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## Hybridity and Intercultural Exchange in Marco Micone's *Le Figuier enchanté*

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THIS ARTICLE USES THE LENS of intercultural exchange to focus on hybridity and the immigrant experience in Marco Micone's semi-autobiographical *Le Figuier enchanté* (1992). Problems of cultural confusion arising from the linguistic incompetence and social ghettoization that existed before the introduction of Bill 101—Quebec's controversial language law—are given much attention by Micone in this text. Nino, the main character, immigrated to Montreal in 1958 as an adolescent, like Micone himself, almost twenty years before the introduction of the bill. While *Le Figuier enchanté* is not explicitly concerned with Bill 101, the implications of the law must be understood before one can comprehend the barriers to cultural mixing that existed before it.

Bill 101 is variously termed "la loi 101," "la Charte de la langue française," and occasionally "Law 101." It was introduced in 1977 by Camille Laurin of the Parti Québécois. One of its key effects was the introduction of obligatory French schooling for immigrant and Francophone children in the public system, unless at least one of their parents had attended the majority of their schooling in an English-speaking school.<sup>1</sup> While Bill 101 brought its own complications, as presented in Anita Aloisio's *Les Enfants de la loi 101* and Claude Godbout's *La Génération 101*, its absence, prior to 1977, arguably meant that immigrants and their children had to confront greater linguistic and cultural barriers than is now the case. Aloisio's documentary shows some of the pain endured by the "guinea pig" generation of first- and second-generation immigrant schoolchildren in the late 1970s, whereas Godbout's film includes more contemporary school experiences. In 1977, many immigrant parents could not understand why, in Canada, a land of freedom, they were not permitted to choose the language of education of their offspring. As a result, they passed much rebellion and confusion onto their children. Bill 101 has nonetheless been largely positive over time. It has meant that immigrant children now attend French-speaking schools and mix with other ethnic groups, including the Francophone *Québécois de souche*. Since the law also enforced

French as the language of the workplace and of signage, it has had the added effect of encouraging native English speakers to learn French, which led to the opening of many *écoles d'immersion* for Anglophone schoolchildren. For Francophones, it has meant not only the protection of their language, but also, and more importantly, a greater sense of societal inclusivity through mixing with various ethnic groups at school. By contrast, at the time of Micone's childhood experience in Quebec, allophones (native speakers of languages other than French or English) remained by and large apart from French speakers at school. As we shall see, Micone's adolescence and schooling were marked by feelings of alienation and marginalization, revolving around language and social barriers.

The title of Micone's text makes reference to the hybrid tree created by Nino's grandfather. In this incident, which Micone has described as semi-fictional (Naves 36), the grandfather symbolically grafts North American fruit onto Italian stock. Importantly, the illustration for the current cover of the Boréal paperback shows a *bandaged* tree. This fig tree is enchanted through its potential to bear two types of fruit simultaneously, but needs time to recover from the cuts and mutilations incurred in the process of its transformation. Micone's text details the wounds arising from the "insécurité psychologique et matérielle" (87) that often accompanies migration, while also seeking to underline the positive elements. The material advantages for the host country might seem the most evident, including the economic benefits of plentiful, cheap, and willing labor—and children who compensate for a declining national birth rate. As Micone points out in *Le Figuier enchanté*, "l'émigration n'existerait pas si elle ne profitait pas en premier lieu au pays d'accueil" (13). Yet he also suggests some less tangible benefits for Quebec society, including the social maturity that comes with the kind of interethnic cultural mixing he calls "métissage" (97). Although this term is not given huge emphasis in the text, the concept behind it does stand out as one of the text's ideals. Micone's use of the term derives from—but also differs from—the sense popularized by the Martinican poet and novelist Edouard Glissant. Glissant invested the word with positive connotations, seeking to subvert it through appropriation, since it had previously been used by colonial powers in discourses of degenerate racial hybridity.<sup>2</sup> While Caribbean and other postcolonial *métissage* often concerns the mixing of previously dominated and dominant ethnicities on a territory that has for generations been home to all of them, Micone's use of the term concerns cultural exchange among immigrants from varied backgrounds, as well as between immigrants (the longer established of which are called *néo-Québécois*), and the *Québécois de souche*. The notion of hybridity—a term Micone uses several times in this "recueil hybride" (13)—is perhaps more important for his purposes. Negating the idea of "pure" ethnicities, he states firmly that, "il n'y a pas de culture italienne, grecque, portugaise ou haïtienne ici [...] Ni tout à fait italienne, ni tout à fait québécoise, ma

