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# France Daigle's Pour sûr: proposing a lusory critical approach

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Dissertation

**FRANCE DAIGLE'S *POUR SÛR*:  
PROPOSING A LUSORY CRITICAL APPROACH**

by

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2018

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## Dedication

In loving memory of my father, Guy J. Roy,  
who also invented bedtime stories for his children

## Acknowledgments

I am truly grateful to my advisor Dr. Odile Cazenave, who has challenged, encouraged and inspired me, and who has gone above and beyond to provide me with support and guidance throughout this entire process. Next, a huge thank you to my second reader and mentor, Dr. Jennifer Row, who consistently met me where I was and provided much-appreciated jolts of energy and intellectual stimulation when they were most needed. Special thanks also go to Dr. Dorothy Kelly, who has been a consistent and invaluable source of wisdom and support since I first arrived at BU. I am also grateful to the other members of my committee, Dr. Jeffrey Mehlman, who has provided valuable suggestions, information and encouragement at several key moments in my academic journey and Dr. Adela Pineda, for her insight, questions and willingness to share her time and expertise during this chapter of my project.

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**MONIQUE A. ROY**

Boston University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, 2018

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**ABSTRACT**

This dissertation examines the fiction of contemporary Acadian writer France Daigle and proposes a new critical approach to her latest novel, *Pour sûr*, which was published in 2011. *Pour sûr* is a 747 page polyphonic, hypertext novel written in fragments that are organized into 144 categories of 12 fragments each. The novel is notable for its metafictional, encyclopedic qualities but also for its skillful and expansive use of Chiac, the most recent iteration of Acadian French that is spoken in the Moncton/Dieppe region of New Brunswick, Canada. Chapter 1 follows the trajectory of Daigle's relationship to this language over the span of her thirty-year writing career. My analysis shows how her continued ambivalence toward Chiac is a source of a major transformation that occurs in *Pour sûr*, in which Chiac becomes a legible mode of representation that makes Daigle's creative goals possible. In chapter 2, the unusual and creative form and structure of Daigle's novels are analyzed, along with the evolution of several aspects of her work, including metafictional, structural, and thematic elements

that are present in multiple texts. I identify the innovations that make *Pour sûr* so different from the earlier novels and propose a closer analysis of its game-like qualities in particular. *Pour sûr* engages its readers and critics by requiring a high level of participation, which transforms their approach to the text. Thus, in chapter 3, I explore the ways in which this novel can be conceived of as a kind of game, and the ways in which these game-playing aspects of the text motivate readers to continue reading and re-reading it, with different experiences and interpretations each time. Here a lusory critical approach is proposed, which is informed by both reader-response criticism and more recent work in the field of game studies. Finally, I argue that Daigle, by creating a kind of hyperreality (as conceived by theorists like Jean Baudrillard and Umberto Eco), ultimately aims to shape the horizon of expectations of her reading public.

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## Introduction

If reading France Daigle's latest novel *Pour sûr* is a thrilling adventure, writing about it is to confront an "embarras de richesses" that can be paralyzing at first. The book is metafictional, encyclopedic and richly intertextual. It has been described as an exemplar of Acadian literature, written in fragments that represent the diasporic Acadian condition and in language(s) that showcase the linguistic diversity of its modern-day cultural center, the Moncton/Dieppe region of New Brunswick (*Prix littéraire*). At the same time, it is a decidedly global text, inviting a cosmopolitan and interdisciplinary analysis that considers literary traditions and critical approaches far beyond the Canadian Maritime provinces. The novel has been lauded as a masterpiece for Daigle and has been described as "plus qu'un roman" and characterized as "une sorte d'éloge des livres et de la connaissance en général" (*Prix littéraire*). Reviewers have noted its massive size, calling it a "brique,"<sup>1</sup> highlighting its weight - both real and symbolic,<sup>2</sup> and even likening the effort required to handle it when reading to a kind of physical therapy - "ergothérapie."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Brun del Re, 251.

<sup>2</sup> Lefort-Favreau, 30.

<sup>3</sup> Parayre, 343.

It has been called “un roman du débordement, de l’excès,”<sup>4</sup> “un labyrinthe rigoureusement organisé,”<sup>5</sup> and, among many other adjectives, “gargantuesque,” “déraisonnable,” “excessif,” as well as “impossible.”<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, writing critically about the novel does seem rather impossible at first. It contains many hundreds of references to other novels, writers, philosophers and theorists both in and out of the French literary tradition, well-known and obscure, along with the inclusion of a wide breadth of scientific, mathematical and historical details. This can produce a kind of sensory overload and provokes an extreme version of the “down the rabbit hole”<sup>7</sup> research that computer technology makes possible - a search about one detail leads to research about several other topics, which in turn require more research and reading, etc. There are innumerable directions that can be taken and so many critical angles to pursue that deciding among them all seems an overwhelming, even futile effort. Daigle herself seems to want it that way, using many fragments to discuss or suggest certain interpretations, then others to offer conflicting ideas or warnings of errors hidden in the text. Basically Daigle engages in a brilliant (and effective) sort of “trolling” of literary critics that necessitates, yet undermines the research they will do while anticipating and disarming certain critical approaches. The overall effect is to leave an aspiring critic like myself hesitant and stalled by a critic’s version of writer’s block.

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<sup>4</sup> Brun del Re, 251.

<sup>5</sup> Fortin.

<sup>6</sup> Tardif.

<sup>7</sup> Some commentary on this phenomenon (basically a new, evolving meaning of the term): <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-rabbit-hole-rabbit-hole>

The process of making my way through these initial challenges and obstructions resembled, in the end, a process of distillation, where the extraneous was removed and I was left with certain central questions to revisit and a clearer understanding of the reasons for which I had been drawn to Daigle's work in the first place. Practically speaking, I was forced to go back and reread everything Daigle had written before *Pour sûr*. Since there is such a marked contrast between her most recent work and the early texts in terms of the language in which Daigle writes, I was challenged to analyze her relationship to language, which was something I had initially hoped to avoid but which in the end proved a fruitful exercise in the context of this project. Finally, I was reminded that literature, and literary theory, can be a lot of fun - and embracing that fun in this case inspired me to change the way I read *Pour sûr*, and the way in which I chose to write about it.

In sum, working on Daigle's novels, especially *Pour sûr*, has had an effect on me personally as a member of the Acadian diaspora as well as in my capacity as a scholar too. For example, her engagement of Chiac has impacted my own thoughts on language and has led me to revisit my own horizon of expectations, something I discuss further in a conclusion to this dissertation. As a scholar, I have had to think more critically about just what is a reading process and what it means to be a critic too - a metacritical analysis that considers the tools and knowledge one brings to the work and also how those things impact one's enjoyment of a text. In this dissertation I retrace my steps on that journey of discovery, and I use a close analysis of Daigle's choice of forms, content and structure to

argue that *Pour sûr* is an important novel, both in the Acadian context and beyond it, in its contributions to contemporary Francophone, North American and global literature.

