

# CHAOS IN BABEL: RECONFIGURING BIBLICAL ARCHETYPES IN MONIQUE BOSCO'S *BABEL-OPÉRA*

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**128** Although not very well known in Francophone literature, Monique Bosco was a prolific author of numerous novels, short stories, and poems, and was recognized as one of the key Jewish writers in Montreal, a small minority group of immigrant intellectuals who wrote in French. Bosco was born in Austria in 1927 but spent many years in France, where she was raised and educated; she later settled in Montreal in 1948. As a reflection of her own experience, many of her texts follow the trajectory of displaced Jews in their quest to settle in North America, thereby inevitably encountering cultural and religious alienation. In many of Bosco's works, readers can observe a particular fascination with the ancient past, especially a preoccupation with the Old Testament and such biblical archetypes as Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Moses, Miriam, Job, and Lot's wife. However, Bosco deviates from the traditional representation of these biblical figures, as she revises them to reflect the contemporary crisis of exile and geographical displacement—seminal elements associated with the Jewish Diaspora.

This study considers selected biblical archetypes in *Babel-Opéra* to examine how the biblical past, grounded in the Old Testament, affects social problems that the Jewish migrant population confronts today. Above all, the theme of wandering, rooted in the Book of Genesis, is directly related to the contemporary crisis of Jewish exclusion and loss of identity in the new homeland, Quebec. To trace the origins of these overarching Jewish themes, Bosco relies on the story of the Tower of Babel, which, in her version, is emblematic of the chaotic migrant experience. This analysis also focuses on Bosco's innovative use of gender reconfiguration as she rewrites biblical history by shifting some religious masculine figures into the feminine to give voice to biblical women. Since the text is fragmented and contains a variety of literary genres, the analysis focuses on noteworthy parts of the prose sections, non-chrono-

logically, given the jagged composition of the text. These sections, *Métamorphoses*, *Shoah*, *Exode*, and *Apocalypse*, are of textual importance because they allow the reader to trace the protagonist's peregrinations from Europe to Quebec.

To begin the study, it is important to look at the complex structure of *Babel-Opéra*, since the architectural frame reflects many of the thematic elements outlined above. At first glance, the text resembles the intricate and hybrid structure of an opera. There is a brief preface, the *ouverture*, an introductory chapter called *Babel-Opéra*, a series of choruses composed in verse (with designated vocal parts for men, women, and children), and a diverse collection of prose selections mentioned above. The narrative weaves in and out of these irregular prose sections: some are numbered, some are lengthy, and others are extremely abbreviated. Structurally, the author frames these prose parts by inserting unrelated biblical quotations, which reflect, in part, the experiences of the protagonist and her mother in their journey from the old world to the new land of Canada. Moreover, the prose sections are interrelated as individual segments, mirroring the overarching textual theme of exile. Interestingly, the *finale* as closure refers once again to the biblical story of the Tower of Babel to create a cyclical, hermetic structure. Throughout the body of the text, Bosco rewrites the narrative of the Tower of Babel to reflect the plight of the Jewish people from their dispersal in the ancient past to the contemporary crisis of exclusion in urban contexts.

129

In the preface that introduces the revised Tower of Babel tale, the author directs the focus to God, thus establishing a relationship between the protagonist and her interlocutor, God. Composed in verse, the preface is entitled *ouverture* and contains such familiar themes that traverse Bosco's works as abandonment, betrayal, and suffering. Bosco's narrator, Myriam, begs God to listen to her:

Il n'y a plus de mots pour t'implorer.  
 mais il faut rompre ce mortel silence.  
 Ô dieu, écoute.  
 Écoute, du plus profond de nos douleurs  
 la lamentation ancienne, millénaire. (9)<sup>1</sup>

Myriam's personal invocation to God shows a secularization of the traditional form of a prayer, highlighting the human condition by referring to pain and silent suffering. As shown in the passage above, Bosco employs lamentation in an innovative modern way, interpolating some seminal traits of Hebrew lamentations, which express overwhelming despair and anguish. Rebecca Saunders explains that ancient and biblical lamentations were considered gender-specific, privileging the role of women. In particular, the form consisted of the following characteristics:

