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## **“A Private Open Space”<sup>1</sup>: Crossing Boundaries and Constructing Identities in France Daigle’s Auto/Fictions**

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### **Résumé**

*Depuis l'expérience traumatisante de leur déportation en 1755, les Acadiens ont toujours été sensibles aux questions spatiale et identitaire, inextricablement reliées pour eux. Tandis que certains privilégiaient la construction d'une identité nationale, donc collective, dans leurs textes littéraires, d'autres, comme France Daigle, ne traitent plus d'une telle identité enracinée dans un espace-temps révolu. L'œuvre de France Daigle, une des écrivains contemporains les plus remarquables en Acadie, se distingue justement des textes tournés vers le passé. Dans ses auto/fictions résolument situées dans une Acadie moderne et visant l'avenir, Daigle conçoit des identités plurielles et hybrides pour ses personnages, identités qui se construisent par rapport à un espace ouvert aux autres. Le dépassement de frontières nationales et culturelles, la transgression du genre au sens de gender et de genre littéraire, et la mise en question de la relation unidirectionnelle du centre vers la périphérie, longtemps caractéristique des rapports de la France avec la Francophonie, font tous partie de la nouvelle poétique de l'espace que Daigle crée dans son œuvre qui comprend actuellement onze textes.*

### **Zusammenfassung**

*Seit die Akadier 1755 aus ihrem Land deportiert wurden, ist für sie der Nexus von Raum und Identität untrennbar. Während einige Autoren hauptsächlich die nationale – und damit die kollektive – Identität der Akadier in ihren Texten darstellen, so haben andere, wie z. B. France Daigle, sich von dieser in der Vergangenheit verhafteten Identität abgewandt. Das Werk von France Daigle, die zu den wichtigsten zeitgenössischen Schriftstellern ihrer Generation in Akadien zählt, ist nicht mehr in der Vergangenheit*

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1 This quote is borrowed from Michelle Cliff, *Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to Despise*. A shorter version of this article was presented at the 5<sup>th</sup> International Auto/Biography Association Conference, July 27-31, 2006, Johannes Gutenberg Universität in Mainz, Germany.

verankert, sondern der Gegenwart und Zukunft zugewandt. Die Figuren ihrer (auto)fiktionalen Texte, deren Identitätsbildung sich durch den Kontakt mit dem Anderen in einem multikulturellen Raum vollzieht, sind von Pluralität und Hybridität gekennzeichnet. In ihren „Romanen“ werden nationale Grenzen überwunden und Gattungsbegriffe sowie Geschlechtsdifferenzen in Frage gestellt; ähnlich dekonstruiert wird die einseitige Beziehung zwischen Frankreich als kulturellem Zentrum und seinen Satelliten, welche die Frankophonie konstituieren. Daigles Werk umfasst inzwischen elf Texte; zusammen entwickeln diese eine neu konzipierte Poetik des postmodernen, transkulturellen Raumes.

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If it is true that “literature is always work with the fragile,” as François Paré, a Canadian specialist in minority literatures, has stated,<sup>2</sup> then this applies especially to “literatures of exiguity” (Paré 2001) of which Acadian literature is an example. Questions of place, deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation (cf. Deleuze/Guattari 1980), and of identity are indeed particularly problematic in Acadie, since the Acadians live in a most precarious state: marginalised relative to France, Quebec and the Anglophone majority in Canada and the United States, they must constantly create for themselves a space they can call their own if they want to preserve their history, their language, their identity, and their culture.

Having been the first to found a French colony on the North American continent in 1604, the Acadians subsequently become pawns on the political chessboard, as France and England fight many battles for hegemony in North America.

In 1755 the Acadians are the victims of an act of what is today called ethnic cleansing (some even speak of genocide)<sup>3</sup>: they are shipped out of Acadie and dispersed on the North American east coast. However, a certain number of these “first boat people of modern times,” as Jean Chartier calls them,<sup>4</sup> begin to return to Acadie as soon as the Treaty of Paris is concluded in 1763 between France and England, a treaty that permits them to live as Catholics and Francophones under the British

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2 See *Théories de la fragilité* (Paré 1994, 9). All translations of critical texts into English are my own. Translations from France Daigle's texts have been graciously provided by Dr. Hans R. Runte, Dalhousie University (Halifax, Canada), who, as the first reader of this article, has helped in shaping it stylistically.