### A Fable as “Mise au point”

To orient us and introduce the main topics I explore in this project, I want to begin with a close look at the first pages of *Pour sûr* and a scene to which I keep returning over and over in my reading(s) of the novel. This scene, I propose, serves as an excellent “mise au point” for my approach to Daigle’s work. *Pour sûr* begins with a bedtime story - the main character Terry is telling his little boy Étienne a fable that he has himself invented. In sum, it is a story about a mouse named Souricette, who goes to university to fulfill her lifelong goal of becoming a “souris de laboratoire” when she grows up. She does indeed land her dream job and because she is one of “les six souris les plus smartes,” she is quickly promoted to participate in the most dangerous test conducted by her lab (10-11).<sup>8</sup> Souricette ignores a bad feeling she has about this test which, of course, ends in tragedy with all six mice dead after two weeks locked inside a labyrinth. The moral of the story, according to Terry, is that it is important always to pay attention to how we feel inside: “Sõ la morale de ct’histoire-icitte, c’est qu’y faut tout le

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<sup>8</sup> 4.37.7 Histoires d’animaux. *Pour sûr* is written in fragments that are numbered and labeled into categories that are listed in an index at the back of the book (more on this in chapter 2). When citing from the text, I use parenthetical citations with page numbers but I also include a footnote each time, listing the fragment’s label (category and unique number). This allows my readers to get a feel for the ways in which Daigle categorizes her fragments, but furthermore it enables them to quickly and easily find the corresponding passages in the English translation of the novel.

temps faire attention à ça qui se passe dans nous autres, à commensqu'on fiîle en-dedans” (11).<sup>9</sup> Terry explains that Souricette might have lived if she had taken note of what was bothering her - “à ça qui la bodrait”- about the test in the first place (11).<sup>10</sup> In sum, she should have heeded her “gût fëeling, ou l’intuition, comme qu’y en a qui appelont ça” (11).<sup>11</sup>

The fable contains several important lessons, or messages, for the readers of *Pour sûr* - thus introducing several topics I explore in the ensuing pages and chapters of this dissertation. First, we are introduced to Daigle’s use of Acadian French and Chiac in her dialogues and we know immediately that *there will be different ways to say things* in this novel. A “gût fëeling” is also “l’intuition or “ça qui la bodrait.” Next, the tragic ending which follows Souricette’s education at university - is it perhaps a cautionary tale? It is at least worth thinking about whether Daigle intends for us to question the usual hierarchy of knowledge and education to which we likely subscribe upon opening this text for the first time. Additionally, the choice of fable as genre is a nod to Acadian oral story-telling traditions and the early French literary traditions out of which they were born, but also to the universal themes found in this genre in every corner of the globe. It brings to mind the rules of behavior embedded in La Fontaine’s fables, for example - themselves a rewrite of Aesop’s fables - and reminds us of the satirical and educative roles that fables (and literature more broadly) often play in a society. Furthermore, the labyrinth that Terry has

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<sup>9</sup> 4.37.7 Histoires d’animaux.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

imagined prefigures some of the structural elements we will identify in the design of this novel, and the effect they have on readers too.

There are other clues, no less important, that exist outside the “cadre” of the fable - which is in itself another significant lesson about the novel, since there is a great deal more to *Pour sûr* than just its narrative parts. We take note of Terry’s keen awareness of his audience and its level of engagement, for example; he continues telling the story only if he determines that his child is still listening: “Croyant Étienne endormi, Terry s’était arrêté ici, mais il dut reprendre car Étienne bougea les jambes, sa manière de signaler qu’il ne dormait toujours pas” (10).<sup>12</sup> There is already a kind of “feedback loop” being demonstrated here between storyteller and audience, one that anticipates the high level of engagement Daigle expects of this novel’s readers. We can also read it as an economizing of resources - with Terry loath to waste his efforts on an inattentive audience:

Terry invente la plupart des histoires d’animaux qu’il raconte aux enfants à partir de détails glanés ici et là dans la vie quotidienne. Il se donne parfois le petit défi personnel de conclure avec une morale, à condition que les enfants soient encore réveillés à la fin de l’histoire, *car il n’aime pas gaspiller une morale – pas toujours facile à tricoter – sur un enfant qui dort* (12; emphasis added).<sup>13</sup>

Daigle similarly expects her readers to be alert and receptive - I explore the strategies she employs that encourage a self-reflective and meta-reading process. Finally, we learn that Terry is enjoying the story he is in the process of inventing: “Ici Terry fit une autre pause, mais il fut content qu’Étienne bouge les jambes, car il s’était lui-même pris d’intérêt pour

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<sup>12</sup> 4.37.7 Histoires d’animaux.

<sup>13</sup> 8.37.1 Histoires d’animaux.

l’histoire qu’il confectionnait à mesure” (11).<sup>14</sup> Again, in this example the act of creation is an interactive one, with the author needing a reaction of some kind from his audience; it is also a shared experience, with both author and audience enjoying the story as it is being created.

In a 2013 interview with Andrea Cabajsky, Daigle uses language that suggests that she sees this novel as a shared experience between her readers and herself:

En écrivant ce livre, je me disais qu’il faudrait que le lecteur puisse lire et avancer dans la même sorte de surprise, ou de plaisir, que finalement moi j’avais à l’écrire. Je voulais que le lecteur aussi partage un peu la nouveauté ou juste le sentiment vif de créer, d’être dans quelque chose que l’on n’attend pas nécessairement (Cabajsky *Le sentiment vif* 250).

In the following pages and chapters, I argue that Daigle has succeeded in establishing this novel as a shared experience that in the end not only transforms the Acadian literary landscape but also the way in which Acadians understand their role in that landscape.

## Chapter Descriptions

In chapter 1, I take a necessary (if initially reluctant) hard look at Daigle’s relationship to language, specifically Chiac, the most recent iteration of Acadian French that is spoken in the Moncton/Dieppe region of New Brunswick, Canada, where Daigle’s work is set.<sup>15</sup> I describe the Acadian context and the important role played by Acadian French and now Chiac in the artistic production by Acadian writers over the years from

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<sup>14</sup> 4.37.7 Histoires d’animaux.

<sup>15</sup> Moncton and Dieppe are adjacent cities, located in the southeastern part of New Brunswick at the geographic center of the Atlantic Provinces of Canada.

the 1970s through today. I then follow the trajectory of Daigle's approach to Chiac in her novels, starting from a studied avoidance of the language in the first part of her writing career, moving to a shift toward including the language that occurs in the late 1990s and finally culminating in a skillful and expansive use of it in the dialogues of her latest novel, *Pour sûr*. I analyze Daigle's continued ambivalence toward Chiac and I argue that this ambivalence is actually the source of a major transformation that occurs in *Pour sûr*, in which Chiac becomes a legible mode of representation that makes possible the realization of several of her creative goals. The chapter ends with a short analysis of the ways in which Chiac and language issues more broadly are approached by Robert Majzels in the English translations of several of Daigle's novels.

Chapter 2 focuses on the unusual form and structure of Daigle's novels over the course of her thirty year career, not just at the level of genre but also in the way the texts are organized. Her first novels are short like poetry chapbooks and play with the layout of words upon the page; her latest novel *Pour sûr* is conceptualized as a massive, hypertextual cube. My analysis is multifaceted and moves from descriptions of the "axes" of rotation (both structural and thematic) that we can identify in virtually all of Daigle's novels to the metafictional aspects of her novels and the pervasive influence of theater we recognize in her later texts. Daigle's collaboration with a theater troupe in the late 1990s had an effect on the novels she has written since then. Finally, I identify the structural innovations that make *Pour sûr* so distinct from her previous texts - no longer just the layouts on the page but now in terms of a kind of three-dimensional architecture - and I

argue that the playful, game-like aspects of the text warrant a closer look in the next chapter.