The lament tradition encompasses a range of utterances from shrieks and cries to improvised oral performance to formal written texts. It is situated on the borders between language and the unutterable, between the highly formalized and the improvised, and between dance, song, poetry, and narrative. (Saunders 13)

Saunders also posits that the genre is often non-linear and fragmented, evoking con-

fusion and upheaval (46). As will be shown, these particular aspects are germane to Bosco's representation of lamentation in her revision of the story of the Tower of Babel. However, instead of using lamentation to express the grief of mourning, as in classical traditions, Bosco shifts the emphasis to represent universal suffering, mainly associated with the Jewish condition. On a textual level, the use of lamentation points to one of the seminal aspects of Bosco's literary style. In an interview with André Brochu, Bosco explains: "Je crois qu'il me faut avouer, effectivement, que mon registre se situe plutôt dans la lamentation. C'est un sport que je pratique régulièrement, depuis toujours pour ainsi dire. 'Faire le mur,' pour moi, cela voulait exactement dire cela: me lamenter, avec abondance, pendant des heures" (Brochu 9). For Bosco, the personal importance of lamentation also highlights the performative aspects of the genre. To offer more insight from a cultural perspective, Galit Hasan-Rokem emphasizes the participation of the female body in articulating lamentation in a highly emotional way, especially in Hebrew texts (34-35). In *Babel-Opéra*, the performative aspect is especially pronounced, since the female choruses echo the main thematic elements of the prose parts, amplifying the difficult plight of the narrator's international journey from Austria, to France, and eventually to Canada. The lyrical aspect of the female lamentation is also directly related to the powerful story of the Tower of Babel. From the position of the narrator, the word *lamentation* in the text is associated with the *malédiction*s of the world, emanating from the biblical tale of the Tower of Babel.<sup>2</sup> It is the recurrent allusion to the word *malédiction*, as a divine curse, that reveals a biblical gender revision of Myriam, who is generally depicted as the female embodiment of Job's suffering. Many of Bosco's texts include numerous intertextual allusions to Job's suffering, underscoring the hardships of the Jewish condition and humanity in general.

After this poetic *ouverture* preface, Bosco inserts the story of the Tower of Babel as the opening prose section of the text. To briefly review the biblical story in Genesis 11:1-9, the descendants of Noah spoke a common language and lived a utopian existence, one which frowned upon individuality in favor of respecting the common good (*New English Bible* 10-11). As the citizens of the territory of Shinar gathered bricks to build their city, they decided to construct a tower that reached to the heavens to celebrate their unity and strength as a people. Their goal was to stay together and to continue to communicate with only one language, but when God saw what they were doing, he decided to punish them by destroying their ability to understand one another. As part of His divine punishment for their hubris, He dispersed them across the earth, thus fracturing their harmony by creating different nations and tribes. It is useful to look at the significance of the word *Babel* because the author reworks it into a contemporary context. In Hebrew, the word *Babel* signifies confusion, and is also associated with chaos and upheaval. To look at this through a critical lens, Jacques Derrida argues that the name *Babel* can be identified with confusion but that *Babel* remains inherently untranslatable (166). The problem of communication lies at the core of this linguistic disorder, flowing from the plurality of languages. In any case,

the destabilizing outcome (or curse), emanating from God's wrath, is transferred directly into the rescripted narrative. According to Catherine Khordoc, this sense of biblical confusion is highly visible in the text, with Bosco creating a postbabelian atmosphere in Quebec, a place where the reader can observe a *métissage* of cultural identities and languages (*Tours et détours* 24-53).