culture est hybride" (100). Quebec society is shown to be hybrid even independently of the immigrant presence, due to the forces of what Micone terms "notre américanité trop souvent occultée" (99), and of course the wider "canadianité" in which Quebec society is set—although this is said to be "nébuleuse" (94). Micone contends that, on a personal level, the immigrant has the potential to achieve an enchanted hybridity, provided he or she can understand and accept the value of the life journey experienced, and enjoy being able to belong to multiple cultures in various ways. Although he or she may never fully belong to any culture—except "la culture immigrée," described below—the experience of hybridity is a rich one. In like manner, the *Québécois de souche* are implicitly encouraged to recognize the richness in their own culturally mixed experiences.

*Le Figuier enchanté* shows the psychological importance for immigrants of gaining an understanding of both the problems and the richness inherent in the experience of migration. This set of cultural baggage is what Micone calls "la culture immigrée." As he puts it, "Le migrant possède sa propre culture: la culture immigrée. Celle-ci rend compte de son passé, de la rupture récente et de son devenir" ("De l'assimilation" 62). Yet in order for immigrants to come to an awareness of "la culture immigrée," it is vital that they reflect on their experience and on what they have in common with other immigrants. Writing is one way in which this can be done, and autobiographical writing in particular can help with construction of identity. This partly explains the proliferation of immigrant literature, termed "écriture migrante" in Quebec, since the 1980s in particular. Philippe Lejeune has written, in relation to autobiography, that "écrire son histoire, c'est essayer de se construire, bien plus qu'essayer de se connaître" (84). For Paul Ricœur, identity is narrative in nature, because we are constantly constructing and reconstructing our identity based on the stories we tell about ourselves. Micone shows that self-construction through language is a pressing issue for the immigrant, or at least for those who master the language well enough to write about their experiences.

Micone came to prominence with the 1982 publication of his play *Gens du silence*, in which he exposed the plight of immigrants, in this case the Italian community in Montreal, who at that point carried no literary or political weight in French-speaking society. Micone is a vocal proponent of the notion of interculturalism as a dialogue between cultures, where self and other are reciprocally affected and positively transformed, once the dominant culture accepts to give a voice and adequate presence to the range of cultures co-inhabiting its space. Like many Quebec nationalists he is also strongly against the Canadian model of multiculturalism, which he sees as leading to a "ghettoized" mosaic, dominated by the hegemonic norm of English-speaking Canada.<sup>3</sup> The *Québécois* prefer the term and concept of "interculturalisme", and the adjective "interculturel", which are widely used in official discourse. This reluctance to

use the Canadian term may partly stem from a Québécois desire to define Quebec society in their own terms, but the stress on the prefix “inter” is also an attempt to focus the debate in a multi- or pluri-cultural society on the *exchange* between cultures. In a recent interview in English, Micone declared: “I’m against multiculturalism because multiculturalism bases itself on ethnicity. It defines belonging as belonging to the ethnic group. I say we have to go beyond that” (Naves 34–35). He prefers to stress the notion of “l’échange entre les cultures” (“De l’assimilation” 60), or what he terms “le principe de réciprocité” (“Immigration” 4). In *Le Figuier enchanté*, he speaks of the “échange harmonieux” (101) with which self-aware immigrant culture can fertilize Québécois culture. As such, this text seeks “un terrain d’entente où la culture immigrée participera au développement de la culture de la société d’accueil” (Prud’homme 111). Alain Gagnon and Neil Bissoondath are among those who have written forcefully against Canadian multiculturalism, which leads in their view to “folklorisation” and to “la transformation en marchandise de la production culturelle des groupes” (Bissoondath, quoted in Gagnon 10).

