and values, primarily nourished by the land.

<sup>2</sup> We translate: “nomad is a verb, a process through which we erect the map of multiple transformations and of multiple modes of belonging [...]”.

In fact, the existential position of the nomad is not that of the homeless. Instead, it is rather turned toward creating an “at home” space everywhere without actually being rooted: “As an intellectual style, nomadism consists not so much in being homeless, as in being capable of recreating your home everywhere. The nomad carries her/his essential belongings with her/him wherever s/he goes and can recreate a home base anywhere” (Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 16), writes Braidotti. Like Deleuze and Guattari, Braidotti distinguishes the nomad from the exile and the migrant who wishes to be re-territorialized. The mobility of the nomad does not take the shape of homelessness or compulsive displacements; it rather incarnates border crossing, the act of walking or wandering, the art of being in movement, no matter the destination.

In this sense, it is important to note that contemporary Québécois and Francophone Canadian literature cannot avoid these cultural and identity updates that go beyond geographical and metaphorical borders, fostering hybrid or *nomadic* narratives, such as Dany Laferrière’s *L’Énigme du retour* or Régine Robin’s *Cybermigrances. Traversées fugitives* and Catherine Mavrikakis’s *La Ballade d’Ali Baba*, for example. These narratives depict heterogeneous spaces that transgress the referential fixity and lead us to question new forms and figures of “nomadism.” By shifting the reader’s attention from geographical spaces to imaginary ones, the writers portray a relation to territory at the junction of geographical and poetic representations, while questioning the feeling of belonging to a territory (here, the act of writing itself) and to a collective identity. In fact, Braidotti—by rejecting the notion of self-identity (or personal identity) in favor of that of nomadic subjectivity, which is its opposite and reiterates the value of constant becoming—focuses on the community rather than the individual. She aims to surpass the identity discourse to explore the notion of the individual globally. It is this perspective that Laferrière embraces in *L’Énigme du retour* by highlighting contemporary cultural encounters instead of simply depicting personal stories. The writer invites us to envision cultures today not only as depicting the sedentary or the transit, and time and space, but more particularly, how it is possible to transgress these categories through imagination, complex identity-alterity relations, and fluid encounters, which is actually what we also read in other contemporary Québécois texts, such as *La Femme qui fuit* by Anaïs Barbeau-Lavalette or *Le Retour de Lorenzo Sánchez* by the Rio de Janeiro-born Sergio Kokis, which explores the topic of mobility, of cultural encounters and the renewal of the self. The experience of mobility is therefore essential in contemporary Canadian Fran-

cophone literary practices, namely in relation to the study of exile, immigration, and identity metamorphosis linked to the subjectivity. In literary works after 2000, this perspective becomes more relevant than a mere exploration of the geographical or physical border crossing, as stated by Alexander Gefen in his essay *Réparer le monde. La littérature française face au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Fictional and non-fictional works can then be called *écritures ordinaires* ("writings of the ordinary") that expose the power of the literary word to psychologically transform an individual (Gefen 21).

## MOBILE BORDERS

Let us remember that national borders have considerably changed in the last decades. They shifted and became "mobile." In *The University in Ruins*, Bill Readings underlines the progressive demise of the idea of a Nation-State: "[the] Nation-State and the modern notion of culture arose together, and they are, I argue, ceasing to be essential to an increasingly transnational global economy" (3). At the same time, Readings asserts that the hegemonic power of the Nation-State is now integrated into a complex globalization process that questions national cultures, on the one hand, and on the other hand, sustains different forms of nationalism. Since his book was published, we have noticed a proliferation of populist movements in North America (the second Donald Trump administration) and certain European countries (Italy, Hungary, the Netherlands, or Poland). In the context of these political and ideological changes linked to the fast circulation of all sorts of information (fake news included), and having global consequences on a vast majority of the world population, literary texts lead us not only to reflect on such issues, but also to anticipate new "territories" likely to embrace endless changes and disclose new possibilities, as underlined by Jean-François Côté in his article « Littérature des frontières et frontières de la littérature: de quelques dépassements qui sont aussi des retours »:

[...] ces territoires nationaux bien délimités, bien répertoriés, qui n'étaient plus censés contenir de "surprises" ou de "mystères" pour l'expérience depuis leur exploration au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle et la construction subséquente et graduelle des cultures nationales, redeviennent partout ainsi de nouveaux lieux intensifs de découvertes. (56)<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> We translate: "[...] these national territories, well limited, well indexed, which were not supposed to contain any 'surprises' or 'mysteries' for the experience since their exploration in the nineteenth century and the subsequent and gradual cre-

Without ignoring the complexities of the Nation-State, this new manner of conceiving the territory as the space of new possibilities—a territory in movement and metamorphosis—enables us to read more subtly the representation of experiences of becoming and identity transformation in contemporary Québécois literature. It is known that the Québécois society (a Francophone minority in the context of Anglophone Canada and Anglophone North America) reflects the foundation context of the Americas and the New World, that is to say the “formation sociohistorique d’une entité hybride issue fondamentalement de la rencontre des cultures autochtones, européennes, africaines, et immigrantes diverses qui ont peuplé par leurs présences la culture des Amériques” (Côté, “Littérature des frontières et frontières de la littérature” 519).<sup>4</sup> These mixed cultures—Indigenous, European, African and immigrant—illustrate the pluralistic character of the foundation of the Americas as well as the conflicts and confrontations that lead to the formation of different nations. Taking notice of these aspects, we distinguish two main attributes of the border in association with the dialectic mobility-fixity: the first relies on the fact that borders are artificially built on the territory. Be they natural or not, borders remain “artificial” in the words of Henri Dorin in *Éloge de la frontière*, who states that: “[ces frontières] demeurent néanmoins artificielles en ce sens que c'est l'homme qui les choisit, les installe, les consolide, les modifie selon ses besoins, ses velléités, ses conquêtes, les inscrit dans une grille de répartition des juridictions, des responsabilités” (32).<sup>5</sup> In this perspective, it is humans who erect and crop borders. As underlined by the French philosopher Michel de Certeau, borders, just like territorial signs, come out of ideologies and political influences (33). They also indicate the direction a community or group will likely take politically and ideologically.

The second attribute of the border derives from an observation: initially conceived to divide and separate, the border evolves, shifts and sometimes morphs into a linkage, into an “élément de solidarité,

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ation of national cultures, are becoming everywhere again new intensive places of discovery”.

4 We translate: “the socio-historical formation of a hybrid entity originating basically from the encounter of diverse Indigenous, European, African and immigrant cultures that used to inhabit through their presence the culture of the Americas.”

5 We translate: “[these borders] remain nevertheless artificial in the sense that it is man who chooses them, installs them, consolidates them and modifies them according to his needs, his desire, his conquests, and he writes them in a grid of geographical breakdown of jurisdictions and responsibilities.”

voire un moteur de cohésion régionale qui transcende la fonction limitative qui est à son origine" (Dorin 33)<sup>6</sup>. From this angle, North America could appear like a territory in constant evolution, both geographically and symbolically, or culturally. The border allows for oscillations and alternations between languages, various displacement practices (migration, immigration, refugee movements), and the integration or exclusion of members to a given community, which obviously impacts the literary texts dealing with such topics. In literary studies, the border has a heuristic value, opening up or restricting interpretation. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the border symbolically displays the peculiarities of the "rhizome" (54). This conception insists on the necessity to conceive the border as a non-confrontational entity fed by fluidity and encounters. Furthermore, the porous characteristic of the North American border joins the relational one through which—in an ideal world—"frontières de séparation devraient céder le as aux *frontières de contact* qui mettent en valeur la complémentarité et les éclairages réciproques" (De Certeau 35).<sup>7</sup> If we allow ourselves to dream of forms of contact without fusion between "borderland" communities—be they geographical or represented in literary texts—it is because there is something obvious: the territory, even broken by a border, generates intermittent movement allowing communities to consider themselves as being different when new and promising spaces emerge:

[...] the entry point of "the border" or "the borderlands" goes unquestioned, and, in addition, often is assumed to be a place of politically exciting hybridity, intellectual creativity, and moral possibility. The borderlands, in other words, are the privileged locus of hope for a better world. (Michaelsen and Johnson 2-3).