Although she modifies the story considerably, Bosco retains the architectural aspect of the Tower of Babel narrative, mainly the vertical image, as she reframes the structure in the opening prose section. In her version, she substitutes bricks for sleek, urban skyscrapers, which underscore the spatial separation between humanity and God: "Voici Babel. Une autre Babel. La Babel éternelle d'aujourd'hui. La tour la plus haute à ce jour" (10).<sup>3</sup> Although the context of the text is current, Bosco also preserves the biblical reference to God's anger when He observed what the citizens of Babel were constructing: "J'ignore encore les raisons de la colère de Dieu. Mais je suis fille de Babel. [...] Je ne suis pas fille de la loi, fille du père, mais égarée, perdue parmi la Diaspora" (11).<sup>4</sup> Myriam points to widespread disorganization in the world, for she is the heiress of the fate of the people of Babel. As the passage above demonstrates, the lack of direction and the sense of being lost constitute the current crisis of displacement for migrant Jews, as shown by the reference to the Diaspora. In essence, the loss of cultural identity recalls God's decision to scatter the citizens of Babel across the earth, with their sense of a coherent place destroyed. In the latter section of this opening part of *Babel-Opéra*, the narrator addresses God again by directing her anger towards Him, essentially accusing Him of abandoning his people to subject them to their inevitable destiny of exile. Alluding to the unforgettable atrocity of modern times, the narrator intensifies her criticism by accusing God of being blind, deaf, and absent during the Shoah, thus introducing a textual motif of shadows and fog: "Comment croire que tu as pu t'absenter, si longtemps, insensible à l'holocauste. Rien n'a fulguré devant ta face, pendant ces nuits de brouillard?" (14).<sup>5</sup> Bosco provides other examples of God's abandonment in alluding to other unspeakable tragedies such as Hiroshima. This reference, found in the prose section *Shoah IV*, reveals a haunting light/dark motif that characterizes the horrifying incident: "Éclipse de Dieu. Et le soleil est là. Dix millions de soleils brillent sur Hiroshima" (46).<sup>6</sup> In another part of *Métamorphose VII*, Bosco further amplifies God's desertion of His people with her references to international wars and violence in Europe, the Middle East, Cambodia, and, above all, the Vietnam war. In these instances, it is important to note that widespread misery portrays Jews as emblematic of human suffering. In addition, these various examples of global massacres buttress Myriam's accusation in the passage cited above of God's absence. To view this through a Judaic critical lens, Derrida also perceives God as an absent figure, which is predicated on his reading of Levinas, a post-Holocaust French Jewish philosopher (Handelman 171-72). This philosophical idea of absence is relevant because it is linked in the text to the notion of Jewish identity. Like the Tower of Babel tale, Jewish identity is associated with this disturbing absence of God, a separation from Him, one that again

evokes the dispersal of the citizens of Babel across the earth. Moreover, this absence is interpolated into the fabric of the lamentation style of the narrative. More importantly, as Saunders notes, the language of lamentation also conveys shattered identity (67), another outcome of God's decision to fracture the harmony of the people. In any case, God has betrayed the chosen people and has essentially forgotten them. As noted above, the haunting of past suffering flows into the modern trauma of mass genocide, thus revealing how the past is undeniably interwoven with the present. From the narrator's perspective, God has fallen asleep, thus reverting to the pre-Genesis era before the creation of humanity.

132 However, Myriam also alludes to the dawn of a new creation, as shown by a revision of the biblical past: "Est-il possible que tu sois plongé dans le rêve d'une nouvelle Genèse, que tu veuilles façonner, de tes mains, dans la glaise, une autre statue humaine. Quel visage, quelle statue?" (14).<sup>7</sup> Her emphasis on the word "dream" may suggest a replacement for the utopian project of the Tower of Babel, mainly because the narrator envisions an alternative Genesis in which a new creation will be moulded from clay. Once again, the architectural motif is preserved, but Bosco substitutes the bricks from the city of Babel for clay. The ambiguity of the face in the creation of this "other human statue" suggests gender blurring, allowing for the reassignment of gender roles. In asking God to reinvent His creation, perhaps the narrator dreams of the birth of formidable women to fracture centuries of passivity and silence. This idea is buttressed by the fact that *Babel-Opéra* is a feminocentric text devoid of any pivotal male characters. The Babel prose section ends with the narrator's insistence on the importance of transformation: "Recommence. Nous sommes prêts pour les plus étonnantes métamorphoses" (14).<sup>8</sup>