Chapter 3 opens with an analysis of these game-like aspects and the ways in which they engage *Pour sûr*'s readers and critics, motivating them to read and re-read the text and requiring a high level of participation that transforms their experience(s) and interpretation(s) of the novel. I propose a ludic critical approach that is informed by both reader-response criticism (Wolfgang Iser, Hans Robert Jauss) and more recent work in the field of game studies (work by Espen Aarseth, Janet Murray, Henry Jenkins and Eric Zimmerman, among others). I also examine the way in which Daigle, in her last four novels (*Pas pire*, *Un fin passage*, *Petites difficultés d'existences*, and *Pour sûr*), blends reality with fiction in order to create a hybrid universe. I propose that our analysis of this hybrid universe can be informed by the concept of hyperreality (as proposed by Jean Baudrillard in *Simulacra and Simulations* [1981] and also developed by Umberto Eco in *Travels in Hyperreality* [1983] where reality becomes increasingly indistinguishable from a simulation of it and the simulation can be consumed as real. Finally, I argue that it is through this creation of a hyperreality that Daigle ultimately aims to shape and transform the horizon of expectations of her reading public.

## Chapter 1: Daigle and Chiac, *Pour sûr?*

*Pour sûr.* Cette expression vient-elle seulement de l'anglais *for sure*? Tant pis. La gradation de *Pas pire* à *Pour sûr* me va, d'autant plus que *pour sûr* fait un petit pied de nez au cliché langagier *sûr et certain*, que je place dans la même catégorie que *la langue de Molière* et *la langue de Shakespeare*. Ai-je parlé de mon rapport d'amour-haine à la langue? (694-695)<sup>16</sup>

This fragment, appearing only near the very end of the novel *Pour sûr*, serves as a perfect dénouement of the text, for it at once ties everything together and, well, undoes it again too. The passage articulates a feeling that will be familiar to readers by this point in the novel, the feeling that nothing here is ever what it seems. It also names the prevailing mood upon which this entire novel has been built, a frame of mind that serves as a framework for the text - ambivalence.

The narrator's love-hate relationship to language is mirrored by my own ambivalence, as a critic, toward the task of addressing the topic of language in Daigle's work. Language, for any Acadian writer, is a complicated subject and by extension a difficult task for critics analyzing their work. It is a topic that many scholars have examined and one I was hoping to avoid in this project. And yet, what I realized is that it remains virtually impossible to write critically about France Daigle's work without paying significant attention to the question of language, and more specifically to Chiac. Furthermore, in the same way that the fragment above, although appearing toward the

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<sup>16</sup> 1627.81.5 Titres.

end of the novel, holds significant clues about a key aspect of the text, Daigle's latest novel, the most recent of her thirty year career, provides important insights into Daigle's previous novels and her development as a writer too. In both cases, Chiac plays a key role.

In this chapter, I first place Daigle's work in context, providing some history about the important and complicated role of language in Acadian literature over time. Next, I examine the evolving role of Chiac in Daigle's work over her 30 year career, paying particular attention to her ambivalence toward the language and how she makes that so obvious in her latest novels. Finally, I focus on this ambivalence and argue that it is the key to understanding a shift that occurs in Daigle's latest novel *Pour sûr* - a shift in her relationship to Chiac that has major implications for her work and its reception by her readers.

### Historical Context

Language has been a complicated subject for Acadians writers since the beginning. During the Grand Dérangement (the Great Expulsion) of Acadians from their homeland by the British in 1755, Acadians were dispersed, dispossessed and silenced. The first written depiction of the Acadian experience of the Grand Dérangement came nearly a century later, in the form of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's epic poem "Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie" (1847), and it was written, of course, in English. It took another hundred years before an Acadian, Antonine Maillet, wrote her own version of the

story, and she chose to do so in Acadian French, the variety of French spoken by Acadians in the Atlantic Provinces.<sup>17</sup>

Maillet is considered by many scholars to be the founder of Acadian literature. In her novel *Pélagie-la-charrette* (1979) a heroic (and outspoken) female protagonist leads a return to the homeland, which, as Rosemary Lyons has observed, serves to deconstruct “Longfellow’s version” (6) of the Acadian story, offering a powerful counternarrative to his story of a meek (and silent) Evangéline and Acadian population (6). Jean-Luc Desalvo has examined the way in which this novel rewrites history, by creating “confusion between history and storytelling, blurring the normally well-defined boundary between the two” (240). Janet Giltrow and David Stouck have explored the ways in which Maillet successfully made the leap from an oral tradition to a written one, writing: “In adopting certain epic conventions arising from the oral tradition, Maillet invokes the context of performance and tradition for her narrative of the Acadian people, repositioning these conventions in a modern, literate genre” (743). In sum, Maillet’s choice to write a new version of the story, in the language of her people, has been

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<sup>17</sup> Philip Comeau and Ruth King write : “Acadian French’ refers to varieties of French spoken in Atlantic Canada [ ] – mainly in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland – which owe their origins to immigration from the centre-west of France during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Structurally distinct from Quebec French, Acadian French preserves a number of linguistic features lost in other French varieties due to its relative isolation from other varieties until fairly recently and, in many regions, due to limited access to French education” (Comeau, 181). One related item may be of interest especially to my readers at Boston University: the first (known) linguistic study done of Acadian French was conducted by James Geddes, Jr., late professor of Romance Languages at Boston University (and for whom the Geddes Language Center is named). His results, a “Study of An Acadian-French Dialect: Spoken on the North Shore of the Baie-Des-Chaleurs,” published in 1908, can now be accessed online at the Internet Archive <https://archive.org/details/studyacadianf00geddgoog>.

described by scholars such as Eloise Brière as a powerful postcolonial intervention and “part of a project by the French of North America to construct a *language-based* identity that defines their New World experience” (3-4; emphasis added).

Acadian writers have grappled with this *language-based* aspect of Acadian identity ever since.<sup>18</sup> In recent years, as Acadian French has become more accepted - and even celebrated - by writers and the general public in the region, Chiac has replaced it as the site of anxiety and resistance in the Acadian psyche. It falls to contemporary writers to make a choice - do they, should they, use Chiac in their work or not? Chiac is a somewhat recent phenomenon (generally accepted to have appeared starting in the 1960s); it is characterized by its integration of English language elements (Boudreau, A. 443).<sup>19</sup> Chiac speakers today still experience stigma and negative attitudes from French (Acadian and Quebec) speakers who feel that Chiac represents a contamination of French by the English language of the majority.

At the same time, many artists and writers see Chiac as a creative form of expression, and their work is seen as part of a movement to legitimize and celebrate the language. A first wave of Acadian artists, for instance the poet Gérald LeBlanc, began using Chiac in their work in the ‘80s and ‘90s. Now, a new generation has taken up the cause, including artists and writers such as Dano LeBlanc (creator of *Acadieman*) and musicians including: Marie-Jo Thériou, Mario “Fayo” LeBlanc, Caroline Savoie and Lisa

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<sup>18</sup> Many have written on this subject as well. One very useful essay is “Linguistic schizophrenia: the poetics of Acadian identity construction,” by Irene Gammel and J.P. Boudreau.