3 See the “Manifeste de Beaubassin,” published on October 25, 2002, in *L'Acadie Nouvelle* and signed by Marie-Claire Dugas, Charles Emmrys, Isabelle Dugas, Donatien Gaudet, and Mario Toussaint ([http://www.cyberacadie.com/acadie\\_manifest\\_de\\_beaubassin.htm](http://www.cyberacadie.com/acadie_manifest_de_beaubassin.htm); accessed June 13, 2006). On the question of whether the deportation was a pre-modern genocide, see also Kolboom (Kolboom/Mann 2005, 120-21).

4 Jean Chartier, “Les Acadiens, premiers *boat people* des temps modernes”, *Le Devoir* (Montreal), October 28, 1992 (quoted in Kolboom/Mann 2005, 111-112 and 313).

crown. Having since then been deprived of a real, legally constituted country, the Acadians have always been sensitive to terms of spatiality – to positively connotated terms such as space, place, roots, and home, as well as to negatively connotated terms such as deportation, exile, diaspora, and deterritorialisation. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the “territories of identity” – to use the title of a recent book edited by Maurice Basque and Jacques Paul Couturier (2005) –, such as they are defined by the painful past and by a feeling of pride in the reterritorialisation and the survival of Acadie – albeit a minority Acadie –, are still central issues in Acadian research today.

Much ink has flowed in Acadian Studies<sup>5</sup> about the Acadians’ collective identity as it was given shape in the past by the experience of a barbarous act and its remembrance, and by the mythical memory of a pre-deportation paradise. Yet if we think of contemporary Acadie – in a world-embracing perspective characterised by globalisation, by the questioning of the borders of nation-states, and by their constant redefinitions –,<sup>6</sup> then it is possible to conceive of Acadie as of a true *exemplum*: we have here a tenacious people which loses its country, its national territory, as a consequence of the “great upheaval”<sup>7</sup> of 1755. This people, however, obstinately maintains its identity throughout all the migrations and tribulations it suffers, and continues, moreover, to construct and reconstruct its identity in its *little literature*<sup>8</sup> by the force of its imagination and by concrete and peaceful efforts in the social and political spheres.

In what follows, I will examine how France Daigle, one of the most remarkable post-modern authors in Acadie, turns her back on the past in order to construct the identities of her characters, of herself, and of the Acadians as living resolutely in the present and aiming for the future. The term “identities” is purposely used in the plural, for it must be said that France Daigle’s identity constructions have very little in common, for example, with the Acadians’ “new, post-exile collective identity” that Antonine Maillet, according to James de Finney, develops in her *œuvre*, especially in her epic novel *Pélagie-la-Charrette*, a unifying identity, de Finney says, which “demands [...] above all the rebuilding of the group, the reciprocal recognition of the

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- 5 From among the numerous publications herewith a limited, but representative selection. For a historical point of view, see the recent books by Naomi E. S. Griffiths (2005) and by John Mack Faragher (2005). The book by Ingo Kolboom and Roberto Mann (2005) deals with Acadian history and literature. For a perspective by political scientists, see Joseph Yvon Thériault (1995) and *Égalité: revue acadienne d'analyse politique* 48 (2003) devoted to “L’identité: produit ou producteur du monde.” For a pluridisciplinary point of view, see André Magord (ed.), *L’Acadie plurielle* (2003), as well as Ghislain Clermont and Janine Gallant (eds.), *La modernité en Acadie* (2005).
  - 6 See Klaus-Dieter Ertler et al., whose book on Acadie (2005) adopts the same perspective (cf. especially 11-17 and 179-183).
  - 7 This translates the Acadian euphemism of “le grand dérangement.”
  - 8 Having created the expression (Paré 2001, 21), Paré devotes an entire book to *little literatures* of marginal countries. By italicising *little* throughout, Paré means to protect the notion of “*little literatures*” from any pejorative connotation.