In the core parts of the prose sections entitled "*Métamorphoses*," Bosco emphasizes the idea of transformation by composing seven individually numbered sections, all containing various revisions of biblical archetypes. In *Métamorphose I*, Myriam contemplates the questions of human origins and procreation. The introductory part of this prose section also includes references, albeit limited, to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. In particular, she wonders why Eve historically bears the brunt of punishment, in silence (most likely due to her gender), for her sin of curiosity: "Comment lui reprocher ce péché de curiosité quand nul ne se lasse de l'interroger, sans répit" (15).<sup>9</sup> The allusion to these famous biblical figures, however, reveals a textual departure because Myriam is searching for her maternal origins. Interestingly, Myriam's quest reveals a contrast with the biblical representation of Eve as a universal mother figure (Genesis 3:20). But instead of discovering her roots, Myriam points to the impossibility of remembering her ancestors; either she has forgotten their names or their identities have simply disappeared: "Je ne les ai pas connues, ou plutôt je les ai oubliées comme tout ce qui concerne la petite enfance—maudite et reniée" (16).<sup>10</sup> The repetition of the adjective *maudite*, or "damned," harks back to Adam and Eve's original sin, which is inserted into the core of the text. Arnold Eisen sheds light on several key aspects identified with this image of sin linked to

damnation: he maintains that the Jewish themes of wandering and Homelessness, or “*galut*” in Hebrew, originate from Adam and Eve’s banishment from the Garden of Eden (3-26). He places this into a larger social context, as he posits that this biblical expulsion in Genesis is connected to alienation and estrangement from other human beings. Eisen also traces this exclusion to God’s dispersal of humanity in the Tower of Babel story and views Cain as the quintessential wanderer, since God’s punishment for the murder of his brother Abel was to ban him from the land that he cultivated, condemning him to endless meandering for the rest of his days. As an innovative writer, Bosco preserves the biblical archetype of Cain but seems to reverse assigned sex roles, as the narrator switches genders, and, in so doing, creates a destabilization of identity. As Judith Butler observes, “When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice” (6). Within this “free-floating” contemporary space of the narrative, Myriam embodies Cain as a nomadic traveller, as she actively embarks on the journey to France in *Métamorphose II*.

133

In this prose section, Myriam and her mother, Stella, are depicted as modern figures of exodus, since their trajectory of cultural displacement begins by fleeing Austria for France to escape the growing threat of the Nazis. Upon her arrival in France, Myriam does not, however, encounter a welcoming land of fraternity and freedom. On the contrary, she finds herself cast out, once again, from Paradise (France), a modern substitute for the Garden of Eden archetype in *Métamorphose I*. As she tries to assimilate by playing with young French girls, she unexpectedly finds herself a victim of anti-Semitism: “Elles semblaient vouloir me rejeter du paradis du Parc des Princes. On joue entre nous. Pas avec une sale austro-boche” (19).<sup>11</sup> After this painful experience, Myriam vows to erase all traces of her authentic Austrian identity, represented by the German language, by aspiring to become “la championne des caméléones” (19).<sup>12</sup> But it is not only Myriam who seeks to attain this goal, as her mother participates in this transformation: “J’en ai fait une vraie petite Française” (19).<sup>13</sup> This recurrent image of the chameleon is noteworthy because it reflects identity changes associated with the word *Métamorphose* in these prose sections. These modifications of the self highlight the importance of mind and body transformation for migrants who seek to adapt themselves to the culture of the host country. As a linguistic “chameleon,” in the examples cited above, Myriam, in turn, wants to master the French language to successfully disguise her “Otherness.” To achieve this personal goal, she even decides to learn the *Marseillaise* to convincingly slide into the “skin” of a French citizen: “J’effacerai en moi jusqu’aux derniers vestiges de toute différence” (19).<sup>14</sup> Her desire to disguise her authentic identity also exemplifies a useful strategy of coping with increasing anti-Semitism in France.