Some of the Québécois opposition to Canadian multiculturalism may stem from a fear that Quebec, a Francophone enclave, could be viewed as one of many “ghettoized” cultures across Canada. Equally, it is arguable that the *Québécois de souche* actually need intercultural exchange more than the old-stock inhabitants of the rest of Canada, who live in a more mixed society already. In any case, many critics, such as Stéphane Courtois, view interculturalism and multiculturalism as compatible, as long as dialogue and cross-fertilisation of cultures are taking place in a pluriethnic society. In 1994, while espousing the principle of exchange, Micone sounded a note of pessimism, seeming to suggest that the Quebec government’s commitment to interculturalism is sometimes mere lip service: “ce que nous avons réussi à faire essentiellement, c’est de plaquer *un discours interculturel* sur une réalité multiculturelle qui est propre à notre situation géographique” (Vaïs et Wickham 26, my emphasis). However, in a 2006 article, he returned to optimism, stressing that from a Québécois interculturalist perspective, “l’italianité est considérée comme une expression culturelle métissée par la culture québécoise de la même manière que celle-ci peut l’être par l’italianité” (“L’Italianité” 17–18). The desire to achieve a valid interaction between cultures remains strong in his work.

It is important to note that Micone is a *souverainiste*, and as such supports a degree of independence for Quebec within Canada. Sympathetic to Quebec’s minority status, he remains very much aware that Quebec is marginal within the context of Canada, and that the French-speaking community now in authority was, for generations, in a dominated linguistic and economic position within the province. Indeed, *Le Figuier enchanté* is often at pains to remind its Québécois readers of their past dominated status, in an appeal for solidarity with the immigrant experience. In his introduction or “Exorde”, Micone draws similarities between workers

from Gaspésie in rural Quebec arriving in Montreal in the 1950s and the experiences of Italian, Greek, and Portuguese peasants: “Ne connurent-ils pas tous le déracinement et la solitude? Ne durent-ils pas se soumettre aux mêmes règles implacables de la recherche du profit?” (14). Later he mentions his affinity with the humble working-class characters of novelist Gabrielle Roy in the 1940s, adding that “leur bonheur d’occasion ressemblait tellement au mien” (85). Here, despite the disparity of the possessive articles, the immigrant voice is attempting to show the Québécois that it is part of their “nous.” The possibilities for empathy among immigrants with the minority status of Quebec—accompanied by empathy among the *Québécois de souche* with the immigrant population through an understanding of the experiences that bind them—create, at the very least, a rich potential for intercultural exchange. Interestingly, the main character of *Le Figuier enchanté* bears the same name as the Nino of *Déjà l’agonie* (1988), described by Erin Hurley as a symbol of the potential for intercultural reconciliation (“Devenir Autre”).

Micone, who has taught courses in Italian heritage and language to second- and third-generation Italo-Québécois, has stressed the need for immigrants, whether first-generation or later, to maintain deep attachments to, and understanding of, their heritage. Both the poignancy of the loss of heritage and the difficult but necessary task of comprehending the migratory process are made clear in *Le Figuier enchanté*. We see this clearly in the description of the immigrant’s daughter who does not have access to Italian classes at secondary school and who struggles to understand various cultural mores when on a visit to the “home” country (95). However, it is equally important in Micone’s view that immigrants feel confident in French (Naves 32), and that they can cultivate a strong attachment to Quebec. Nino/Micone’s appropriation of French-Canadian literature, for example through the works of Gabrielle Roy, and his virtuoso and passionate use of a rich vocabulary give a sense of this in *Le Figuier enchanté*.