members of the community, and the development of a collective will" (171).<sup>9</sup> The trek up the length of the North American continent that Pélagie and her group undertake is a necessity imposed upon them by their exile and their desire to return to their homeland, it is a choice which defines their collective identity.<sup>10</sup> The identity of Daigle's characters, however, is individual and plural; it is a "relation-identity" which, according to Édouard Glissant, takes shape "at the cross-roads of the individual and the others."<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Daigle constructs identities by relating the self to space and to the Other. Space plays a primordial role in Daigle's work: her characters are great travellers who criss-cross the whole world, thus following the example of their creator who in her twenties, and despite her agoraphobia, travelled in Europe and the Middle-East. Similarly, her characters traverse the continents from east to west, they leave Israel and arrive in the United States,<sup>12</sup> they leave their city and their country to change their life or to begin it anew,<sup>13</sup> they run across one another in airports,<sup>14</sup> in cities<sup>15</sup> or on a Greek island,<sup>16</sup> some of them stay for a few months in San Francisco,<sup>17</sup> others quit Baltimore and pass through New York on their way to Nunavut,<sup>18</sup> part of Canada's Great White North; all of them are forever moving, forever seeking to know themselves and the Other, or else forever wandering, seeking to lose themselves, to lose their identity.<sup>19</sup> One of Daigle's characters, though confined to her bed by sickness, still "travels at an unheard-of speed" in her inner self, while another dreams of multiple displacements and of a "long and mysterious

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9 Before de Finney, Hans R. Runte proposed a thorough study of certain texts by Maillet in terms of French epic literature; he compares the medieval epic genre and its role in the founding of a people with the construction in Acadie of a collective, national identity as thematised by Maillet in her early "novels" (1997, 15-39).

10 See Edward W. Said: "I think identity is the result of an act of will. Not something given by nature or by history"; for himself, he claims a plural, mixed identity ("Ne renonçons pas à la coexistence avec les Juifs," interview published in the *Nouvel Observateur*, January 16, 1997; in "Identité," <http://www.peripheries.net/f-ci10.htm>; accessed June 21, 2006).

11 See Édouard Glissant in *Le Monde*, December 31, 2004; in "Identité," <http://www.peripheries.net/f-ci10.htm> (accessed June 21, 2006). See also his *Poétique de la relation* (1990, 155-171) where he pits the (positive concept of) identity-through-relations (identité-relation) against the problems resulting from the identity-from-roots concept (identité-racine).

12 Claudia in *Un fin passage* (passim).

13 Claude in *La vraie vie* (68), Hans in *Pas pire* (136-137) and *Un fin passage* (118).

14 The characters Élizabeth, Camil Gaudain, and France Daigle in Daigle's autofiction *Pas pire* (166).

15 In *Un fin passage*, Claudia observes the return of the painter whom she met at the airport in Europe (32-33, 38-39, 43-44, 46-47, 60), and who is returning to Baltimore to rejoin the woman he loves. At the moment of his return, the painter meets Hans who sells him his puzzle, one of his last possessions (125-129). The story of the painter and his beloved will continue in Moncton, in *Petites difficultés*, where their names, the Zablonskis, are revealed.

16 Élizabeth and Hans in *1953* (162) and *Pas pire* (166).

17 Hans in *Pas pire* (158-160, 167) and *Un fin passage* (passim).

18 The Zablonskis and their travel plan in *Petites difficultés* (77, 89-90, 143, for example).

19 Hans in *Un fin passage* (87, 89-90, 118, 123-124).

voyage.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, Daigle uses the topos of voyage<sup>21</sup> and movement in order to create a poetics of space which directly influences her characters’ identity constructions. The first of the three parts of this article examines the “Great Infinite/Indefinite Spaces” of Daigle’s writing.

### Great Infinite/Indefinite Spaces

Daigle’s first three books, emphatically modern, constitute a kind of trilogy; they are *Sans jamais parler du vent*, *Film d’amour et de dépendance*, and *Histoire de la maison qui brûle*. To this must be added, because of its experimental form, *Variations en B et K*. Already in these early works, published in the 1980s, space is heavily emphasised, and concretely so by the very page lay-out – the pages are almost blank, and the few lines of text appear at the top or bottom of each page –; early critics commented on the indeterminate genre of these works oscillating between poetry and prose,<sup>22</sup> texts without proper plots à la Antonine Maillet, or without political demands such as one finds them in the nationalist poetry of the 1970s. Indeed, François Paré notes that France Daigle and other women writers of her generation “begin divesting [Acadian literature] of the past at the precise moment when nationalist poetry was occupying the main stage of institutionalised Acadian literature [...]” In these young women writers’ works, he adds,

the totality of the community is hardly thinkable anymore, because the spirit of community in modern Acadie, as seen through women’s texts, is no longer whole, single-voiced, but has been touched by the appeal to the horizontal, the transversal of its multiplicity (Paré 1997, 124-125).