*Defacto*, borderlands remain transition spaces as shown through the North American travels and wanderings of the character of Vassili Papadopoulos, the father of the female narrator in *La Ballade d'Ali Baba* by the Québécois writer Catherine Mavrikakis. The border as a mere *line* implies crossing by people, cars, objects, and information: they are in transit and reveal the intermittent movement of coming and going. The border does not really "end" anything: it crosses from one State to another, for instance, both geographically (crossing a line or a checkpoint)

<sup>6</sup> We translate: "element of solidarity, perhaps an engine of regional cohesion that transcends the limitation that is at its origin."

<sup>7</sup> We translate: "Separation borders should give up to *contact borders*, which emphasize complementarity and mutual illumination." (The italics belong to the text.)

and temporarily (in the sense that the border crossing does not last; one is “on” the border for a brief moment). If we consider the border as being “natural,” we can also imagine it sparking a mixed relation between an individual and his or her desire to transgress it, merely an illustration of the desire to cross a spatial or geographical limit. Contrarily, a territory that would solely be transgression would not allow for any anchoring, be it at a particular point in space or individuals belonging to a borderland community. It becomes evident that such an exercise of imagination, where we either privilege freedom or restriction regarding the border, does not advance our analysis.

From another perspective, the border creates a form of intimacy between those who cross it. The coming and going of people and goods illustrates once more the importance of the intermittent movement when interpreting various types of mobility (nomadism, voyage, immigration, etc.) in literary texts. The writers, particularly Laferrière and Mavrikakis, set the scene for the representation of places of intimacy on the threshold of the inside and the outside, of here and there, life and death. The multiple connections and rhizomatic threads developed through these narrations lean on a postulate of openness to alterity. Furthermore, the literary discourse as a cultural, social-political, and identity-related “interface polémique”<sup>8</sup> (“controversial interface”) leads us to consider the heuristic function of the border as a metaphor for a space in which the narrator or character can negotiate various transformations and temporary hospitable places of belonging.

The autobiographical novel *La Ballade d'Ali Baba* by Mavrikakis is a perfect example of the representation of mobility linked to border crossing and to the negotiation of a place where Érina, the narrator, and her father feel in the presence of each other, even if intermittently and only for a limited time. The *incipit* of the text in particular discloses the topic of the movement as a promise and an epiphany, but ends paradoxically in an offset tone:

Dans la lumière incandescente de l'aurore, les rayons impétueux du soleil à peine naissant tachaient la nuit d'une clarté carmin. Nous roulions à tombeau ouvert à travers tout Key Largo. Les néons des enseignes des motels vétustes bâties à la hâte dans les années vingt et trente et les panneaux multicolores des bars de danseuses nues datant de 1950 faisaient des clins d'œil au ciel tumescent du jour à venir. Les phares des voitures roulant en sens inverse nous éblouissaient

8 The expression belongs to Régis Debray, *Éloge des frontières* (Paris : Gallimard, 2011), 37.

par intermittence. Ils nous lançaient des signaux de reconnaissance lubriques. (Mavrikakis, *La Ballade* 9)<sup>9</sup>

At a second glance, this paragraph seems quite coherent, presenting several of the topics and motives that structure the novel: road trips, adventures, encounters, breakups, etc. Everything seems in movement: the sunrise doubles the car headlights and the street neons; the carmine sky is stained by striptease bar billboards along the road, while naked dancers reverberate with the urban lighting. In this opening paragraph, there is implicit dialogue between the transcendence (represented by the illuminated sky) and life on earth, associated with the carnal *jouissance* of the striptease dancers. The father of the narrator, who passed away, led the life of an adventurer, a rules-breaker, constantly on the edge. No wonder that his passing illustrates the passion for life in spite of everything and refuses the confinement of the stone tomb “de la grande dalle noire, très triste, très funèbre” (108).<sup>10</sup> The father figure remains spectral: a ghost, a haunting presence, still enjoying his wanderings.

