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# Images of Florida in the Haitian Novel of Exile

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JOUBERT SATYRE (Translated by Martin Munro)

## Introduction

Florida officially entered the Haitian imaginary and reality with the boat people, those economic refugees who, during the 1980s, risked their lives on flimsy vessels heading for Miami.<sup>1</sup> Their massive exodus made the Floridian metropolis the American city with the largest Haitian diasporic community, and also the only one to have a “Little Haiti.”<sup>2</sup>

As no Haitian author living in Haiti has taken an interest in the migration of the refugees to Florida, nor in their settling in to the state, the literary representation of this place is almost absent in Haitian literature written in Haiti.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, Haitian diasporic authors have depicted Florida in works that represent their compatriots who have settled there. In the literary domain there are three moments that seem to mark out the exile of these immigrants: a positive vision of Florida, the dangerous odyssey, and the arrival that could lead to reterritorialization or the return to the native land. Two of the leading Haitian diasporic authors, Émile Ollivier and Dany Laferrière, have set out these various stages, respectively in *Passages*<sup>4</sup> and in *Cette grenade dans la main du jeune Nègre est-elle une arme ou un fruit?*<sup>5</sup> Whereas Florida is evoked in Laferrière’s novel only in an anecdotal way, Émile Ollivier makes this region one of three geographic poles in *Passages*—the two others being Port-à-l’Écu and Montréal.

This article aims to analyze the two novels mentioned above for their literary representation of Florida, and of Miami, the symbolic city of access to the American Eldorado for the various peoples of the Caribbean. Its theoretical framework is imagology, and in particular the two theorists Daniel-Henri Pageaux and Jean-Marc Moura. A work of reportage by Jean-Claude Charles titled *De si jolies petites plages* (1982), one of the very first inquiries into the situation of the Haitian boat people in Florida, is also referred to, but in an anecdotal way.<sup>6</sup>

### **Literary Images of the Foreigner: Utopia and Ideology**

Daniel-Henri Pageaux defines the literary image of the foreigner, imagology's object of study, as "an ensemble of ideas on the foreigner formed in a process of literary representation, and also of socialization."<sup>7</sup> For his part, Jean-Marc Moura notes that "images of the foreigner overflow everywhere the strictly literary field and [they] are primary objects of study for anthropology and history."<sup>8</sup> This is why, he says, "Imagology needs to be carried out in an interdisciplinary manner," in spite of the reservations of literary purists (36). Taking inspiration from Ricœur's *Essais d'herméneutique* (1984), he defines literary images of the foreigner along two distinct lines that relate not to the content of these images but to their functions: utopia and ideology.<sup>9</sup>

On the utopian side, the writer sees the foreigner as an alternative society, an inverted image of his or her social group. The Other thus represents the site where the potentialities and the repressed dreams of the society to which the writer belongs are realized. It functions as an idealized counter-model. According to Jean-Marc Moura, this laudatory representation of the foreigner is "subversive, in the sense that it distances itself from conceptions of its own culture to construct a radical alterity. It thus tends to accentuate foreignness in the identity of the group" (50). The other is kept apart and external, radically different to the writer's social group.

On the ideological side, the literary images of the foreigner have an integrative function. The writer represents the foreigner based on the conceptions of his or her sociocultural group and "accentuates the supposed identity of the group over its otherness" at the risk of reproducing clichés and prejudices of the otherness in question (49). In this ideological vision, the Other is "integrated into a conception of the world whose center is the group" to which the writer belongs (53). The foreigner is considered to be inferior. The ideological pole is based in some ways on a colonial and imperialist logic.<sup>10</sup>

However, Jean-Marc Moura warns against any dualist view of the utopian/ideological couple in these terms: "It would be wrong to believe that the two phenomena are opposed. They are dialectically related" (53–54). Finally, he recalls the role of illusion, prejudice, and the social imagination in the construction of these representations of the foreigner, for "every image is a mirage in the sense that it re-describes the reality that is foreign to society, and like any fiction, it recreates it" (55).

How is Florida represented in the abovementioned novels? Is the image of Florida utopian or ideological? While avoiding basic Manichaeism, as Jean-Marc Moura recommends, we will see whether the representation of this land of migration is positive or negative in the two novels studied. Thus, the utopia and ideology poles will be reinterpreted here in terms of good and evil, attraction and repulsion.