<sup>19</sup> The word “Chiac” is believed to be derived from “Shédiac,” a town just 20 miles northeast of Moncton (Boudreau, A. 450).

LeBlanc (all singer-songwriters), and Gabriel Malenfant, Jacques Doucet and Timo Richard (members of the rap group Radio-Radio). More recently, young artists like Xavier Gould (who plays a popular Chiac-speaking YouTube character named Jass-Sainte Bourque) have harnessed social media sites like Facebook to share their work.<sup>20</sup> In recent years, electronic media like YouTube and Facebook has allowed videos, images and texts that feature Chiac to be shared nationally and internationally in unprecedented ways. This is having an impact in terms of popular culture - Moncton is becoming known for this linguistic particularity, which is in turn changing how Acadian culture and ethnic identity are represented. I discuss this further in my conclusion.

### In the Beginning

For France Daigle, the relationship to Chiac has been a reluctant progression. Although she has always been comfortable using Acadian French, Daigle was initially very resistant to incorporating the English language elements that distinguish Chiac. For Acadians of Daigle's generation, Chiac has a negative, even shameful connotation. Speaking Chiac means losing a battle - the battle to preserve the Acadian French language in a specific geographic context where this Francophone minority is surrounded

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<sup>20</sup> For those who wish to learn more about the history and context of Acadian French and Chiac, two excellent documentaries are readily available online on the National Film Board of Canada's website: The first, *Éloge du chiac*, is 27 minutes long, was directed by Michel Brault and released in 1969 ([https://www.nfb.ca/film/eloge\\_du\\_chiac/](https://www.nfb.ca/film/eloge_du_chiac/)). The second, *Éloge du chiac - Partie 2*, is 77 minutes long, directed by Marie Cadieux and released in 2009 as a follow-up to the first ([https://www.nfb.ca/film/eloge\\_du\\_chiac\\_part\\_2/](https://www.nfb.ca/film/eloge_du_chiac_part_2/)).

by an Anglophone majority. New Brunswick is the only officially bilingual province in Canada (French and English, since 1969)<sup>21</sup> and only a third of its population is Francophone and of Acadian origin. As Daigle has explained, in the 2013 interview with Andrea Cabajsky of the University of Moncton:

J'ai été élevée en apprenant, comme bien d'autres, que la vraie langue, c'est le français. Le chiac, c'est un accident ou une négligence ou une paresse ou une défaillance, mais ce n'est pas la langue à promouvoir. C'est un sous-produit du français dans ce contexte-ci, dans cette région-ci. Donc, c'était négatif (Cabajsky *Le sentiment vif* 251).

Daigle refused to use any Chiac at all in her first published work, but the only way she could achieve this was to avoid using dialogues almost completely. She has described this as a “blocage total” (Cabajsky *Le sentiment vif* 251) and has explained that for her, the choice was either to use Chiac in her characters' dialogues, or to eliminate dialogues altogether, since animating her characters without including any of the local Chiac would simply not do:

...je savais que je n'écrivais pas de dialogue parce que j'avais ce problème avec la langue à employer dans le dialogue. Pour moi, ça n'avait aucun sens de faire du dialogue en français standard, sauf quand ça pouvait s'appliquer. Mais faire parler les gens d'ici en français tout à fait correct, standard, c'était insensé<sup>22</sup> (Cabajsky *Le sentiment vif* 251-252).

Daigle's first novels are experimental and do not present a narrative in the manner of a traditional novel. They are short in length and composed of short passages of standard

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<sup>21</sup> See <http://officiallanguages.nb.ca/faq>. For more information: <http://officiallanguages.nb.ca/publications-links-other/history-official-languages>.

<sup>22</sup> Words like “blocage” and “insensé” have psychological implications - in many of her novels (and especially *Pour sûr*) Daigle makes references to psychoanalysis and influential French psychoanalysts like Jacques Lacan. See footnote 34.

French. Most pages contain only one passage surrounded by a lot of blank space, in this way resembling poetry more than prose.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, Daigle's style favors simple sentences and sentence fragments (sometimes of one single word). For example, a typical passage in her first book, *Sans jamais parler du vent* (1983) starts with these three sentences: "Prendre son temps. Une ponctuation lente, espacée. La maison qui se construit, essayer parfois de l'habiter"(21). An entire passage (i.e. an entire page) in her second book, *Film d'amour et de dépendance* (1984) reads: "Sa maison était faite de bois et de terre. Tapie dans les herbes devant la mer" (24). She pushes this brevity to an extreme in her third novel, *Histoire de la maison qui brûle* (1985), which contains even shorter passages (i.e. entire pages) such as: "Et la maison brûlait. Om"(27). The effect is a prose that observes, *describing* rather than *explaining* and leaving much to be interpreted by the reader.

Pushing this last point to an extreme, these novels are a kind of prose poetry, a series of vignettes that illustrate scenes a reader can visualize. Daigle primes us for this interpretation, calling her second novel a "film" after all. The novels also behave a bit like graphic novels, except that they do not contain actual pictures, rather there are passages of text describing the images we are supposed to imagine. In *Variations en B et K*, Daigle fully realizes this idea with short passages of small text at the bottom of each page that are meant to be "captions" of photos that are not actually visible in the book. In

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<sup>23</sup> I explore this further in Chapter 2.

the void left by the absence of characters speaking an authentic living language, Daigle has developed an alternative way to populate her texts.

When Daigle's full oeuvre is considered, her early novels are like a backdrop or theatrical scenery and her process of writing these novels is akin to a kind of set construction, complete with some minor characters who basically function as part of the background.<sup>24</sup> When Daigle finally introduces protagonists who speak Chiac in her later novels, it is like an overlay of living, breathing characters onto the existing backdrop - she is now populating the fictional world she had previously created. To readers who are familiar with Daigle's previous body of work, her latest novel *Pour sûr* does feel like a "do-over" of sorts. Using narrative passages featuring a variety of characters (protagonists as well as minor characters), essay style fragments and expository passages, Daigle starts from the beginning (especially in regard to Chiac and her relationship to it) and then takes her readers with her on the entire trajectory of self-discovery and ethnic identity development.<sup>25</sup>

With regard to ethnic identity development, it has been noted that Daigle's trajectory as a writer is somewhat unusual. As Acadian literary scholar Raoul Boudreau argues, her early novels eschewed realism in an unexpected way for an author in a "minor" literary context. About *Sans jamais parler du vent*, Boudreau writes: "On ne peut guère imaginer un texte plus éloigné du réalisme" (Boudreau, *Le rapport* 34). He

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<sup>24</sup> *Élizabeth, Claude* and *Hans* are examples of this - I discuss them again in subsequent chapters.