It is true that France Daigle seems to have erased historical references in her early works in which the horizontal does dominate: she creates in them immense geographical spaces without borders, for example the infinity of sea and beaches whipped by the wind (*Sans jamais*, *Film d’amour*), or the vastness of Kouchibouguac National Park in New Brunswick, which is bordered by the Acadian coastline and juxtaposed by Daigle to the limitless length and breadth of the nomad’s desert (*Variations*). Yet there is no lack of the vertical, either: on every page of *Histoire de la maison*, at the moment when one must turn it, another space is interwoven, the spiritual space, that Daigle represents by the meditation syllable OM: it joins the Orient to the Occident where the story of the burning house takes place. I have demonstrated elsewhere<sup>23</sup> that these spaces situated in times immemorial and

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20 Alida (43, 44, 45) and Denis (46, 68-69) in *La vraie vie*.

21 Jeannette den Toonder (2004) examines the topos of voyage as a symbol for opening up to the Other in Daigle’s *Pas pire*. See also den Toonder (2003).

22 See for example Anne-Marie Alonzo (1984) and Claude Beausoleil (1984).

23 “Écrire ses racines: fragments d’histoire et questions d’identité dans l’avant-texte de *Sans jamais parler du vent* de France Daigle,” paper given at the Conference of the Association des profes-

reminding us of the biblical space of Genesis (sea, land, wind) nevertheless contain hints allowing us to discover hidden traces of an Acadie that has been suppressed, of an Acadie that is surely not inscribed in the surface of the texts, just as, incidentally, the Acadians are not so inscribed, because the occasional characters inhabiting these spaces have no name, they remain as anonymous as most of the places mentioned.

The first-person narrator of *Sans jamais*, a text written in fragments, is a barely described young man, a "man without qualities" à la Musil. He is sketched out at the beginning of the text: "Having left one December morning. A cap, a shawl. Spitting. The impression of belonging in another age, another era" (10). He travels sometimes over the ocean and over land, by boat or by train, stopping here and there in ports and railway stations (11), only to leave again immediately: "Preparing oneself not to have roots anymore" (72). This is his goal: "A novel that I would write and which would be a masterpiece" (29); he has formulated this goal despite the profound doubt that the narrator expresses with respect to the validity and the very existence of the spatio-temporal reference points: "Situating the things somewhere in space and time, as if they really existed, space and time" (39). However, at the end of the novel the narrator has succeeded in his quest, the creative act has been completed, at least metatextually, for the book exists. The last fragment is situated in the space of the family, where the narrator continues to reflect on "[t]he children's chapter, [on] what could still happen if one gave it time. An unfinished [piece of] writing, a partially somber painting" (141). Here is a narrator who refuses closure, who evokes a possible but indeterminate continuation comprising everything that "could still happen," everything that has not yet been said, everything that must still be dug up and explored in this language which is French, a language inhabited, in the narrator's words, by "the unnameable, the uncountable" (63), and a language characterised by the masculine and feminine which carry the inherent risk of gender stereotyping. The gender problem is evident throughout the text which specifies neither the number nor the gender of the children: there are either fifteen or sixteen of them (16), and they are referred to by the double forms "those boys-girls" ("ceux celles") and "'them' boys-girls [are doing such and such] ..." ("ils elles [font] ...") (*passim*); these double forms are considered awkward in French where the grammatical masculine gender overrules the feminine as soon as a plural contains a single masculine noun or pronoun. This rule, one of the language laws of the *Académie Française* which is still being observed by the French, is dispensed with by France Daigle who employs an inclusive language well before its use was being highly recommended (at least among French-speaking Canadians); she does so in the entire text from which I quote only the following two examples: "At least that[,] the children, never all of the boys-girls present" (16), and "The children, those boys-girls who

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seurs de littératures acadienne et québécoise de l'Atlantique (APLAQA) in Charlottetown, University of Prince Edward Island, October 2005.

come when one calls them" (*Sans jamais* 17). In this way Daigle introduces one constant into her books: work on and with the language, an instrument which does not always permit her to express certain things, a language that one must sometimes twist in order to create new meanings. Such work happens on several levels, among others on the level of the deconstruction of the characters' gender, an important leitmotif throughout Daigle's novels.