### **Passages (1991) by Émile Ollivier: The Call of Florida**

Émile Ollivier's novel *Passages* (1991) is built on a double narrative thread. The first tells of the odyssey to Florida and the sinking of a group of Haitian boat people from Port-à-l'Écu. The second relates the last days of Normand Malavy, a Haitian exile who left Montreal to settle in Florida. These two parallel accounts find their point of convergence in Miami, where Normand meets the surviving boat people, to whom he offers his support.

It is the socio-economic reality of Haiti that provides the novelist with the general framework of the first narrative thread. Indeed, like many real boat people who set off for the American Eldorado, those in *Passages* are driven out of their country by poverty and repression. This part of the novel also evokes the perils involved in crossing the Atlantic that the Haitian refugees face: thus, most of the boat people in *Passages* perish through drowning, and only a few survivors reach Miami.<sup>11</sup>

As for the second narrative thread, in which Normand is the protagonist, it is inspired by the political situation in Haiti and, in part, by the novelist's life. This autofictional dimension is evident in the different commonalities between Émile Ollivier and Normand Malavy: both are Haitian political exiles living in Montreal; they also have fragile health.<sup>12</sup>

In Port-à-l'Écu, the starting point of the first narrative thread, it is poverty and the threat of being dispossessed of their lands that push the peasants to leave for Miami. Moreover, some of them have tried to go to sea in the past, but were arrested by *tontons-macoutes*<sup>13</sup> and imprisoned at Fort-Dimanche.<sup>14</sup> Not wanting to be conned anymore by unscrupulous smugglers, they decide to build their own sailboat that they named *La Caminante*—a name that is highly symbolic of the deep meaning of this baroque novel that is written, as it were, under the patronage of Montaigne.<sup>15</sup> The construction of the sailboat is an opportunity for the community to show unity and solidarity.

Derville Dieuseul, one of those planning to leave, explains his point of view to the others: “We can not continue to be swindled in this way [...]. We will have to build our own boat. This should not be complicated. With a team, shoulder to shoulder, we should get there.”<sup>16</sup> To help them arrive safely, the boat people choose as captain Amédée Hosange, who, in his youth, sailed all over the Caribbean: “You [Amédée Hosange] are the only one here to have experience in this field. In your youth, you made many trips to Cuba, the Bahamas, Nassau, Maracaibo, Curaçao, on boats no bigger than those used on the circuit between Port-au-Prince, Jérémie, Corail, Pestel [...]. You know how to use the sun; it is your compass and your chronometer; your compass, you have it in your nostrils” (62–63). They are not unaware of the dangers of their journey and wonder how they will be able “to travel without the aid of all the impressive equipment available to the real sailors: sextant, compass, radio, maps [and] escape the American fleets patrolling the waters to bar our passage” (61). But thanks to his knowledge of the art of navigation, Captain

Amédée Hosange should be able to overcome all these obstacles and reach Florida without hindrance.

### **Floridian Utopias**

*Florida: Land of Liberty and Riches*

Even if they seem to be unaware of what direction to take to get to Florida, the boat people clearly state the reasons why they are sailing to this part of the world: it is a land of liberty and riches. At this stage of the narrative, the American dream that they hold to presents Florida as the promised land. Here, the novelist takes up Haitian social discourse on the United States, considered as Eldorado. The opposition between the native country and America is very clear. There is no gray area in between. Port-à-l'Écu symbolizes all that is bad, while Florida is endowed with positive values. A dystopian place, Port-à-l'Écu is a microcosm that reflects the political and economic failure of Haitian society as a whole. In this sense, *Passages* is one of the Haitian novels that establish a cause and effect relationship between dictatorship and material poverty. In his article "Exile, Africanity, and Intertextuality in Emile Ollivier's *Passages*," Martin Munro shows that the Haitian space that traditionally offered protection to the peasant is degraded in *Passages*. As the peasant is deterritorialized even in his native country, his only hope of a better life remains exile at any cost.

Among the calamities that drive the peasants into exile, there is first of all the repression that rages in their island, which is presented as a vast prison: "Here we are locked up. I'm tired of waiting for a hypothetical rain, a shower, just enough for the corn to blossom and the grass to grow back, thick. Let us take the helm as we need to in order to escape from this mess, and to reach another life."<sup>17</sup> Florida, which can be identified by a particularizing synecdoche as Miami, is the land where the boat people will be able to (re)find their dignity.<sup>18</sup> The narrator recalls it in these terms: "We had to leave, since it was no longer possible to cling to the land, to protect our community, to escape from a thousand and one misfortunes; since they, the toughest, the most honorable, and the proudest refused to become slaves again."<sup>19</sup>

Material poverty is another calamity that forces the peasants to embark for Florida, which is seen as a land of plenty. Thus, *Passages* reactivates the American myth that anyone who lives in the United States can realize his or her dreams and become rich. Nevertheless, the myth reflects to some degree the reality, as Haitians who immigrated to Florida or the United States have considerably improved their living conditions.