<sup>25</sup> This is something that is developed further in Chapter 3.

explains further : “Avec ce premier roman, France Daigle s’inscrit d’emblée dans un formalisme radicalement étranger à la littérature acadienne et anachronique par rapport au développement des littératures émergentes” (35). Boudreau argues that Daigle’s artistic journey took an unconventional path compared to other writers in emerging literary contexts. In contrast to these other writers, including some of her “*engagés*” Acadian contemporaries like Gérald LeBlanc, Claude Le Bouthiller and Herménégilde Chiasson, Daigle did not obviously anchor her first novels in her ethnic and cultural context, she came to this later in her writing career (34-37). At the same time, Daigle’s rejection of Chiac is actually a fundamentally *Acadian* act because it is an example of a kind of cultural and linguistic silencing that is fundamentally Acadian. Even her titles and subtitles of the period evoke this silencing, with vocabulary like “sans jamais parler” and “obscur” as well as an emphasis on the visual over written expression, with “dernier regard” in the subtitle of the third novel, for example. Her second book is even titled “*Film d’amour et de dépendance*” as though it might be a work of visual arts - it is not actually a film or screenplay, but it does discuss a hypothetical film project and describes various potential scenes, camera angles, etc. At the very least, it is clear that the “Chiac problem” has had a considerable impact on the structure and style of France Daigle’s writing from the beginning and even in the *absence* of the language from her work.

After Daigle's long non-Chiac beginning phase,<sup>26</sup> the late 1990s were a watershed moment. Between 1997 and 2000, Daigle wrote three plays in collaboration with a theater troupe based in Moncton N.B; *Moncton sable* (1997), *Craie* (1999) and *Foin* (2000). In the dialogues of these plays, for the first time in her career, she permitted herself the use of some Chiac. For her, theater wasn't as serious a medium – she felt she could experiment, have fun with it. In the 2013 Cabajsky interview, Daigle is very clear on this point: “Un moment donné on m’a invitée à faire des pièces de théâtre. J’en ai fait, donc là, j’ai glissé, parce que pour moi, le théâtre, ce n’est pas sérieux. Le théâtre, on s’amuse une soirée. Alors là, je me permettait de mettre du chiac – pas nécessairement du gros chiac – mais je me suis comme apaisée par rapport à toute cette question-là petit à petit” (*Le sentiment vif* 252).

Not surprisingly, Daigle's experiments with Chiac in the theater had an effect on her novels of the same period. Starting with *Pas pire*, in 1998, she began to include a bit of Chiac, animating and developing a cast of very compelling characters who would have recurring roles in the ensuing novels - *Un fin passage* (2001), *Petites difficultés d'existence* (2002) and *Pour sûr* (2011).<sup>27</sup> In Daigle's own words, these first experiments with Chiac were “gentle:” “Même dans les quelques livres avant *Pour sûr*, il y a du chiac.

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<sup>26</sup> Daigle wrote eight novels during this first phase : *Sans jamais parler du vent*, 1983; *Film d'amour et de dépendance*, 1984; *Histoire de la maison qui brûle*, 1985; *Variations en B et K*, 1985; *L'Été avant la mort*, 1986; *La Beauté de l'affaire*, 1991; *La Vraie Vie*, 1993; and *1953: Chronique d'une naissance annoncée*, 1995.

<sup>27</sup> Daigle has admitted that she made Terry and Carmen recurring characters because her readers liked them so much (Leblanc and Brown, *Interview France Daigle*). This is explored further in Chapter 3.

Mais c'est quand même assez doux" (252). She included a bit of Chiac in *Pas pire*, a little more in *Un fin passage* and more again in *Petites difficultés*....

In the first of these novels, *Pas pire*, one narrative thread introduces Terry Thibodeau and Carmen Després for the first time. Terry and Carmen are young Acadians who live in Moncton, New Brunswick. They meet each other mid-way through the novel, by the end of it they are a couple, and in subsequent novels their relationship develops even further. In *Pas pire*, Terry and Carmen (mainly Terry) speak a very mild form of Chiac - for reference, here are a few examples taken directly from the text: “-Faullait, pour ma job” (136), “- Toi? As-tu quelqu’un de famous dans ta famille?”(141), “-*But* y m’a donné sa carte”(190). This “mild” Chiac is basically a vernacular Acadian French that only very rarely (a word here and there) incorporates English language elements. We should note that in this first text, Daigle has not yet developed a standardized system by which to write in Chiac. In the examples I give here, one English word, “but,” is italicized but the other two, “job” and “famous,” are not distinguished in any way from the words in French. This is something with which she will experiment in later novels, as I explore later in this chapter.

In a separate narrative thread of *Pas pire*, Daigle herself appears as an actual character who interacts with some of the fictional characters in the book (although notably never with Terry and Carmen).<sup>28</sup> The narrative containing the Daigle surrogate

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<sup>28</sup> There is one previous novel in which Daigle appears as a character - *1953: Chronique*... - but in that case the character, Bébé M, is meant to represent Daigle as a baby.

character centers on her agoraphobia and the challenges she faces in accepting an invitation from Bernard Pivot to appear on his literary TV program in Paris, *Bouillon de culture*. This Daigle character does not speak Chiac, but several of the Acadian characters who interact with her do.<sup>29</sup>

Daigle's first forays into using Chiac in her novels seem timid and hesitant. In contrast to the way in which she approached it in her plays, this is no longer "s'amuser une soirée" but rather a slow, difficult process rife with challenges and trepidation. It is not insignificant that the part of *Pas pire* in which Terry is introduced for the first time is entitled "Thérapie d'exposition" (57). Exposure therapy. Here, Daigle is talking about the narrator's agoraphobia.<sup>30</sup> She goes on to describe her "coming out" as agoraphobic to a friend, Marie. She describes efforts she undertakes to try to ease into going places... a slow process that resembles something like exposure therapy. In one such example she writes :

Alors je ralentis, je mets la pédale douce. Ainsi, parfois, quand j'ai la présence d'esprit qu'il faut pour avancer tout doucement, les choses se replacent, prennent une plus juste dimension, font en sorte qu'il devient possible d'avancer. L'erreur, c'est peut-être de vouloir aller trop vite, ou d'en vouloir trop, tout simplement (109).

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<sup>29</sup> Raoul Boudreau examines the linguistic diversity in *Pas pire* in his chapter "Les français de *Pas pire* de France Daigle," in a 2000 book by Robert Viau, *La création littéraire dans le contexte de l'exiguïté*. This is something I discuss later in this chapter, in the section about *Pour sûr* that showcases the vast spectrum of linguistic diversity in contemporary Moncton/Dieppe.

<sup>30</sup> On the subject of exposure therapy, I would like to think further about the collective trauma of the Great Deportation (Grand Dérangement) and the ways in which Daigle handles that in her work, often through humor (there is a fragment in *Pour sûr* that I discuss in Chapter 3 which is a fantastic example of this - a construction sign with an unintended message in translation). One of Daigle's theatrical plays, *Foin*, stages children playing in a barn (a recognizable site of Acadian trauma, when barns were burned down and villages razed). [HYPERLINK: Click on the number 144 to go to the footnote and passage in question.](#)

But beyond the France Daigle character's agoraphobia surely the concept of exposure therapy also offers a means of conceptualizing the first tentative uses of Chiac by an author who studiously avoided it for the first fifteen years of her career. The character's agoraphobia and self-directed exposure therapy serve as stand-ins for Daigle's initial reticence and subsequent timid experiments with using Chiac. Certainly the two processes begin similarly - Daigle eases into the use of Chiac - "c'est quand même assez doux" - in a way that mimics her France Daigle character's short forays in her car - "je mets la pédale douce" - softly, carefully, gently.