The narrator’s unforgettable memory of alienation and racism in France prefigures the inevitability of Hitler’s final solution in World War II. *Métamorphose IV* announces the dark coming of the war, which is amplified by the intervention of the women’s chorus. Once again, the chorus laments the plight of Myriam and her

mother, while placing their predicament into the context of universal human suffering, with allusions to the persecution of the Jewish people: “Horreurs de ces guerres / Croisades / Guerres saintes de l’Horreur / Inquisitions / Pogroms” (24).<sup>15</sup> In the narrative, the inevitability of war comes to fruition in the prose section *Shoah I*, in which Myriam and her mother demonstrate resistance to the Nazis by refusing to wear a yellow star of David, the emblem of their Judaism. In refusing to comply with these orders, the symbol of the chameleon resurfaces, in a different way, as Myriam decides to change her name to Marianne Mésange. Once again, she attempts to meld herself into the body of a French citizen by choosing this “metamorphosis” to conceal her Jewish identity. With this objective in mind, she wants to not only survive the Holocaust but also reinvent herself with a credible French name. As tensions escalate during the war and more and more restrictions are placed on Jews, Myriam searches for words to describe the horror but can only articulate her fear by a profound sense of silence, one that seems to commemorate the loss of millions of Jews. With this

**134** ensuing crisis in Europe as a backdrop, Bosco suspends the narrative to build up the male and female choruses to foreshadow the mother’s and daughter’s most arduous exodus, leading them to North America. Above all, the female choral parts convey the tension between past and present, anticipating the radical changes that will take place in the next part of their journey. The choral voices vacillate between the imperfect and present tenses, describing the difficulty of geographical displacement:

Les pays que nous aimions  
 Nous allons les quitter  
 L’exil, l’exode ne nous font plus peur  
 Que Babel s’écroule comme Dieu l’a voulu  
 Nous en construirons une autre  
 Où Caïn ne tuera plus Abel. (30)<sup>16</sup>

On a textual level, the chorus’s rhetoric influences the progression of the narrative, since the emphasis is placed on the mother’s and daughter’s personal exodus, but there are more profound textual implications here. As Saunders notes, the lamentation can also be sung to evoke the experience of exile or migration to a foreign land, thus underlining the emotional crisis of loss of the homeland (73). At the same time, the women’s voices suggest that the journey to a new country marks a new stage in their quest to establish a sense of home in another host country. As noted above, Bosco reprises the architectural motif, which suggests the possibility of building a more utopian version of a newly erected Babel. This image of a more utopian society is supported by the biblical references to Cain and Abel, for in this new country the social environment may possibly be devoid of violence. Once again, Bosco modifies the biblical archetype of Cain and Abel, while retaining the Jewish trope of Cain as the restless wanderer who is embodied primarily by Myriam. In this more contemporary vision of the future, Bosco seems to restore hope in a more compassionate view of mankind, an idea reinforced in this excerpt from the chorus: “Le monde est là / Qui nous attend / Un monde nouveau” (31).<sup>17</sup>