A consideration of some key facts in Micone’s personal background will allow a better understanding of his approach. After arriving in Canada from Montelongo in rural southern Italy in 1958, Micone at first attended French school, and then an English school frequented mainly by Italians, although it was run by the Irish order of Christian Brothers. Quebec’s schools were divided into Protestant and Catholic school boards (*commissions scolaires*) until 1998, which in part explains the fact that he attended an Irish Catholic school.<sup>4</sup> Micone, as a foreigner, was in fact refused entry into one French school of his choice (Caccia 261), an experience that was relatively common for Catholics who were not *Québécois de souche* until a more inclusive approach to acceptance into French Catholic schools was adopted after the advent of Bill 101. The other reason for his attendance at English school was “pour faire comme tout le monde” (in other words, like all the other Italians, prior to Bill 101), as Nino’s

father puts it (71). School was traumatic, as Micone had no knowledge of French to start with, and was forced to start learning English two years later when he attended another school. He was initially treated as backward in the English-speaking school simply because he could not speak the language. Ironically, his own community advocated that Italian immigrants attend English-speaking schools, to learn what Nino's father calls "la langue des patrons" (39), for purposes of commercial and social advancement, thus perpetuating the gap between the Italian immigrant community and the French speakers.

Micone chose to study French at third level, but did not feel confident writing in French for many years. In a 1994 interview, he made the following striking statement: "Tout ce que j'ai écrit jusqu'à maintenant a été conditionné par le sentiment que j'ai longtemps eu de ne maîtriser aucune langue et de n'appartenir à aucune culture" (Lévesque 22).<sup>5</sup> He is now, however, solidly rooted in three languages, often publicly pointing out his love of English, and translating from French, Italian, and English, while writing critical and other material in French. In an article written in the year of publication of *Le Figuier enchanté*, he welcomed into the realm of "québécoisité" literature written in languages other than French and experiences lived in other languages ("De la ville" 146). In 2004, he reiterated this point forcefully: "Au Québec, la littérature ne s'écrit pas qu'en français" ("Immigration" 4). He is a clear proponent of enthusiastic and self-conscious interculturalism.

Yet he is also something of an ambiguous figure. His poem-essay "Speak What" (published in 1989, very shortly before *Le Figuier enchanté*) was a controversial attack on what he perceives as the obsession of French speakers in Quebec with imposing the French language. It was intended as a response to Michèle Lalonde's famous nationalist poem "Speak White", first recited in 1970, and published in 1974. While Micone recognizes the need for official support and protection for the French language, he warns that adequate concern must be given to other, perhaps deeper, issues. These include the valuing of immigrants for the cultural enrichment they can bring, the recognition of their experience (of cultural loss as well as cultural gain), support for the sometimes difficult process of transculturation, an appreciation of their intelligence, and important matters of a practical nature—such as acceptance of their qualifications.

*Les Geignards*, the one-act play set around 1990 that closes *Le Figuier enchanté*, is the most forthright demonstration of the latter notion. Here we see tensions between Anne, an old-stock Québécoise and Manuela, a highly-educated South American language teacher who cannot find work because her qualifications are not recognized in Quebec. Manuela feels valued only insofar as she can support the country economically with cheap labor, and culturally by producing children who will be schooled in French. The text also plays with great irony on the Québécois fear of immigrants taking up too much room, or even of taking their place.

Symbolically, Manuela pretends to want to sit beside Anne at a talk on immigration, while Anne, who has kept the seat for her friend, feels threatened by Manuela's presence. Manuela's character serves to point out—playfully, but also with some bitterness—that many fears and misconceptions are not yet resolved between the *Québécois de souche* and the immigrant population, and that the question of the protection of French at times seems puny in comparison to these issues.

Perhaps the greatest merit of *Le Figuier enchanté* lies in the number of important issues it voices. The notion of speaking, and at the most basic level, the importance of having a voice, is vital to all of Micone's work. We see this even in the titles of "Speak What" and *Gens du silence*. Whether through plays, a gestural and highly embodied medium but also a spoken one, or the more linguistically challenging written forms of the  *récit* and essay, Micone has always been concerned with expression through writing. He has described the "besoin d'écriture" among immigrants in the following terms: "On écrit parce qu'on est immigrant... car, dans certains cas, on n'aurait sans doute jamais écrit si on ne l'avait pas été. L'état de fébrilité, de désorientation, de questionnement, d'entre-deux propre aux immigrants, est particulièrement propice à l'écriture" ("Immigration" 4). Micone's contention is that there is an increased need for telling one's story among immigrants, or as Lejeune or Ricœur would put it, "se construire."