For these men and women on the point of departing, Florida is Eldorado, the promise of rapid enrichment: "We will leave, we will follow in the footsteps of Tiresias. It is said that in less than six months he was able to build a palace, and pile up as much money as there is dust in our pantry. It is said that there, money is not what is lacking; it is everywhere, even in the dry clods in the fields. We have to

abandon a land that no longer gives us food to quell our hunger, nor grass to feed our cattle” (53). Finally, the boat people want to flee the dirt in which they languish and the diseases from which they suffer, the consequences of material poverty. Their trip to Miami will allow them to leave their land of filth and dirt. In this way, they will no longer flounder “in this wound crawling with worms, this gangrene, this chronic gonorrhoea” (57).

According to the categories laid out by Jean-Marc Moura, we can say that Florida is in the imagination of the boat people the utopian, positive, Other, radically different from oneself. It is the Other that fascinates and that one would like to resemble. Unlike Port-à-l'Écu, Florida is a land of happiness and freedom for which one can take any and all risk. As Moura reminds us, the utopian representations of the foreigner are liberating because they emphasize his superiority over the specific social group:

The utopian representations of the foreigner are [...] characterized by their function of questioning or accusing the values of the group. They place the foreigner on a stage outside of the group, imposing a dualistic hardening of this “other.” They are erratic interpretations, which challenge the group’s conceptions, and redescribe the stranger to society in terms radically different from those customary to him.<sup>20</sup>

*Florida: Substitute for the Native Land and Fountain of Youth*

Normand Malavy, protagonist of the second narrative thread in *Passages*, is a Haitian intellectual exiled in Montreal.<sup>21</sup> But it is neither the desire for freedom, nor the wish for a better life economically that drives him to leave the Quebec metropolis to go to Florida. He goes there for other reasons: to flee the Montreal winter to find a climate similar to that of Haiti, his native country, which he moreover wants to get closer to, take stock of his life, and recover his health.

The Miami climate, as we know, is like Haiti’s: “In Miami when you come from the airport, the coconut trees line the road leading to the sea, the open sea, and what a sea it is!”<sup>22</sup> Moreover, a Haitian community has established itself in this city, reproducing the cultural practices of the native land: “The Haitians there speak their language, serve their gods, sing their folklore and dance their rhythms” (174). In *De si jolies petites plages*, Jean-Claude Charles evokes this reterritorialization in the following way: “Heat there is fetal. The West Indians hunted by the satraps can here cultivate the illusion of a twin sister of the earth who kicked their buttocks. The Haitians feel a bit like it is familiar land. Almost twenty-six degrees centigrade.”<sup>23</sup>

As a vicarious site of the native country, Miami is opposed to Montreal in several regards. The Floridian metropolis is first associated with images of life and

happiness: “In Miami, the sun is reflected in the blue of the sea, and is mirrored in the glass and chrome facades of the skyscrapers,”<sup>24</sup> while Montreal, because of its polar winters, is more like a dystopian place, associated with death: “Quebec, in January, is stuck in a shroud of snow. Night seems to swallow the day. Men and women, shut away in their homes set up as impregnable fortresses to fight the darkness and the cold, undergo winter confinement, month after month...” (78–79). The narrator insists on the climatic differences between the two cities to explain the decision of Normand to go to the Floridian metropolis:

Why Miami? Perhaps simply to change the air, leave this gray world. The sludge, like a thin layer of skin, covers the streets of the town; on the trees and on the roofs, the snow, the swaddling and the shroud, imprisoned life, and one could not open one’s mouth without a spurt of gray mist escaping. In Montreal, in December, January and February, even joy freezes over. So, you have to kill boredom, run away. Maybe Normand wanted to leave all this when he left for Miami. (81)

While Montreal is described as a place of confinement, Miami is presented as an open city, a maritime city “where life flows and agitates ceaselessly.” Also, the first gesture of Normand on arriving in the apartment at Golden Beach that was left to him by his brother Ramon, is to open doors and windows to let in the life-giving air that comes in from the sea:

Normand opened windows and patio doors to remove the stale smell and freshen the air. After sliding open the large bay windows, the room was invaded by the constant sound of the surf mingled with the screeching of scattered gulls that were like white corollas floating on the sea. The ocean of a pure inky blue kept this unchanging hue until the point where the waves collapsed onto the beach. The sand, in the time it took to be licked by a tongue of foam, became gray, then regained its brilliance. (123)

In this context, this trip also appears like a journey to the fountain of youth, as Normand also wants to recover his health and move on to another stage of his life: “Before leaving Montreal, Normand believed in a redemption by the sea. He did not clearly express this feeling, but believed that this stay would enable him to take stock of his existence and arrive at a place of truth. Was this the fragile hope he was entertaining this afternoon, as he sank down onto Golden Beach?” (120).

Finally, Normand goes to Miami to take stock of himself, question his memory, and try to fix what was running away from him, because “in landing in Miami, in the full January sun, he was arriving from afar, from the other side of life” (68). For this character, Miami is therefore the city of renewal, a true New World that must help him to be reborn. Thus his approach is related to another myth of America: that of the fountain of youth, which, like Eldorado, is part of the imaginary of the discovery of this continent. It should be noted that through these projects, Émile Ollivier opposes Miami not to the homeland of the character but to his host country. That is why Normand can watch live on television the fall of the dictatorship during his stay in this city. This fall is a sort of redemption for the native land, an image of the appeasement that the character comes to seek in Florida. Thus, Normand’s vision of Florida inscribes the latter into the utopian pole, according to the categories of Moura. It is a positive vision.

*Florida: Site of Reterritorialisation in Cette grenade*

Although in his novel *Cette grenade*, Dany Laferrière does not substitute Miami for his native country, he presents this city as the place of the reterritorialisation of Haitian immigrants in America. The narrator, who unequivocally doubles as the novelist—because he presents himself as a successful Negro writer—is commissioned by “a prestigious magazine” to make a report on America.<sup>25</sup> He goes to Florida for his work as a journalist, but compatriots that he meets by chance give him parcels to pass on to relatives who live in the state, like the man he meets at the Fort Lauderdale airport: “I must go straight away to New York ... Could you go and carry this package to my mother? My parents live in Palm Beach. The address is on the envelope. If you do not have a car, I’ll pay you a cab, otherwise let me at least pay for gasoline.”<sup>26</sup> The various cities of Florida that the narrator visits or mentions are markers of the Haitian presence in this area. Nevertheless, like Ollivier, Miami stands out from these cities due to the large number of Haitians who have settled there. It is no surprise that the narrator travels to Little Haiti, “the Haitian neighborhood in Miami,” to visit Ms. Siméon, who has been living in Florida for nearly forty years. The meeting between the two is very brief, but Ms Simeon takes the opportunity to highlight the attraction that Miami exerts on the West Indians. According to her, “if it was feasible,” many immigrants would have walked to the economic capital of Florida.

The second character that the narrator meets in Little Haiti is called Désilorme Monestin, a regular at the Librairie Mapou, the bookshop on 2nd Avenue, not far from the Notre-Dame Church. Desilorme Monestin has been living in Florida for thirty-five years, but remains attached to his native land. He notes with bitterness that no name designating the fruits of Haiti is included in the dictionary. Then, in a flash of linguistic patriotism, he pleads in favor of the Creole language, which, in his opinion, should be used to name these fruits. His compatriots would no longer be obliged to use the words of others: “These are trees that we have planted ourselves,



that we have watered ourselves, that we have protected from the great winds ourselves, well, we should be the ones who name them, so why are the names we have given to them not found in the dictionary? Why can't we find: mango, quénêpe, bérégène, mirliton, zabrico, cayimitte, cocoyé?" (245-46).