### Doing and Undoing Gender, or Gender Bending à la Daigle<sup>24</sup>

As a woman and an author, France Daigle stays outside the dominant precepts of her era's ideologies: despite her nationalist parents (Boehringer 2004, 13), and despite the fact that most Acadian male poets espouse nationalism at the time when she begins to write, Daigle does not adopt the cause of Acadian nationalism; nor does she declare herself a (radical) feminist, as do most Quebec women writers who in their "fiction-theories" (Brossard 1988; Théoret 1987, 119) intend to "kill the womb" (Brossard 1988, 19, 27, 28) of the "patriarchal mother" (Brossard 1988, 22) in order to bring about real changes in society.<sup>25</sup> Without positioning herself as a declared feminist,<sup>26</sup> Daigle nonetheless undermines the hetero-normative order by foiling her characters' gendered stereotypes: the male narrator in *Sans jamais* not only maintains the uncertainty regarding the children's sexual identity, he also alludes several times to his own sexual ambiguity, for example when he calls himself "invincible and tender" and thereby mixes together character traits stereotypically considered to be distinctly masculine or feminine (39). He even goes so far as to refuse any sexual identification by declaring: "And in those cafés, whenever a woman looks at me, the danger then of being a man. For the woman especially, the danger of being a man." (27) These deconstructions of the heterosexual norm continue in *Film d'amour* where a couple dreams of making a film in which there would be "ambisexual bodies dancing." (46) The gender of the characters forming the couple remains forever elusive since the grammatical endings which define the partners are interchangeably feminine here and masculine there.<sup>27</sup> Another example of

24 This heading is obviously modelled after the title of Judith Butler's *Undoing Gender* (2004).

25 In the inaugural lecture of a colloquium entitled "Écrire la société" (1994), Brossard suggests that liberal feminists' claims are insufficient to abolish sexist discrimination against women; she distinguishes instead between three constitutive levels of feminism: 1. the expression of women's subjectivity (306-309), 2. feminist thinking (309-313), and 3. feminist discourse (313-316). She also highlights the gains of feminism and the backlash against these gains. She ends her lecture by underscoring the necessity of fighting against "the marginalisation of the feminine" (319-320) in the future.

26 For a lukewarm endorsement of feminism, see Daigle's response to my question whether she considers herself a feminist: "Oui, pourquoi pas... On l'est forcément. Si vous êtes une femme aujourd'hui, il est presque inconcevable de ne pas être féministe; le contraire me paraît inconcevable." Pressed to develop her answer, Daigle speaks of equality as the fundamental tenet of relations between men and women (Boehringer 2004, 16).

27 "– Yet I was a very strong man. – [Yes,] a very strong woman" (*Film d'amour*, 25, 45). One of the dialogue partners is quite obviously female, while the gender of the other remains undetermi-

Daigle's gender deconstruction may be found in *Variations*. A first-person narrator-writer, parent of two daughters, recounts his little model family's camping holidays; the end of his story reveals all of a sudden, by means of a single feminine ending, that the couple does not consist of a man and a woman, but of two women.<sup>28</sup> This unique intervention on the grammatical level amounts to an unexpected undermining of the readers' probable heterosexual attitudes, expectations the text seems to endorse, only to subvert them later on. The writing of such texts, in which the masculine and feminine have been evacuated, or are alternating, or remain suspended, represents a considerable challenge, especially since French is a gender-driven language. By taking on this challenge and by making her characters inhabit various gender positions at the same time without them ever becoming asexual or neutral, Daigle deconstructs fixed gender roles.<sup>29</sup> One could even argue that by doing so, Daigle goes beyond certain feminist positions that lead to theoretical conundrums with which feminists have struggled over the last decades, i.e. the reproach of essentialism levelled at those who insist on "sexual difference(s)," a concept which grounds that which it tries to overcome – patriarchy – in the same binary system it sets out to battle; or the question of what happens to the women's movement if the concept of a free, authentic, unified subject is deconstructed by post-structuralists at precisely the same moment when (white) feminists thought to have left behind the status as woman-as-object to become a subject.<sup>30</sup> Although Daigle's characters in more recent works never correspond to typically male or female stereotypes, they do acquire more personalised traits such as proper names. Moreover, Daigle abandons the linguistic experimentations of her early work with its emphasis on infinite spaces and indefinite genders in order to create urban spaces where she situates her characters living in various social networks, urban spaces for which homologous referents exist in reality.