While the syntax in *Le Figuier enchanté* is relatively simple, and creates a conversational, even confessional tone, the vocabulary used is rich. Micone's love of language constitutes a link with his Italian-speaking father, who was also a lover of words. Yet the use of a sophisticated vocabulary may also stem from a need to display linguistic prowess, a theory supported by the aforementioned comment by Micone about the feeling of "ne maîtriser aucune langue." The presence of Italian in the text is more fraught. In contrast to his plays, *Le Figuier enchanté* contains very little Italian, even though he seems to lament the fact that French in Quebec remains more influenced by English than by the languages of its allophone immigrants. This is indicated near the start of the text, in his use of the neologism "nevâsse", from *nevaccia* (mauvaise neige), which he prefers to the Anglicism "sloche" (14). He also refers to the "mezzogiorno" (the south of Italy), to "mercanti" for traders, to "fuorilegge" (outlaws) and to "cantastorie" (street singers). These words are didactically glossed in endnotes, in an attempt by Micone to transmit some of his Italian culture—the aforementioned "principe de réciprocité."

Yet the attempt at transmission of the Italian language for its own sake is ultimately slight in *Le Figuier enchanté*. One reason is that, in the dramatic trilogy, the presence of Italian served to convey the experience of recent immigrants who switched linguistic codes from Italian to French and English, whether consciously or unconsciously. Such confusion would seem out of place in *Le Figuier enchanté*, where the narrative is

channeled mainly through Nino, a long-established immigrant or *néo-Québécois*, who also happens to be educated, and through Micone's authorial persona. Another reason for the relative absence of Italian in *Le Figuier enchanté* is Micone's feeling that the use of two languages simultaneously—"le côtoïement des langues"—was becoming too much of a "recette" in immigrant writing (Vaïs et Wickham 25). In any case, it would appear that Micone preferred to focus on conveying a host of political issues in sophisticated French in this work. The crippling problems surrounding those without adequate linguistic skills are thrown into relief by the contrast between their relative powerlessness and Micone's own impressive mastery of the language. As has been pointed out, his attention to language is evidence of what has been termed "la surconscience linguistique" (Gauvin 7–14). This over-awareness of language, in whatever form it takes, accompanies all members of Quebec society, whether Anglophone, Francophone, or allophone.<sup>6</sup>

*Le Figuier enchanté* teems with political issues, all seeming to want to speak at once. Diversity is evident also in questions of genre, as the text is a mix of autobiographical fragments, fictional elements, essayistic writing, and the one-act play, and has even been given the label "autofiction" (see L'Hérault). As mentioned, Micone calls it "un recueil hybride." On the title page, it is termed "un récit"—a deliberately open term. The style is somewhere between high literature and didactic conversation. The tone is also hybrid, conveying anger, indignation, irony, and occasional lyricism and nostalgia. The authorial persona seems to blend into Nino, Manuela, Nino's father, Luca, and others, who form part of a "je" with multiple identities but with many common experiences. There are many objects of criticism, one of the most striking being Québécois indifference to the difficulties facing immigrants and their economic exploitation. Equally, the national chauvinism and posturing of leading members of the Italian community in the Quebec of the 1950s are lambasted in the chapter titled "Baobabs." Even Micone's community of origin in southern Italy comes under attack for its gender chauvinism. The experiences recounted are themselves hybrid. Images of Italy and emigration to Canada are constantly intertwined. There is no description of Italy without a reference to emigration and no mention of Canadian experience without a feeling of being out of place, sometimes expressed in the text through nostalgia but more often through feelings of alienation. When the narration moves to Quebec, a series of letters back to Italy underlines the ongoing connection between *la terre d'accueil* and *la terre d'origine*. Further complexities arise in the negotiation of school and neighborhood games through a different language from that spoken in the home, and the trauma as a foreigner in the various schools attended. With such constant movement from one cultural or linguistic terrain to the other, reflections on society abound, and identity remains constantly in flux for the narrator.