The women's voices intensify the urgency of exodus by sustaining the theme in a series of supplementary verses, which initially appear after the brief prose section *Apocalypse I*. It is important to note that the message of *Apocalypse I* heightens the disorder and suspense of the period surrounding the holocaust, when the narrator describes listening to the radio not knowing what to believe about the war. At the same time, this period of chaos harks back to the Tower of Babel story, as the narrator wonders if this terrifying predicament represents her people's fate and punishment. As Bosco grafts the biblical narrative onto this modern wartime horror story, Myriam describes this idea of confusion: "Cela crie dans Babel en toutes les langues. Il est trop tard déjà. Le grand déferlement a eu lieu. Personne n'a su l'empêcher. Déluge et délire" (39).<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, the time to leave Europe presents itself over and over again in a series of repetitive female verses. In the choral part immediately following *Apocalypse I*, Bosco includes references to biblical figures, with sustained textual allusions to Lot's wife in several verses. In this example, she retains the emphasis on exodus by revising the original biblical image of Lot's wife: "Que commence l'exode / Je n'emporterai rien / Je ne tournerai pas la tête / Pour un dernier regard" (37).<sup>19</sup> Like the musical composition of an opera, there is another variation on the main thematic verse above, underscoring the pressing need to flee Europe: "Il faut partir / Sans se retourner / Sans un regard / Ensevelir le passé" (48).<sup>20</sup> In another choral part situated after the prose part *Exode III*, the women's voices describe the hardship of severing oneself from one's origins and maternal country, revealing an intratextual echo with the aforementioned references to Lot's wife. Here, Lot's wife is evoked in a more abstract way, mainly by the verb *se retourner*: "Comment se détacher / Sans se retourner / Comment abandonner / Les vieilles souches d'ancêtres" (54).<sup>21</sup> Bosco rescripts the tale of Lot's wife, especially the part of the story in which she disobeyed God's commandment by looking back to see if her daughters were behind her as the flames consumed the town of Sodom, and as tears poured down her face, her body was gradually transformed into a pillar of salt. It is important to point out that this biblical image recurs in many of Bosco's works, most notably her novel *La Femme de Loth* (2003). Here, however, she revises the biblical figure of Lot's wife by reversing the trajectory. Although Lot's wife was petrified in time (the past), because her gaze was directed behind her, this contemporary image of Lot's wife liberates her by restoring mobility to her poetic avatar, as demonstrated with the women's chorus. Bosco reconfigures the representation of Lot's wife by directing her gaze forward with the goal of traveling toward the new world, and, in so doing, severing her from the shackles of the past: "Il faut aller de l'avant / Sans regrets ni remords / Semant l'oubli sous nos pas" (52).<sup>22</sup> The women's chorus in these lines reinforces the idea of leaving the traces of the past behind, including the emotional connections to departed ancestors, since they are associated with the old world.

As seen in many migrant texts, the motif of the suitcase appears in *Exode III*, an emblem signifying nomadic displacement for these Jewish characters. Myriam describes her suitcase as *mince*, oddly devoid of items, but nonetheless it represents

the freedom to acquire new objects in her host country, Canada. For the plight of the migrant, the journey to uncharted territory does not offer a defined sense of identity even though the narrator changes her name back to Myriam: “Reprenant mon nom. Mais toujours sans patrie. Emigrante. Apatride. Je ne suis ni d’ici ni de là. La vieille Europe déchirée n’est plus pour moi” (47).<sup>23</sup> Torn between past suffering in Europe and alienation in a new country, Myriam initially perceives Canada as a vast horizon. As postmodern refugees of the Diaspora, their meanderings continue in their quest to establish a sense of belonging; but, as with their struggle to assimilate in France, the same challenge presents itself in North America.

The arrival in Quebec (*Métamorphose V*) introduces another key biblical archetype, one also shifted into a contemporary context. For the two immigrants who have narrowly escaped inevitable deportation to the extermination camps, Canada represents a multicultural paradise. By giving voice to the silent biblical Miriam, Bosco also interpolates another revision of the seminal biblical figure, Moses. Before delving into the reconfiguration of this archetype, it is important to note the reprisal of the chameleon motif in *Métamorphose VI*, as Myriam attempts to meld herself into her new society. To achieve this objective, she pursues a romantic relationship with an unnamed man, an idealistic “*prophète*” who is particularly inspired by the political ideologies of Lenin, Marx, Mao, and “Che” Guévara. Here, there is a modern revision of Moses with regards to the young man whom she meets, a militant proletariat. Since the protagonist is older, the chameleon effect manifests itself in Myriam’s desire to assimilate into this new society with both her body and soul in this amorous relationship. Her confession in *Métamorphose VI* exemplifies this idea: “Moi je l’ai aimé, cet homme. De corps et d’âme. Je l’ai aimé jusqu’à la folie déraisonnable” (61).<sup>24</sup> It is, however, the combination of her innocence and her excessive love for him that ultimately results in the betrayal of this young rebel, for he deserts Myriam and his social cause by marrying a rich woman with whom he has fathered a child. In the latter part of this prose section, Bosco revises the characterization of the lover by depicting him as a secular Moses, whom Myriam describes as follows: “C’était lui mon livre de Sagesse. Moïse, après s’être entretenu avec Dieu, ‘la peau de son visage rayonnait d’avoir parlé avec Lui’” (67).<sup>25</sup> This section makes references to her rebel lover not only as a prophet but also as an idol, a personal one for Myriam, who also seems to be a secular replacement for God. Myriam expresses guilty feelings because she worshipped him, thus committing a sin, one for which she atones by acknowledging it: “Là aussi j’ai péché contre la loi. Je l’ai adoré—en silence—mais je l’ai adoré, idolâtré” (67).<sup>26</sup> The term ‘la loi’ reveals another biblical allusion to Moses, as this modern Myriam violates the first of the Ten Commandments that God wrote on the two stone tablets Moses brought down from Mount Sinai: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20). That he was a gentile and an infidel lies at the core of her sense of guilt and shame for worshipping at the altar of this deceptive man: “Et je n’aurais pas voulu lier mon sort à un faux Gentil, à un infidèle” (66).<sup>27</sup> On a structural level, Bosco frames this *Métamorphose* with biblical passages taken from the Song of