Daigle may not make the connection directly, but for an informed reader the passages about agoraphobia easily double as passages about the author's complicated relationship to Chiac. In *Pas pire*, shortly after the introduction of her Chiac-speaking characters, we find the following fragment:

Je sentais bien qu'il fallait que je me décolonise, que je m'affranchisse, mais je ne savais pas par où commencer. Je me sentais grosse et divisée comme l'Afrique, affaiblie, envahie, mal coordonnée, primitive et paradoxale. De sorte qu'il me devint presque impossible de faire un pas dans un sens ou dans l'autre (103).<sup>31</sup>

In the same way that the France Daigle character must free herself from her fear of travel in order to get to the literary program interview, it appears that France Daigle the author

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<sup>31</sup> Daigle makes some interesting word choices here - the fragment offers an image of Africa that reinforces certain stereotypical depictions and colonial vocabulary. Does Daigle do this unconsciously or is she purposefully using this language to highlight the complications inherent to discussions of post-colonial conditions in different parts of the world? This is related to debates in contemporary scholarship about the history of the Acadian deportation - some scholars (like John Mack Faragher) have compared it to a kind of ethnic cleansing but others believe that takes it too far. HYPERLINK: See footnote 145.

must free herself of this fear of using Chiac in order to move forward in her literary career. And in both cases, there is a kind of liberating, decolonizing dimension to the process. It is noteworthy that the voyage the France Daigle character needs to undertake is a trip “back to France.” For Daigle the character, the trip to France is a necessary evil, a required part of her profession as a writer, made especially challenging as a result of her agoraphobia. For Daigle the author, the trip to France<sup>32</sup> represents a kind of necessary confrontation with the linguistic and cultural hegemon - made especially challenging due to her own ambivalence toward Chiac. France (the country) is not known for easily recognizing or celebrating linguistic variations, especially those occurring in regions outside of the hexagon. The experiences had by Daigle the character during her trip to France address this reality head-on.

In a first example, Daigle and her travel companion, a friend named Camil Gaudain, notice that French people in Paris mistake them for Americans, and barely give them the time of day.

Au cours de la journée précédant l’enregistrement de *Bouillon de culture*, nous nous sommes promenés tout à fait librement dans Paris, Camil et moi, le temps de nous refaire l’oreille aux accents et aux intonations et, passant sans doute pour des touristes américains, de nous faire répondre en anglais plus souvent qu’à notre goût. Quand nous étions fatigués, nous nous arrêtions dans des cafés.

- C’est étrange. C’est comme si y nous entendaient pas.

- Je sais.

[...]

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<sup>32</sup> Author’s note: I read *Pas pire* for the first time in the winter of 2001 working in France as teaching assistant on a language study abroad program for Dartmouth students in Lyon. I inadvertently left my copy of the book in a corridor at the university (Lumière Lyon II) and have always wondered about who might have picked it up and been (hopefully) introduced to France Daigle and her work as a result.

- Peut-être qu'y'entendent personne vraiment.
- Y'a ça aussi (176).

Daigle thus highlights a kind of linguistic deafness of the French, a deafness to different versions of French, like the Acadian French spoken in New Brunswick, but she also immediately casts Acadians as part of a larger global community - with the “Peut-être qu'y'entendent personne vraiment” the narrator suggests that it is the French who are isolating themselves from everyone else (in their inability to hear them). In *Pas pire*, we sense that Daigle is at least partly concerned with a goal to be recognized, noticed, seen. In a fragment that comes earlier in the text (before the trip to France), the text's narrator/protagonist muses about the reasons for which she writes. Some notable lines include:

Et puis, qu'est-ce que je leur dirais à *Bouillon de culture*?...

...Que tout est affaire de *légitimation*? Légitimité de ce que nous sommes aux yeux du monde et à nos propres yeux. Être et paraître. Par/être, être par. Voir et être vu. Reconnu...

...Et enfin, peut-être que oui, pour toutes ces raisons, écrire (132; emphasis added).

This question about legitimacy is not surprising given the Acadian context in which Daigle writes. From the beginning, Acadian writers have been concerned with establishing legitimacy, in the eyes of France, of Québec, of themselves. But Daigle doesn't sound so sure. Her question betrays a palpable uncertainty about the subject. This prefigures an important change we will see in *Pour sûr* - one I will discuss later in this chapter.

For now, we make note of Daigle's use of vocabulary that is related to the visual realm rather than the auditory. We are, with *Pas pire*, at the very beginning of a marked transition in Daigle's writing - up until this novel, she has employed a more visual, descriptive style made necessary by her avoidance of Chiac.<sup>33</sup> Her tentative use of Chiac in this novel is transformative in that it marks a move towards her development of an Acadian voice that demands to be *heard*. And this Acadian voice is not one single voice, but many - a kind of chorus of voices, expressed through conversations between characters, infused with Chiac. This is something we will see pushed to an extreme in *Pour sûr*, which has too many different characters to count, many of them Acadians speaking different versions or registers of Chiac and Acadian French. But Daigle has already established this precedent here in *Pas pire*, with a novel composed of three different narrative threads featuring different Acadian characters. These threads, although theoretically independent from each other, also relate to each other in various ways, both explicit and implicit. I will examine this more closely in the next chapters, but for now it is worth highlighting some of the ways in which the threads exist in a kind of conversation with each other around the topics of language, culture and the relationship of Acadians to the French.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> This is something I explore in Chapter 2.

<sup>34</sup> To explore further: A ubiquitous presence of references and allusions to psychoanalysis in this text. Lacan and Freud are referred to in countless fragments. Psychoanalysis can be considered one of the structural axes or narrative threads I describe in chapter 2, at least in the last four novels. (HYPERLINK: Click on the number 62 to skip ahead to that page.) Daigle includes fragments about Lacan's work on language - one example on page 127: "De nombreuses trouvailles de Lacan tirent leur origine des miroitements du langage, du langage comme révélateur. En effet, Lacan trouvait dans la parole de ses analysants la nature réelle du mécanisme qui leur nuisait. Aussi dut-il inventer

We observe, for example, that the passages featuring France Daigle's trip to France are interwoven with passages of the Terry/Carmen narrative thread that feature Terry's random encounters with French people, culture and language too. Terry, who has recently started work as a river boat captain, is chosen to pilot a special excursion for a group of foreign dignitaries - Francophones in town to plan an upcoming "Sommet de la francophonie" to be hosted by Moncton in the following year (156). This makes him nervous and Carmen tries to distract him by giving him a few *Astérix* books (this becomes significant later, as Carmen is already adopting a role she fully inhabits in later novels - that of a teacher who favors traditional French language and culture and attempts to transmit that knowledge and appreciation to Terry).<sup>35</sup> On the big day, with his group of special guests on board, Terry's boat gets stuck in a dyke for an hour. Nervous, one member of the delegation, a French writer,<sup>36</sup> comes over to smoke a cigarette and strikes up a conversation with Terry. They have a series of humorous misunderstandings due to colloquial linguistic differences:

– J'ai pas de veine.