One of the few constants is, nonetheless, the question of language, whether explicitly or implicitly present. It is one of the key obstacles for the non-Francophone immigrants. While in his "Exorde," Micone underlines the similarities of the "ouvrier gaspésien" of the 1950s to the displaced and economically exploited condition of many immigrants, we must remember that the Gaspésien would have had no problem speaking French. As mentioned, *Le Figuier enchanté* is not explicitly focused on Bill 101, yet is permeated by the cultural dynamic inherent in it. The text alludes to the law directly on several occasions. As is typical with Micone, these allusions are multi-stranded. The most extended references occur towards the end of the chapter "Baobabs," where Micone underlines the fact that before its introduction, young foreign children were isolated from the French-speaking community. However, he also points out that attending a French-speaking school does not necessarily mean that the school system sensitizes pupils to the riches that cultural mixing can bring. "Sauront-ils malgré tout trouver la voie du métissage?" (97), he wonders wistfully. The comment reflects his general appeal for the promotion of hybridity but is made specifically in relation to the "jeunes allophones," for whom "franciser n'est pas synonyme d'intégrer" (106), especially when, as sometimes happens, they are bunched together in schools with no Francophones present.<sup>7</sup> In another reference to the bill, Manuela suggests that there would have been fewer problems if it had been in place earlier, as it proved difficult to change the expectations of immigrants long accustomed to sending their children to English schools. In an interview in 2000, Micone expressed regret that Bill 101 had not been in place earlier, declaring that integration would have been less difficult for him if the law had existed before his arrival (Novelli 169).

Nino's considerable problems with language are given much attention. For months he lives in his Francophone Montreal neighborhood of Ahuntsic without the linguistic abilities even to play with the local children. Finally, he figures out how to build a tree house and gains the respect of the local children who had previously ignored him. For this task, it is not language but gestures that save the day. However, linguistic development follows in a natural fashion once the child has been accepted into the social circle, demonstrating the merits of social interaction between newcomers and members of the host society. Yet the title of that chapter, "BÉ-A-OU-CO-UP" [sic], seems symbolic of the enormity of the new and confusing experiences an immigrant must deal with, often without any support. A traumatic autobiographical incident occurs in the chapter entitled "Even that guy knows." In the English school he now frequents at age 15, Nino is once more mute. As he is the only student able to answer a question on Mussolini, he is rewarded by the accolade "Even that guy knows;" in other words, "even the class dunce knows." He is taken for an idiot, even though he was top of his class in Italy. Evident

here is the invidious undermining of the immigrant, whose talents are not appreciated or even sought after, and who is forced into feelings of inferiority, though lack of confidence or skill in language (and through the general lack of expectation that the immigrant will be clever).

Micone/Nino's age on arrival and consequent linguistic adaptability mean that he is far more able to integrate into French society than his parents. His parents are portrayed as a sacrificed generation: they are the "gens du silence." Their problems with language keep them in situations of economic exploitation where lack of linguistic confidence leads to lack of mixing and forces them into ghettos, which they then seek to perpetuate. Neither the father nor the mother can speak French or English well on arrival. Yet the host language is not the only language that makes itself felt by its absence: in *Les Geignards*, Manuela makes the point that newcomer immigrant grandparents sometimes do not know enough French to be able to talk to their grandchildren, who may in turn have only a elementary level of their heritage language. The same point is made in the chapter "Baobabs." Micone's lack of linguistic exclusivity and espousal of multilingualism are evident here, although he makes equally clear that knowing several languages will not necessarily provide the immigrant with a worthwhile or empowering job in Quebec. This is the case for Manuela, who is fluent in four languages—like Lolita in *Addolorata*—but who works in a factory. Equally, language skills must always be seen in terms of the economic and political status they can confer, as in the somewhat paradoxical situation where Micone discourages women from studying only languages at college, implying that a qualification in something more socially respected or socially critical would be more empowering.