*La Ballade d'Ali Baba* also points to a complex temporality made up of coming and going between the past and the present, between Vassili's life and Érina's. The novel multiplies the brackets in which the reader transgresses the chronological timeline: “le temps [sort] de ses gonds” (“time [fell out] of its hinges”) (104). One particular scene is evocative: Érina finds herself caught in the “l'étrange présence” (“strange presence”) (96) of the specter of her father and Sofia, her partner. Far from depicting the gothic atmosphere of ghost stories, Mavrikakis locates this scene in a trendy apartment in downtown Montréal. Vassili and Sofia are having a wonderful time waltzing and laughing; they are both specters and mock death. According to the same logic, towards the end of the novel, time “stops;” it is placed into brackets (“effectue une parenthèse” 195). While driving to the Keys, in Florida, Érina remembers the little girl she used to be, and she seems confused: she “ne sai[t] que penser de cette enfant-là” (“does not know what

<sup>9</sup> We translate: “In the incandescent light of the dawn, the impetuous sunrays hardly broken were staining the night with carmine clarity. We were driving at breakneck speed through Key Largo. The neons of old motel brands built hastily in the 1920s and 1930s and the colourful billboards of striptease bars from 1950 were winking to the pompous sky of the new day. The headlights of the cars driving in the other direction were blinding us intermittently. They were launching lubricious complicit signs”.

<sup>10</sup> We translate: “slabs of concrete, very sad, very mournful”.

to think of that child") (195) who "attend, nerveuse, l'avenir" ("is waiting the future, anxious") (195).

Intermittent experiences are a recurrent feature of the novel: from the point of view of the form, the narration is composed of several essays whose titles—"Key West, 31 décembre 1968" ("Key West, December 31, 1968"), "Montréal, sous la neige, février 2013" ("Montréal, under the snow, February 2013"), "Florence, 1966", "Kalamazoo, été 1968" ("Kalamazoo, summer 1968")—name several places and epochs and create the effect of an eye blink, splitting the story in several parts and fragments. Then, jumping from one city to the other, from one country to the other—the United States, Canada, Italy, Algeria—and among the different periods of the different narratives also indicates the phenomenon of the intermittence. The reader actually circulates across geographic and symbolic spaces. They are enabled by memories of the past trips like in the scene where the narrator is actively searching for a place that would likely welcome her, make her feel she belongs: "Je reprends le chemin de Key West. Celui-là que j'ai emprunté avec toi dans ta Buick Wildcat à la fin de décembre de l'année 1968" (Mavrikakis, *La Ballade* 185).<sup>11</sup> Through the act of writing, the road towards Key West becomes a myriad of memories. From geographical places easily identifiable on the map, the narration slides into an imaginary universe that allows us to meet once again the little girl, Érina, the narrator, as she was in 1968, and as she used to belong in the paternal lineage.

In her previous novels, Catherine Mavrikakis—particularly in *Ça va aller* and *Le Ciel de Bay City*—created women narrators who wished to break from their family and historical lineage by refusing to transmit the legacy of the past to their daughters. Such women narrators did everything they could to escape their past without really managing to. They were condemned to put up with the effects of the eternal return and the cyclical character of events that often ended up repeating themselves. On the contrary, in *La Ballade d'Ali Baba*, the perspective is reversed: the narrator is the one who receives the parental heritage, not the one who transmits it. She accepts that she is "to write" the end of her father's story, respecting his last wishes. Her father's legacy is not exactly linked to the family genealogy: it does not imply rootedness, continuity, or a sense of the future. Instead, it defines itself by ambiguity and hazard: "[...] Mais mort, comme vivant, on ne peut avoir de lieu à soi ni de nostalgie [...]. Ces mots avaient été [...] au centre