In *Little Haiti*, Haitians go about their business as if they were living in their native land. That is why the memory of Port-au-Prince popped up in the memory of the narrator, while driving in the car with Désilorme Monestin: "From time to time, in order to avoid a hole, a car drives straight toward us. It feels like Port-au-Prince. We pass before a great temple, painted in green and white, filled with people singing and dancing, clapping their hands. They heckle and jeer at all the devils. Mrs. Siméon is not likely to be bored here" (246). One of the most obvious features of the reterritorialisation of Haitians is their attachment to their culinary habits. The narrator of *Cette grenade* underscores this in the following passage where his companion orders in a restaurant the Haitian national dish made up of rice and beans (peas) in sauce:

Finally we arrive at a small restaurant on the way. He [Monestin] gets out promptly and orders two dishes of the day: white rice, black peas, fried pork and vegetables (eggplant, mirliton, carrot and cabbage) in sauce. We eat in the car. I say that it is very good. Monestin literally grunts with pleasure. He takes a sip of Champola kola. He would like to see this art of living in the dictionary one day. (247)

However, Monestin deplors the differences between the way the US government treats Haitian refugees and Cuban refugees. He would like the United States to give the Haitians the same chances as the Cubans. He even says he is ready to charter boats to go to his brothers in Haiti, if the government gives him permission.

One finds in the pages of *Cette grenade* echoes of Ollivier's novel and of Jean-Claude Charles's text, such as the many shipwrecks that are the price some pay to reach the Floridian Eldorado: "I [Monestin] can not turn on the radio without hearing that Haitians traveling on makeshift boats have just drowned. And everyone looks on at this without saying anything" (249). Despite these tragedies, it is the settling in to Florida by the Haitians that the author writes most about. He seems to suggest that they have found a second homeland where, despite prejudice and racism, they can live decently. It is a community that embraces the present without breaking the bridges with the native land. This attitude reflects the novelistic poetics of Laferrrière, who seeks to be a writer of the present. But above all it inscribes Florida as a land of Haitian implantation, in the utopian pole, according to the terminology of Jean-Marc Moura.

### Florida: Ideological Images

In *Passages*, Florida does not seem to live up to the hopes of the boat people. During the crossing, they are struck by two dramas, which prefigure the disillusionment of the survivors who reach Miami: the sinking of *La Caminante*, engulfed by a storm in the Canal des Vents and the drowning of Noelzina, for the release of whose body the boat people had waited in order to take it back with them.<sup>27</sup> These two tragic events seem quite gratuitous, as they have no compensatory effects for the boat people.

Yet the journey had begun under happy auspices. The news they heard of a blind man preparing to cross the Pacific from San Francisco is welcomed as a favorable omen. Amédée Hosange, as a skilled captain, “stayed all night at the helm, watching for the waves, dodging them if necessary, living in complete intimacy with the winds that were driving him, the stars that guided him.”<sup>28</sup> But this was to forget that the ocean, the symbol par excellence of baroque inconstancy, can change from one moment to the next. Indeed, after a few days of sailing, *La Caminante* is immobilized by a flat calm period of weather, while clouds obscure the sky. Sensing a tragedy, the boat people, under the guidance of their captain, organize a Vodou ceremony to ward off fate. They are able to reconnect with their ancestral practices and revive their faltering hope:

The women prepared the traditional tray of food; there were a few missing items that could not be found at sea, but we had compensated by offering our finest bananas, plump sweet potatoes, grilled beef and bottles of our best clairin. Moving to the rhythm of a drum that Derville had taken out of god knows where, Odanis Jean-Louis had traced with flour on the floor of the bridge, the emblems of the Supreme Master: anchors, wind rose, a boat decorated with palm branches, sails decorated with a pierced heart. He had also drawn the portrait of the mistress of water, half woman, half fish. (148)

Despite this ceremony and the drowning of Noelzina, which is akin to a theogamy, since the narrator suggests that this woman was chosen as a wife by the “master of the deep,” *La Caminante* is shattered by the unleashed elements: “*La Caminante* was shaken by a violent shock, and before we could even question its origin, we were thrown to the sea. A dead star, *La Caminante* sank into the ocean, leaving some debris of the hull floating. Somehow, some of us clung to the wreckage. Floating on this stormy sea, we drifted for a part of the night” (168-169). Most of the boat people perished during this shipwreck: “Of the seventy-seven people who had embarked at Port-à-l’Ecu, there were more than twenty-two left. Numb with fatigue and fear, we dared not question the fate of our fellow travelers” (169). The bodies of the

shipwrecked are stranded on the shore at Golden Beach, spreading terror among the bathers, including Normand.<sup>29</sup>

The survivors are rescued by a sailor who takes them to the beach at West Palm Beach, not far from Miami. They are quickly surrounded by the police. It is now the end of the Floridian dream: "Around us, a crowd of cars in a waltz of intermittent red and green lights, squeals of tires, a whole people of uniforms and clacking boots. I [Brigitte Kadmon] foresaw rather than saw them, armed with clubs and revolvers. They yelled: the dreadful sputtering of their on-board radio covered up their voices."<sup>30</sup> They are then taken to the Krome camp, a former military base located a few miles from Miami. It is in this open-air prison that Normand meets Brigitte Kadmon, wife of Amédée Hosange, who tells him the story of the boat people's odyssey.<sup>31</sup>