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ned, as in: "You always knew what to say to make me happy as I am. *Your male or female voice, speaking alone, by itself*" (8, my italics; for exclusively feminine endings, see also 71, 77, 84, 91). On page 32 appears a character who could be one of the dialogue partners: "The entrance to his house faced the sea and he often went out to go and stand beside her." Finally, the double form "those boys-girls" ("ceux celles"), which occurs frequently in *Sans jamais*, is also employed in *Film d'amour* (9, 10); it is reinforced by the doubling of the masculine form "danseurs" with the feminine "danseuses": "– [...] one hadn't thought that that would affect the male dancers. – And the female dancers... – Yes, the female dancers also, but above all the male dancers" (101); elsewhere in *Film d'amour*, the male dancers are characterised as "androgynous" (54).

- 28 "I finally get up. A woman *like me*, behind me, asks what page I'm on ("à quelle page je suis rendu"), says quite disarmingly that she doesn't like didactic books" (*Variations*, 42; my italics).
- 29 Judith Butler reflects on possibilities of "undoing gender" in a non-fictional, broad critique of gender norms (2004).
- 30 For a succinct description of these feminist positions which constitute "the identity crisis in feminist theory", see Alcoff (1997). For ways to go beyond it, see de Lauretis (1987). For a more inclusive feminism, no longer centred in Europe and North America, see Grewal/Kaplan's "transnational feminist practices" (1994).



### Urban Space

From *La vraie vie* (1993) onward, spaces and characters with proper names increase sharply in Daigle's ever-growing *œuvre*. Her thin, small-format books of the beginning are replaced by somewhat more voluminous tomes. But the essential characteristics of her writing do not change: she does not start, for example, to develop all of a sudden long mimetic descriptions of "real" places and of characters; rather, she continues with her elliptic and allusive style. She borrows from cinematographic techniques and juxtaposes rapid "shots" which suggest rather than explain things. The fragmented narration follows several characters at a time, and the continuity of the narrative strands must be established by the readers as if they were assembling a puzzle, which happens to be one of Daigle's favourite hobbies. When she evokes big cities like Paris, New York, or San Francisco, she does so not to highlight their importance as centres of art and culture, but to explore the fluidity of these urban spaces which are in fact meeting places where the paths of people of the most diverse origins cross. So it is with Terry and Carmen, a young couple from Moncton, New Brunswick, who do not visit the famous monuments of Paris or important exhibitions during their first trip to Europe in *Un fin passage* (2001); rather, they are happy just to stroll along the streets, to take the *métro*, or to pause in cafés and bistros and meet people that chance puts in their way.<sup>31</sup> For example, when they meet an expatriate American painter who asks them for a description of Moncton, they have little to say at first, except that "[i]t's beautiful when it snows. In the evening" (101); but then they mention that there are in Moncton, despite everything, a great number of artists "[f]or a small place" (102); this is followed by a two-page enumeration of (real) contemporary Acadian artists' names which mean strictly nothing to the (fictional) American, but which valorise peripheral little Moncton as compared to the cultural centre of *la Francophonie*, Paris.

In another work, *Pas pire* (1998), Daigle continues the deconstruction of centre and periphery, or the relativisation and revalorisation of cultural spaces, by inscribing herself, through her name, as a character in her autofiction.<sup>32</sup> For if it is true that, according to the character France Daigle and the other Acadian characters in *Pas pire*, the literary value of Daigle's *œuvre* is increased by the writer's being (fictitiously) invited to appear on Bernard Pivot's television show *Bouillon de culture* (158), then the author Daigle does not fail to send ironic little winks to her readers by

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31 Chance is an important leitmotif with Daigle. It determines the structure of *Petites difficultés* that she wrote "on the basis of the results obtained from doing the Yi King" (interview with Boehringer 2004, 17; see also *La vraie vie* where the theme of chance plays an important role).