11 We translate: "I take again the road towards Key West. That one that I took with you in your Buick Wildcat at the end of December of the year 1969".

de son parcours dans ce monde, de ses liens familiaux, de ses départs, de ses infidélités” (Mavrikakis, *La Ballade* 160).<sup>12</sup> Ultimately, the novel appears like a *requiem* in the memory of the disappeared father: a Greek immigrant to Canada and the United States who wanted to look like a North American at all costs: “faire l’Américain, coûte que coûte” (“play the American at all costs” 184). “To play the American” meant both “to become” American and “to play” being an American, like in a fiction about immigrants—this was one of the roles that Érina’s father played on his life’s stage. After all, the daughter is the one who remembers (“celle qui se souvient” 189)—the one who will disperse her father’s ashes into the sea at Key Largo.

The metaphorical border crossing between reality and fiction, between geographical and narrative spaces, just like the voices of memory and literary discourse, resonates in the *topoi* of the road trip and adventurous wanderings. The gap between different places like Key West, Montréal, Alger, Florence, etc., and different periods (1968, 2013, 1966) illustrates the power of the writing of the movement and the movement of writing: the writer marks the page with her pen like the father used to mark the map with his travels. Therefore, the personal cartography of father and daughter joins through the dream of being “away,” be it in the referential or in the scriptural space. Like in western and road movies, the father and later on, the daughter, following in his steps, both get to the confines of the North American continent. Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* comes to mind (the play is often quoted in Mavrikakis’s novel): the father’s ghost returns to literally haunt the daughter and shake chronological time. To these references is added the Arabic story of Ali Baba: Mavrikakis’s novel *La Ballade d’Ali Baba* is continuously moving and on the move, its different parts play with the boundaries between popular and high culture, between realism and fantastic imaginaries, between tragedy and farce. The narration is built as a palimpsest: the text blends layers of old and new (his)stories and turns around symbolic border crossings not only regarding father and daughter, but also regarding the boundaries of geography and literary discourse.

## CONCLUSION

In his essay *L’Esprit migrateur. Essai sur le non-sens commun*, Pierre Ouellet affirms that the topic of migration has become more

12 We translate: “[...] But dead like alive, one cannot have a place of one’s own or of nostalgia [...]. These words have been [...] to the center of his life path in this world, of his family relations, of his departures, of his infidelities.”

and more common in contemporary Francophone Canadian literature – in migrant writings and not only. Mobility is no longer geo-cultural and linked to going and coming from one place to another. According to Ouellet, mobility is:

[...] aussi de nature ontologique et symbolique, puisqu'elle caractérise le déplacement même du Sens et de l'Être dans l'expérience intime de l'altérité, où l'on fait preuve du non-sens ou du néant de son identité, individuelle ou collective, qui n'existe pas sans l'appel à l'autre où elle se métamorphose à chaque instant. (*L'esprit* 9)<sup>13</sup>

The contemporary writer – a migrant or not – appears like an alchemist and a dissident figure: he or she is no longer the writer of migration, of exile or of wandering, but the writer of the “transportation, transmigration, transmutation” (“transportation, transmigration, transmutation”) (*Où suis-je?* 289), in Ouellet’s words. Such a writer explores the mobility of our times (of people, goods, and information), including the mobility of the spirit, thinking, and all forms of creation. From this point of view, there is no real border between migrant writers and the others, born in Canada. The contemporary writer is the new nomad in a fragmented and diverse world: he or she leads us to reflect on the values and challenges of interculturalism, multiculturalism, and transculturalism. After all, what does it mean to live and to be a creator dealing with several languages, several ethnic groups, going and coming, past and present, identities in progress, and encounters with multiple others? In fact, we would like to believe that today’s literary productions (novels, autobiographies, autofictions, essays, etc.) instruct us to appreciate the value of hybridity and renew our thinking about who we are and what our place in the world is. “La grande saveur des frontières, une fois reconnues et garanties, c'est qu'on peut les franchir, jouer à leurs marges, exercice autrement plus exaltant que leur abolition pure et simple. Seuls les conquérants rêvent d'effacer les frontières, surtout celles des autres”<sup>14</sup>, writes Régine Robin in her essay *Nous autres, les autres : difficile pluralisme*.