Strikingly, the question of language is, as we have seen, in some ways central to the text, while in other ways appearing almost like a side issue. Micone is in favor of Bill 101 partly because of his understanding of the Francophone need to protect the language and partly because he personally found it destabilizing to have had to attend English school. As we have seen, this was partly due to the pressure from the Montreal Italian community, but also due to his having been refused entry by one Francophone school, a fact glossed over in the text. However, he constantly reminds us that some questions are more important than those of protecting French. He feels solidarity with the Francophone workers who were economically dominated by the Anglophone minority until the *Révolution tranquille* of the 1960s, but points out in "Speak What" and in *Les Geignards* that the Québécois must realize that they are not the only people to have suffered tyranny and oppression. He ends the 1989 poem with the resonant phrase: "Nous sommes cent peuples venus de loin pour vous dire que vous n'êtes pas seuls." Equally, while language is important for integration (and Micone proved his awareness of this by

studying French at college and later writing in French), the material and psychological difficulties confronting immigrants need to be taken into account and expressed, just as their talents and their value to Quebec society must be appreciated, so that they are not symbolically or literally treated as the dunces of the class.

In sum, *Le Figuier enchanté* stresses the need for immigrants to avoid an overly strong focus on ethnicity of origin (the dangers are particularly clear in the chapter "Baobabs") while also retaining an attachment to heritage, and a sense of being part of Quebec society. To this end, Italian and Canadian experiences are inextricably linked in the text, which demonstrates "un incessant va-et-vient" (Ouellet 278) between the two cultures. Equally, the text is a vehicle for Micone's aspirational notion of intercultural exchange. It allows the *Québécois de souche* to learn about aspects of Italian experience, both in Italy and in the Italian community in Montreal, while also allowing both old-stock and new inhabitants to realize what they have in common, including on the levels of economic exploitation and minority status. The stand-off between Anne and Manuela in *Les Geignards* suggests that much cathartic dialogue still needs to occur, and Godbout's film makes the same point.<sup>8</sup> However, the hybrid identity of immigrants has the potential to become an enchanted one, provided there is openness to exchange and to comprehension on both sides. Some specific issues that remain to be dealt with in 2010 concern the non-recognition of immigrants' qualifications and the fact that some multi-ethnic schools do not have any *Québécois* Francophone students (both of these issues surface in Godbout's film).

Micone seeks to function as a healer both for himself and his community, like a "thaumaturge", a term used in this text to refer to miracle children, perceived as having magical powers of healing, like the baby Nino in rural Italy in the chapter of that name. Implied is a hope on Micone's part that traumatized *néo-Québécois* readers of the book, of whatever generation, will come to some self-healing through self-reflection. In putting into words experiences common to many immigrants, Micone and the other immigrant voices in the text act as a vehicle for identity construction for all those who feel torn between cultures. Also implied is an aspiration that the *Québécois de souche* who read the book may become less focused on language and economics and move towards a more balanced and human view of the immigrant condition.<sup>9</sup>

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Originally the parental school had to be in Quebec but this has been extended to parental attendance at school in English-speaking Canada, and there are also some exemptions where siblings attend English school, and for some First Nations children.

<sup>2</sup>For a clear explanation of *métissage* and reflections on the autobiographical context, see Zuss.

<sup>3</sup>Debates over multiculturalism are complicated by the fact that there are various types of multicultural societies—for example the different models represented by Great Britain, the USA, and Canada. Of the latter, Canada is the only one to possess a Multiculturalism Act, which was passed under Trudeau in 1988. Chapter 8 of Barry provides an analysis of multiculturalism and relates it to the Quebec context (292–328).

<sup>4</sup>They are now divided into English school boards and French school boards.

<sup>5</sup>Here, the “culture immigrée” to which Micone belongs seems, by implication, not to qualify as a full culture.

<sup>6</sup>See Hurley and Pivato on language in Micone’s plays.

<sup>7</sup>This issue is given much attention in Godbout’s film.

<sup>8</sup>Matters have progressed since the publication of *Le Figuier enchanté* in 1992, and certainly since Micone’s school experience. There are now manuals of intercultural education for teachers in Quebec and a programme of *éducation à la citoyenneté* (see McAndrew and al. éd).

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