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quantité de nouveaux mots et recombinaison nombre de locutions pour faire comprendre comment - et à quel point - l'inconscient se manifeste par le langage" (127). Another topic for future exploration/commentary : The ways in which Daigle writes up lists of canonical French authors, classifying and reclassifying them in different ways - alphabetically by name, chronologically by date of birth, in order of their appearances in the *Bibliothèque idéale*. In this way Daigle reinforces the authority and visibility of French letters/Belles Lettres while at the same time undermining them with these lists that don't mean anything. Additionally they are interspersed with numbers, lists of mathematical equations, etc.

<sup>35</sup> It is worth noting the humorous juxtaposition of cultural registers in *Pour sûr*, high and low culture are side by side, Belles lettres and "canonical" BDs such as *Astérix*. There is also a certain disconnect in using such texts to explain francophonie.

<sup>36</sup> Various clues seem to point to Pierre Michon as the French writer upon which this character might be based. He is from La Creuse and wrote *Vies minuscules*....

Un peu figé, Terry ne s'aventura pas à répondre, mais il jeta un coup d'œil furtif aux poignets de l'homme, à tout hasard (182).

–Moi je déteste. Ça me donne les boules.

Terry essaya de s'imaginer ce que ça pouvait vouloir dire d'avoir des boules. Il ne savait pas non plus quelle grosseur de boules imaginer. Il pensa simultanément à des boules à mites et à des boules de billard. Comme l'homme à côté de lui restait là sans parler, il finit par le trouver plutôt humain, voulut l'encourager (183).

Despite these initial communication challenges, the two enjoy each other's company and Terry finds himself answering the French writer's questions about regional geography and life in Moncton. He finds it challenging to describe what the Petitcodiac river looks like in the winter months and discusses this with Carmen later: “– Ben, faullait que j'y pense. J'avais jamais essayé de dire ça de ma vie. T'as jamais besoin de le dire quand tout le monde le voit” (189). He does, however, see some value in the exercise, “Terry réalisa que le fait de voir ce paysage si familier à travers les yeux des délégués étrangers venait ajouter à sa compréhension” (177).

Meanwhile, in concurrent scenes of the other narrative thread, the France Daigle character is experiencing a similar process in her interview with Bernard Pivot on his *Bouillon de culture* program, scenes in which she and Bernard Pivot discuss the book we are reading, *Pas pire*. In one part of the interview, Pivot asks her about who is responsible for maintaining language and the arts in the Moncton/Dieppe region:

...Et qui s'occupe de la langue, des arts?

– Bien, un peu tout le monde, et un peu personne.

– Et ça fonctionne?

– Vous devriez venir voir. Vous pourriez juger par vous-même (185-186).

With the line “un peu tout le monde, et un peu personne,” the France Daigle character describes a democratization of language and the arts that is distinctly unlike the French approach (and Bernard Pivot is duly skeptical). With this exchange, Daigle (our real author) begins to make a case for a collaborative, community-based stewardship of language and the arts. This is a foundational idea, both in the sense of it being radical - we have a clear break from the French hierarchical approach to maintaining language and culture from the top down (through l’Académie française) - and also in the sense that it is an idea that becomes a fundamental aspect of Daigle’s work in all of her subsequent novels, as we will see.

In another part of the interview (a discussion of the narrator’s agoraphobia), the Daigle character impresses Pivot with her knowledge of French psychiatry (specifically the work of Jean Delay) and he exclaims, “ – Dites donc. Vous ne lisez pas qu’Antonine Maillet, en Acadie!” (179). Daigle replies, “Non, nous ne lisons pas qu’elle. Mais son œuvre nous aide beaucoup à nous lire nous-mêmes, comme peuple. Les révolutions ne sont pas toutes sanglantes. Certaines passent même inaperçues. Un jour, comme ça, on découvre qu’elles ont eu lieu” (179). In fact, *Pas pire* is just such a revolution, and not just because it depicts an Acadian author holding her own in a French literary milieu. *Pas pire* is the start of a Chiac revolution in Daigle’s work (one that works in a similar fashion, too - going unnoticed until one realizes later that it has occurred). With these first tentative uses of Chiac, Daigle is upending her relationship to the language and thereby joining her Acadian contemporaries who had already been using Chiac in their

work. Starting with *Pas pire*, Daigle's novels begin to stage the complicated relationship all Acadians have with language, depicting the decisions that Acadians (artists and otherwise) must constantly make as they negotiate a linguistic landscape that pits the French they have inherited from their ancestors against the English of the Anglophone majority that surrounds them geographically and culturally. Despite the serious nature of this negotiation, Daigle chooses to depict it in a lighthearted, almost silly manner in *Pas pire*, in a scene in which Terry and Carmen discuss the idea of going on a vacation somewhere for the winter months. Carmen proposes a trip to either Louisiana or France - and suggests they decide by playing a game of pool - if he wins they'll go to Louisiana, if she wins, they'll go to France (169). There is something significant, for an Acadian, in having to choose between these two options. Travel to either place might be conceived of as a kind of pilgrimage. Louisiana is the place where many Acadians ended up settling after the Grand Dérangement. And France is at once a place of origin for Acadians and another post-Grand Dérangement destination. Some would argue that the choice represents a kind of crossroads that contemporary Acadians confront constantly, at least in regards to the language that they choose to speak. France represents, well, standard French, "Académie French," while Louisiana might represent a move toward American English. Many contemporary Acadians essentially choose to exist at the crossroads itself, constantly negotiating between the two languages rather than to favor one over the other. This is, in broad strokes, one way to define Chiac.

Carmen's proposal to decide the trip destination via a game of pool is a pivotal aspect to this scene:

– On décidera sus une game de pool. Si tu gagnes, on va en Louisiane; si moi je gagne, on va en France.

Terry se retourna enfin, mais lentement, puis s'assit, comme si tout cela était très sérieux.

– Tu veux dire pour tout l'hiver?

– Aussi longtemps qu'on pourra. On reviendra au printemps. Ou on restera plusse longtemps. On sait jamais, peut-être qu'on voudra pas s'en venir.

Terry regarda le visage de Carmen. Il essayait de voir si une chose aussi importante pouvait se décider de cette façon. Il crut comprendre que oui (169).

In the same way that Terry and Carmen will gamble to decide “une chose aussi importante,” Daigle's turn toward Chiac as a literary tool in this text for the first time in her career is equally a major creative gamble. And the game in question is a cue sport which has a less than reputable connotation, bringing to mind seedy, smoke-filled bars and hustlers who might try to cheat an unsuspecting player. Furthermore, the pool game here is a model of cause and effect without deep intentionality, which underscores at once the absurdity of looking for a deeper cause and the futility in trying to make some kind of artificial choice between these two options. We can make an obvious connection to Daigle's ambivalence toward Chiac, and the reticence with which she begins to employ it in her work. But beyond this, Daigle's depiction of a game being used as a tool in this silly way is also significant, as games, and more broadly, play become prominent, even pervasive phenomena in her later work, especially *Pour sûr*. This is something I explore in later chapters, Chapter 3 especially.