Songs and the Book of Job. She fuses the sensual aspect of the narrator's attraction with the painful side of love by referencing the Song of Songs, and in this way, she lyrically captures the powerful desire of Myriam's first romantic relationship. At the same time, she describes the excessive suffering that love, especially unrequited love, brings. The apex of her pain is framed and grafted onto Job's tribulations in the biblical verses underscoring Job's torment.

In sharp contrast to the depiction of the rebel as a false prophet, Bosco enhances the image of authentic prophets by weaving other biblical allusions to Moses and Miriam into the fabric of the narrative. The narrator, Myriam, states that Moses did not reach the Promised Land. According to the origin of her biblical avatar's name, Miriam was Moses's older sister, who was also considered a creative prophetess in her day. Like Moses, she too tried to reach the Promised Land. Here, the quest to reach the Promised Land involves gender switching, as Myriam takes on Moses's role in courageously forging the path to the new world, Quebec. Mirroring the fate of the biblical Moses and Miriam, who died before reaching the Promised Land, the narrator too ultimately fails in her mission: "Et la Terre Promise, la Terre du Retour n'accueille pas les transfuges comme moi" (85).<sup>28</sup> Historically, Miriam's demise seems to mirror the plight of scores of biblical Jews led by Moses who died along the way in the desert. In any case, the spatial experience of exclusion for the migrant protagonist is extended to America (Dallas and Memphis), as Myriam mentions the deaths of Martin Luther King and the Kennedy brothers to reinforce the impossibility of reaching the Promised Land: "Il sera dit que personne n'entrera jamais en Terre Promise" (79).<sup>29</sup> This elusive utopia seems unattainable, thus recalling the Tower of Babel story. Like the people of Babel, Myriam's hope collapses into disillusion because she only encounters universal disorder and chaos. In *Métamorphose VII*, Bosco frames the prose section with a quotation from Georges Bataille's *Le Bleu du ciel* to highlight postbabelian disorder. The body of the text features an internal echo from Myriam's perspective, which reflects Bataille's idea of disorder: "Tout me désespère sur cette planète où je suis encore survivante, en ce monde où tout n'est que désordre et dispersions" (85).<sup>30</sup> On the last prose page of the narrative, Myriam reinforces the migrant experience of exclusion with these candid words: "Et le pays que je me suis choisi n'est pas la Terre promise" (93).<sup>31</sup> Here, Bosco appears to deconstruct the myth of paradise, specifically for refugees from the Diaspora who hope to discover the Promised Land. Although the protagonist conveys feelings of disillusion, Bosco abruptly shifts the focus geographically; she describes Canada as a vast land with harsh, long winters. In opposition to this traditional image of the landscape, however, many Canadian citizens have tender hearts. The emphasis on humanity reveals a return to the overarching biblical image in the text, the Tower of Babel. Interestingly, the vertical image of the original Tower of Babel is restored, as Bosco calls for the opening of doors and a reprisal of bricklaying activity, which, in turn, alters the message. In other words, Myriam finds a glimmer of hope because Canada opens her doors to scores of exiled and, in many instances, oppressed people from

around the world, all united in their plight of human suffering.