Strangely, the Krome penitentiary recalls the dystopian world of Port-à-l'Ecu that the boat people wanted to flee. It is as if they had crossed the Atlantic and confronted the unchained forces of the ocean for nothing. Although they are not ill-treated in Krome, in which, it must be emphasized, cleanliness contrasts with the dirt of Port-à-l'Ecu, the survivors will not see their dreams of freedom and wealth come to fruition. Krome is like a concentration camp where hope is no longer possible:

A double belt of carefully meshed barbed wire surrounds the gray, single-story rectangular buildings. From a distance, they appear like sinister warehouses. After crossing the enclosure, we find ourselves in a North American prison, with its watchtowers at the four corners, its doors and windows screened, its guards on duty, its supervisors in impeccable uniforms dragging with them enormous keychains to open subdivided compartments, provided with superimposed cage-beds separated by a simple curtain. Surprisingly, this prison is teeming with children and adolescents who have known nothing but a prison environment.<sup>32</sup>

Ironically, the arrival of these boat people in Florida roughly coincides with the fall of the dictatorship in the island. This may be one of the reasons why Brigitte Kadmon decides to return to her homeland, despite the help offered by Normand. But this choice is mainly explained by the disillusionment of the now widowed heroine, because although he survived the shipwreck, her husband Amédée Hosange died in Florida:

I return to Port-à-l'Ecu. I want to live, to pray, to be buried in my own language. Here, under the pale reflections of the neon lights, in the shadow of skyscrapers of concrete, steel

and glass, people have something sad that leaves the impression that they are at the end of their lives. There, facing the sea, walking against the wind, against the breakers, one feels a burst of life, a desire to struggle, to conquer. “Nothing. Really nothing.” Brigitte repeated the word “Nothing” several times. She thus constituted a rampart against the last trials which could assail her on this foreign soil; a protection against suffering, against the infallible pendulum of the clock of time. “Nothing,” this simple word would have the power to spare her the troubles of the days to come, to cleanse her of her fatigue, to propel her to the other side of the ocean, to make her set foot again in Port-à-l’Ecu. “Nothing.” She pronounced a final judgment on Miami, the migration, the broken dream. She punctuated it with a jet of spittle. (229-230)

By a kind of unexpected inversion, Brigitte Kadmon denies the positive vision she and her people had held of Florida. As a result, the native land is endowed with positive values. This reversal must be interpreted within the framework of the baroque aesthetic which, to use Montaigne, sees the world as a “perennial swing.” It illustrates, in a way, Moura’s point on the opposition between utopia and ideology, which, he says, never stops. Finally, Brigitte Kadmon’s decision to return to Port-à-l’Écu is part of the eternal flow of things to which the title of the novel refers.

The death of Amédée Hosange announces that of Normand who, at the time of the captain’s funeral, does not fail to realize the resemblances between their respective journeys. Amédée has abandoned the land of his ancestors for a better life, but his dream has turned into a nightmare: “We played the same game, Amédée and I; we both believed that we had to take shelter, leave, wait until the storm had passed, and the sky had once again become beautiful. In fact, our departure was definitive, except that I am still alive” (228). At that moment, Normand does not know that his end is near, for he dies shortly afterwards. He will not find in Miami a place where he can “slide on a smooth piece of ground” nor the place of anchorage that he was looking for when leaving Montreal (113).

Thus, Florida is not the land of freedom and wealth that the boat people dreamed of, nor that of the fountain of youth that motivated the departure of Normand from Montreal. In both cases, the Floridian utopia turned into a disaster, even if it can be considered that, from Norman’s point of view, the end of the dictatorship alleviated this disaster. The real Florida does not coincide with the dream of Florida. Nevertheless, it is mainly Brigitte Kadmon’s decision to return to her native island that illustrates the change in Florida’s positive vision to its opposite: once there, she discovers that it is not the paradise she imagined. From then on, her perception of this region no longer has to do with utopia, but with the ideology with

which the foreigner's negative images are associated. As Jean-Marc Moura points out, the latter reinforce the group's identity. Thus, by discovering the Floridian reality, Brigitte Kadmon realizes that the situation in her country is not as catastrophic as she thought, especially since the dictatorial regime is driven from power. The centrifugal movement, which fed the appeal of the elsewhere gives way to a centripetal movement. From then on, the only worthwhile place for her is her homeland. As we have already pointed out, Brigitte Kadmon's about-face illustrates the baroque, to which the phrase of Montaigne refers, placed in epigraph to the novel. Any other denouement would have been in contradiction with this aesthetic to which Emile Ollivier adhered.