32 For this concept, now widely used in French critical discourse to describe texts which defy easy generic categorisations, as they vacillate between the factual and the fictional, see Marie Darrieussecq (1996) who synthesises in her article various attempts at defining the malleable genre (Serge Doubrovsky, Philippe Lejeune, Gérard Genette, Vincent Colonna) before adding her own convincing take on it. For Daigle's autofiction *Pas pire*, see Francis 2003. See also Dumontet 2004.

putting dumb-ish questions into Pivot's mouth; incidentally, the latter finds it difficult to pronounce the American first names of certain Acadians, such as Chuck Bernard's name that Pivot pronounces the French way, "Chuque Bernard." (163-64) Moreover, in a metatextual comment that Daigle has Pivot make, he admits to having the same problem that many a flesh-and-blood reader has: "[I] don't know if this is your usual style, you don't distinguish very well between reality and fiction." (153) The metatextual asides the author Daigle directs at her readers by making fun of her character Pivot continue when the television interview with Pivot ends on a few light-hearted remarks about "the autobiographical temptation" (154), symptomatic of the 1980s, that Daigle, opines Pivot, had not known how to resist (154-155). Obviously, the author knows full well that she gave in to that particular "temptation" in order to appropriate a particularly slippery genre, thus adding her own take on texts that defy easy categorisations.

By way of conclusion, I will briefly evoke Daigle's most recent novel, *Petites difficultés d'existence* (2002). Here several characters from previous texts reappear, either Monctonians like Terry and Carmen who now have a child and are expecting a second one, or characters hailing from more distant lands, like the American painter Étienne Zablonki and his wife Ludmilla. Situated in Moncton in December, against the background of the great proverbial whiteness of the Canadian winter and its snow storms, the novel encompasses a whole metadiscourse about the creative process, about the writer's famous "white page" which becomes here the "white canvas" of painting. Parallel to this autoreflexive discourse, the plot takes shape: a group of young people, some of whom are unemployed, transform an old industrial building slated for destruction into lofts. Finding an official name for the renovated building provokes an animated discussion in the group whose members invent several ludic variations such as "Loftstore," "La Warehouse" (pronounced [ouaraousse]), thus playfully underlining the interpenetration of French and English characteristic of *chiac*, the French spoken in and around Moncton, "Loftige," and others (85-87) – precisely the fun one can have with signifiers, known ever since Rabelais. The novel ends at Christmas, at a time when the transformation of the building is in full swing. The old industrial structure, which in addition to the apartment lofts will house a bookstore, an art gallery, and a bar, has thus under reconstruction become "a private open space" where the social, the economic and the artistic coexist, even get mixed together, where people of all ages, origins, and genders can live, work, and play with one another. And like in other texts by Daigle, so in *Petites difficultés*, too, lived reality and fiction intermingle, for the Wallace building, an age-old model for a space needing renovation, actually existed in Moncton. Unlike the building in the novel, the real Wallace was demolished in early October 2002, in spite of all attempts at saving it, as Doyon-Gosselin and Morency remind

us.<sup>33</sup> At the end of October 2002, a few weeks only after the demolition, France Daigle's book comes out – a true transfiguration of a concrete place into a literary, not to say utopian space, in which Acadians welcome all and the Other into their midst and will thereby be transformed themselves. The novel's closure is well chosen: by not having the end of the book coincide with the completion of the renovations and the owners' moving-in, Daigle indicates that constructing and transforming identities through and by the Other in a private open space is a never-ending process, a process she herself keeps performing over and over, as an author who has moved from experimental writing for the "chosen few" in the 1980s to her recent, more broadly appealing (auto)fictions, published since the 1990s. However, Daigle never waivers from her keen interest in and exploration of the myriad possibilities of the novel's formal potential. After the playful paradox she conceives of in *La vraie vie* where she captures "real life" only to present it in a rigid numerical structure (five chapters, each divided into two parts containing ten fragments, or  $5 \times 2 \times 10 = 100$ ), after the principle of the zodiac with the underlying number twelve that characterises *Pas pire*, after the daily structure of *Un fin passage* which is immediately undercut by having the days of the week in the chapter titles appear in a deliberately disorganised order, and after the principle of the results of the Yi King which organises *Petites difficultés d'existence* but which, one learns, has always been played with seventeen instead of its required sixteen elements (184), readers now await impatiently her next novel, tentatively entitled *Jusqu'à la fin*. As it is built on another ambitious numerical structure ( $12 \times 12 \times 12$ ), it will contain 1728 passages, with 144 narrative strands, as the author explains (cf. Daigle 2004, 25). In it, Daigle will undoubtedly continue to transgress boundaries she herself has set in order to create a multilayered textual space that is, influenced by the culture surrounding her, all of her own making.

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33 In their article (2004, 79, note 26), Doyon-Gosselin/Morency reproduce the demolition notice from *L'Acadie Nouvelle* of October 1, 2002.

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