13 We translate: “[...] also ontological and symbolic, because it characterizes the displacement on Meaning itself and of Being in the intimate experience of alterity, through which one demonstrates the non-sense or the void of one’s identity, individual or collective, that does not exist without the call of the other where it transforms every second.”

14 We translate: “The great flavour of borders, once recognized and secured, is that we can cross them, play with their edges, an exercise even more exciting than their abolishing pure and simple. It’s only the winners who dream of erasing the borders, especially those of the others.”

Finally, no writing today is likely to escape the idea of border crossing and pluralism if we consider the numerous topics that are explored and transgressed in literary pieces: from exile, migration, immigration, to road trips, to name only these aspects. As mentioned in the Manifesto “Pour une littérature monde en français”, published in *Le Monde* in 2007,<sup>15</sup> the configurations of the Francophone literary field have become more and more permeable and mobile. This Manifesto acknowledges the latest changes and searches by writers and critics to cease the domination of hegemonic French and go beyond the dichotomy of center-periphery by proclaiming the end of the Francophonie and the advent of open literatures, proclaiming the value of multiple languages and cultures.

In Québec nowadays, the literary corpus by migrant writers has an essential role in the history of Québécois literature. The phenomenon of migrant literature remains fascinating as it historically links the evolution of Québécois literature to the major literary and philosophical trends of the twentieth century that was defined by postmodernism, transculturalism and multiple migrations of people and ideas from one continent to another, as well as by fragmented identities that tend to integrate otherness and make the most of cultural encounters. Finally, in Québec, we witness the mobility of a new type of writing that is likely to develop, “d’aller de surprise en surprise, comme dans un rêve, et c’est ce que devrait être la vie”<sup>16</sup>, in the words of Dany Laferrière. It is the migrant writing that initially explored this imaginary of mobility that is reshaping the national literature today, by opening it up to new understandings and new interpretations of the border and alterity.

*Abstract:* This article explores how contemporary Québécois and Francophone Canadian writers think about the return to a homeland linked to identity transformation, border crossing, and mobility. Drawing from the theories of the mobility turn and using Rosi Braidotti’s notion of “nomadism,” I show how this return (physical or imaginary) generates both conflict and resilience. My hypothesis is that analyzing a fictional text through the lens of mobility allows for new approaches to identity formation and contributes to renewing literary forms.

15 “Pour une littérature-monde en français”, *Le Monde*, 15 mars 2007, accessed June 25, 2019, [https://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2007/03/15/des-ecrivains-plaident-pour-un-roman-en-francais-ouvert-sur-le-monde\\_883572\\_3260.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2007/03/15/des-ecrivains-plaident-pour-un-roman-en-francais-ouvert-sur-le-monde_883572_3260.html).

16 Dany Laferrière, *Dany Laferrière à l’Académie française. Discours de réception. Réponse d’Amin Maalouf* (Montréal, Boréal, 2015) 23. We translate: “to go from surprise into surprise, just like in a dream, and this is how life should be”.

*Keywords:* border crossing, contemporary literature, Québécois literature, Francophone Canadian literature, nomadism

*Bio:* Adina Balint is Professor of twentieth and twenty-first century literature at the University of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. Her current research focuses on the representation of everyday life in contemporary French and French-Canadian literature. She has recently published: *Les ambiances dans les littératures de langue françaises du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle à nos jours* (Presses de l'Université Laval, 2024, with S. Buekens), *Simone Chaput : espaces, cultures et identités* (David, 2024, with I. Chassaing, L. Gaboury-Diallo, J. Thibeault) and *Imaginaire et représentations littéraires de la mobilité* (Peter Lang, 2020). She is vice-president of the Association des lecteurs de J.M.G. Le Clézio.

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