### **Conclusion**

According to the contrast between the ideological image and the utopian image of the foreigner, it is clear that, initially, for Normand and for the boat people, Florida is a *locus amoenus*, a place where it is good to live. This image of Florida is utopian, in the sense that Jean-Marc Moura gives to this term, because it is the opposite of Port-à-l'Écu and Montreal, where the characters live before their departure. Indeed, according to the theorist, while ideology tends to preserve social reality, and therefore to justify it, utopia puts this reality into question; by opening up other horizons, it has a liberating function that manifests itself in particular in the odyssey of the boat people crossing the Atlantic and the departure of Normand for Florida. Similarly, for Monestin in *Cette grenade* the image of Miami as a place of reterritorialization of the Haitian community is positive. That is why, if he could, he would go and fetch other compatriots to help them settle there. The voyages of the boat people and of Normand to Florida, which draws their *raison d'être* from this utopian vision, have a symbolic significance: they illustrate the call, the appeal of the Other. All the euphoric values of an America, considered at the same time as land of welcome and of the fountain of youth, terrestrial paradise and place of all redemptions are reactivated. These myths that have fueled and are still fueling social discourse on the United States are justified in the material success of this country. In a second phase, that is, at the moment when the dream must confront reality, the positive image of Florida becomes negative, at least for Brigitte Kadmon who decides then to return to her native country. The confinement at Krome, the discovery of the true face of America, robbed Florida of its utopian power and its force of attraction. For not having lived up to the dreams it had provoked, Florida now falls into the ideological category. Nevertheless, it is necessary to qualify this representation found in the literature in relation to the real experience of most Haitian boat people who have settled in Miami. After fleeing dictatorship and precariousness, they found a new home there. Indeed, Jean-Marc Moura himself attenuates the opposition between utopian images and ideological images: "Ideological and utopian images constitute the limits between which all the staging of the foreigner unfolds, but from

the one to the other, the latitude is immense, due in fact to the infinite virtualities of our imaginings of the Other.”<sup>33</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The presence of patrol boats of the US Navy in Haiti’s territorial waters has only decreased the numbers of Haitian boat people tempted by the Floridian adventure; it has not completely eradicated this phenomenon.

<sup>2</sup> There is also a “Little Cuba” in Miami. These names are the obvious signs of a form of reterritorialization of Haitian and Cuban immigrants, to use Deleuze’s term.

<sup>3</sup> One could question why this silence exists among writers living in Haiti. Why has no writer living in Haiti written anything about the odyssey of the boat people? The same could be said for the cane cutters in the Dominican Republic. After the noteworthy novels of Jacques Stephen Alexis (*Compère Général Soleil*, 1955) and of René Philoctète (*Le peuple des terres mêlées*, 1989), no contemporary Haitian novel has engaged with the living conditions of these workers.

<sup>4</sup> Émile Ollivier, *Passages* (Montréal: L’Hexagone, 1991). All references will be to the first edition. Subsequent quotations in English from *Passages* were translated by Martin Munro.

<sup>5</sup> Dany Laferrière, *Cette grenade dans la main du jeune Nègre est-elle une arme ou un fruit?* (Montréal: VLB, 2002). Henceforth referred to as: *Cette grenade*.

<sup>6</sup> Jean-Claude Charles, *De si jolies petites plages* (Paris: Stock/2, 1982).

<sup>7</sup> Daniel-Henri Pageaux, “Recherche sur l’imagologie: de l’Histoire culturelle à la Poétique”, *Revista de Filología Francesa, Servicio de Publicaciones, Universidad Complutense de Madrid*, vol. 8, (1995): 140.

<sup>8</sup> Jean-Marc Moura, *L’Europe littéraire et l’ailleurs*, (Paris: PUF, 1998), p. 36.

<sup>9</sup> The opposition between utopia and ideology is related to Victor Segalen’s distinction between what he calls “the aesthetics of the Diverse” and conventional exoticism.