This complex assortment of biblical archetypes in *Babel-Opéra* allows the reader to explore the problems of perpetual wandering and exile, seminal elements of the Jewish Diaspora rooted in the Book of Genesis. In this contemporary revision of the Tower of Babel tale, Bosco weaves fragments of the biblical story into her text to describe the plight of migrant Jews who journey to North America. Interestingly, the biblical story of the Tower of Babel resurfaces, once again, in the closing pages of the narrative in a section entitled *Finale*, creating a circular pattern in the construction of the text. Above all, the textual reconfiguration of the ancient tale of Babel provides the frame and the foundation to study the narrator's crisis of identity fragmentation, as she negotiates multiple cultures and languages in Austria, France, and Quebec. The concluding lines in an untitled prose section reinforce the connection to the city of Babel, as the architectural motif reappears with a focus on the incomplete tower. At long last, there is hope in constructing a new Babel in Quebec, one which is predicated on human fraternity and the celebration of the plurality of cultures.

138

## NOTES

1. "There are no longer words to implore you  
but it is essential to break this deadly silence.  
O God, listen from the depths of our pain  
to the ancient lamentation, that is a thousand years old." (All translations are mine.)
2. For more on lamentation and the notion of the *malédiction*, see Khordoc, "Babel en reprise."
3. "Here is Babel. Another Babel. The eternal Babel of today. The highest tower to date."
4. "I am still disregarding the reasons for God's anger. But I am the daughter of Babel. I'm not the daughter of the Law, the father's daughter, but lost amidst the Diaspora."
5. "How is it possible to believe that you could be absent for so long, insensitive to the Holocaust. Nothing flashed in front of your face, during those foggy nights?"
6. "Eclipse from God. And the sun is there. Ten million suns shine over Hiroshima."
7. "Is it possible that you might plunge into a dream of a new Genesis, that you might mould, with your hands, in clay, another human statue. What face, what statue?"
8. "Let's start over. We are ready for the most astonishing metamorphoses."
9. "How can one reproach her for this sin of curiosity when no one grows weary of interrogating her, without respite."
10. "I didn't know them, or rather I forgot them like everything concerning my early childhood—damned or disavowed."
11. "They seemed to want to reject me from the paradise of the Princes' Park. We play amongst ourselves. Not with a dirty German."
12. "The champion of chameleons."
13. "I made her into an authentic little French girl."

14. "I will erase all of the remaining traces of my otherness."
15. "The horrors of these wars / Crusades / Holy wars of Horror / Inquisitions / Pogroms."
16. "The countries that we loved  
We are going to leave them  
Exile, exodus no longer frightens us  
May Babel crumble as God wished  
We will build another  
Where Cain will no longer kill Abel."
17. "The world is here / Who waits for us / A new world."
18. "It screams in Babel in every language. It is already too late. The great flood has taken place. No one could stop it. Deluge and hysteria."
19. "Let the exodus begin / I won't take anything / I won't turn my head / For a last glance."
20. "It is necessary to leave / Without looking back / Without a glance / Bury the past."
21. "How to detach oneself / Without looking back / How to abandon / the old line of ancestors."
22. "It is necessary to move forward / Without regret or remorse / Shedding oblivion under our foot-  
steps."
23. "Reclaiming my name. But always without a country. Emigrant. Stateless person. I am neither from here nor there. Old, torn apart Europe is no longer for me."
24. "I loved this man. Body and soul. I loved him to the brink of madness."
25. "It was him my book of Wisdom. After having conversed with God, the skin on Moses's face was shining from speaking with Him."
26. "There too I sinned against the Law. I worshipped him—in silence. But I worshipped him, idolatress."
27. "And I wouldn't have wanted to link my fate to a fake Gentile, to an infidel."
28. "And the Promised Land, the Land of Return doesn't welcome renegades like me."
29. "It will be said that no one will ever enter the Promised Land."
30. "Everything drives me to despair on this planet where I am still a survivor, in this world where every-  
thing is but disorder or dispersal."
31. "And the country that I chose is not the Promised Land."

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