<sup>10</sup> Edward Saïd’s *Orientalism* (1978) is probably the work that has most incisively studied the mechanisms of the negative representation of the Other in order to dominate him or her.

<sup>11</sup> This tragedy is the fictional representation of numerous shipwrecks that have hit the boat people. I will return to this point later.

<sup>12</sup> Normand, like Émile Ollivier, suffers from renal problems. His family name, “Malavy” is an allusion to his fragile health.

<sup>13</sup> Name given to members of Duvalier’s militia.

<sup>14</sup> Name of the prison that was the symbol of Duvalier's dictatorship.

<sup>15</sup> The novel's first epigraph is Montaigne's celebrated phrase on the instability of the world and the eternal flow of things: "I do not depict being; I depict the passage." Moreover, the boat plays an important role in what Paul Gilroy calls "the Black Atlantic," from the title of his book on reterritorialization in America of African peoples transported by the slave trade. The name *La Caminante*—the itinerant in English—is also significant, especially as it relates also to the situation of Émile Ollivier, a writer exiled in Montreal. *La Caminante* refers to the polysemic nature of the word "passages," as discussed by Martin Munro in his aforementioned article.

<sup>16</sup> Ollivier, *Passages*, 60.

<sup>17</sup> Ollivier, *Passages*, 52–53.

<sup>18</sup> This synecdoche is easily explained, for although it is not the capital of Florida, Miami is the state's most populous and prosperous city. Also, from the boat people's point of view, it is the entryway to the United States. That is why in the article, the two elements of the Florida/Miami couple are interchangeable.

<sup>19</sup> Ollivier, *Passages*, 32.

<sup>20</sup> Jean-Marc Moura, *Image du tiers monde dans le roman français contemporain* (Paris: PUF, 1992), 281.

<sup>21</sup> The novel does not specify if Normand also comes from Port-à-l'Écu, but suggests he does, by insisting on the urgency of the latter to help the boat people in Miami and in presenting them as his compatriots.

<sup>22</sup> Ollivier, *Passages*, 119.

<sup>23</sup> Jean-Claude Charles, *De si jolies petites plages*, 81.

<sup>24</sup> Émile Ollivier, *Passages*, 65. It is for the Miami sun that Youyou, Normand's friend, also leaves Montreal: "One fine morning, Youyou could no longer bear living in Montreal: the sludge, the winter miasma, the silence of the nights, the dirty little streets, the shady shop fronts and cafés. However much he walked the long avenues knocked up by the city authorities using taxpayers' money, at the very heart of him he quivered with the memory of the old town of poverty, the nostalgia of Port-au-Prince, of pretty things and the Chinese lanterns that pierce the twilight in the entertainment districts [...]. He repeated endlessly that in continuing to live in Montreal, he risked confusing the temporary scaffoldings with the architecture itself. He picked up his bits and pieces and left for the warm sun." Ollivier, 177–78.

<sup>25</sup> Without presenting himself like Dany Laferrière, the narrator of the rhapsodic essay—Jack Kerouac is extensively evoked as an inspirational figure—reflects at length on the success of *Comment faire l'amour avec un Nègre sans se fatiguer* (1985), on the sexual and economic advantages that he derived from this success.

<sup>26</sup> Laferrière, *Cette grenade*, 148.

<sup>27</sup> Noelzina has already tried twice to emigrate to Florida. Arrested during the second attempt by the tontons-macoutes, she is sentenced to pay a heavy fine or go to prison. Being insolvent, she chose prison.

<sup>28</sup> Ollivier, *Passages*, 144.

<sup>29</sup> This shipwreck, which occupies a central place in the narrative economy of *Passages* recalls the numerous real-life tragedies of the boat people in their attempts to reach Florida. It is moreover surprising that there are no official statistics on the number of people drowned during these crossings. But they number in the tens of thousands. In *De si jolies petites plages*, Jean-Claude Charles had already given an idea of the scale of these silent tragedies.

<sup>30</sup> Ollivier, *Passages*, 171.

<sup>31</sup> Recorded on cassette, the account of Brigitte Kadmon is narrated in the second degree by Régis, a friend of Normand.

<sup>32</sup> Ollivier, *Passages*, 197. Note however that “for humanitarian reasons,” and thanks to Normand’s activism, Brigitte Kadmon, Amédée Hosange, and other boat people are freed. Ollivier, 209–10

<sup>33</sup> Moura, *Image du tiers monde*, 282.

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