In a way, *Pas pire* is a novel with no ending, or rather, a novel that leaves us hanging in a variety of ways. Several final passages contain invitations for new journeys yet to start and others depict experiences or activities that have only just begun. The last fragment of the novel is a kind of soliloquy in which the narrator (speaking for the agoraphobic Daigle) describes her occasional dreams of traveling, alone, just for pleasure (202-203). In the fragment just before this one, Hans, in an airport shop, finds and buys a 3000 piece puzzle and goes off to find himself a hotel room in which to piece it together (200-202). In another fragment the character Chuck Bernard telephones France Daigle to tell her that he saw her on the *Bouillon de culture* program and is so pleasantly surprised to learn that he is featured in her novel that he has decided to read it himself. She promises to bring him a copy so he can do just that (198-199). And finally, during the pivotal game of pool in which they will determine their travel destination, Carmen reveals to Terry that she is pregnant with their child.

In every one of these cases, Daigle hints at things to come but she also provides clues about the ways in which her writing process will continue to evolve. Those readers familiar with Daigle's subsequent novels will know that Terry, Carmen, and their children (as well as Hans and several others) will continue to be recurring characters from now on. They know that these recurring characters will make her writing increasingly popular with her local readers and that she will also begin featuring characters that, like Chuck Bernard, are depicted in the act of reading the novels in which they appear. Finally, they also know that Daigle's first tentative uses of Chiac here are only the

beginning steps of a longer journey, one that will expand in scope and significance in ways that we will examine next.

#### Post- *Pas Pire*

In many ways, *Un fin passage* (2001) and *Petites difficultés d'existences* (2002) are less significant as stand-alone novels than they are in relation to the novels that come immediately before (*Pas pire*) and after them (*Pour sûr*). With *Pas pire*, these next two novels form a trilogy, sharing a cast of recurring characters (a cast that grows in size with each ensuing novel) and a series of continuous and often related narratives. All three are concerned with voyages and cultural/ethnic encounters and exchanges. Whereas in *Pas pire* it is France Daigle who “goes back to France” to encounter Bernard Pivot and the French cultural and linguistic hegemony, in *Un fin passage* it is Terry and Carmen who travel to France. While there, they befriend a French artist (Étienne Zablonki), who is so captivated by their descriptions of Moncton N.B. that he decides to move there with his wife - this is the journey featured in *Petites difficultés d'existence*.

It is their relationship to *Pour sûr*, however, that makes these novels most interesting to me here - and in many ways, the three texts together can be seen as a prelude to *Pour sûr*. We are left with a feeling of anticipation once again, at the end of *Petites difficultés...*, with several examples of “unfinished business.” Terry and Carmen’s first child has been born (they name him Étienne, presumably after their new artist friend) and they are now expecting a second baby. The main plot of the novel has to do with an

ambitious project undertaken by Terry's good friend Zed – he is transforming an old mill into artist's lofts and putting several of their mutual friends, including Terry, back to work after a period of unemployment. The house/construction/writing metaphor we saw in earlier texts is now transformed into one of renewal, reconstruction and a collaborative process undertaken by a group of people. We learn that Terry and Carmen are both in the planning stages for new business ventures - Terry will be opening a bookstore and Carmen a bar. Readers are left with a lot to look forward to, and an increasing sense that Daigle is not simply writing individual novels here, but that she is creating a saga or multi-volume project in the style of Balzac's *La Comédie humaine*, or Zola's *Les Rougon-Macquart*.

Inasmuch as these three novels, *Pas pire* (1998), *Un fin passage* (2001) and *Petites difficultés d'existence* (2002), are related in this kind of overarching, chronological way, they also read like a series of rehearsals, rehearsals that lead up to Daigle's 2011 masterpiece. In these rehearsals, she practices and hones certain key characteristics of her work, each time growing bolder perhaps, each time pushing a bit further. Examples include her use of the recurring and ever-growing cast of characters, the development of characters who represent herself and her readers, and the playful, game like quality of the narrative and structural elements of the novels. Finally, she increases her use of Chiac, and she experiments with how to represent it typographically and conceptually.

In regard to typography, Daigle experiments with how to represent the English-pronunciation words in her Chiac dialogues. As we saw in *Pas pire*, Daigle used italics for some words and not others. In *Un fin passage*, she drops the italics altogether and simply writes the English pronounced words like the others (which requires readers who can distinguish between the two on their own).<sup>37</sup> In *Petites difficultés...*, she does the opposite, this time using italics for every single word in English. None of these methods is particularly elegant and it is clear that Daigle is working toward the development of a better system - she succeeds in *Pour sûr*, which we will see later in this chapter.

Beyond typography, another major change is afoot. It is in these novels for the first time that Daigle's characters begin to notice and reflect on the Chiac they hear and speak. In *Un fin passage*, during their trip to France, the language spoken by Terry and Carmen does not go unnoticed by the people they meet along the way. When Étienne Zablonksi met them for the first time, for example, he was initially unsure about what language he was (over)hearing:

Les deux jeunes se parlent, mais ils ont aussi l'air de s'embêter un peu.  
L'homme prête l'oreille.  
– Pourquoi c'est encore qu'y fallait passer par Londres?  
– C'était plus cheap pour des billets ouverts.  
– C'est vrai. T'es smarte pareil d'aouère toute démêlé ça pis de nous avoir rendues jusqu'à icitte.

L'homme qui n'avait pas l'air de lire ne s'y connaît pas tellement en langues, mais il se dit que les jeunes doivent parler le créole (73).

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<sup>37</sup> See the end of this chapter for a brief note about the English translations of Daigle's work.

From an Acadian perspective, this would be considered a very mild Chiac, or not really Chiac at all, with only one word - *cheap* - borrowed from English<sup>38</sup>. But combined with colloquial Acadian French, it catches Zablonki's attention. It is a seemingly minor scene - but actually significant in its portrayal of kind of self-consciousness with which Daigle writes these first novels in Chiac. She is hyperaware of every Chiac word or phrase she uses, and means for her readers to know it, too.

If in *Un fin passage* the observations are made by outside observers like Zablonki, in *Petites difficultés...* it is the Acadian characters themselves who begin to reflect on the language they are speaking. Here we have a conversation between Terry and Carmen, who have returned to live in Moncton and raise a family together. Their baby has been born and they have named him Étienne (presumably after their new artist friend):

- Asseyes-tu de dire que je parle trop chiac?
- On dirait que c'est pire dernièrement. C'est quasiment comme si que tu faisais par exprès.
- Par exprès? Quoi c'que tu parles about?
- [...]
- Je pense à Étienne. C'est pas beau un enfant qui parle chiac. Un adulte c'est pas si pire.
- ?

Terry n'avait vraiment rien vu venir de ce côté-là. Et il dut se l'avouer, il était blessé.

- Geeze Carmen, tu me surprends. On n'a jamais parlé de ça. De la manière qu'on parle. Je veux dire, que ça serait un problème.

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<sup>38</sup> The choice of "cheap" as the English-borrowed word here seems significant, given Daigle's upbringing vis-à-vis Chiac, as it can also denote inferiority, low status or baseness.

– Prends-les pas mal. On en reparlera. Ça doit être à cause des enfants. On dirait que ça me fait penser à des affaires que je pensais pas avant (143-144).

In this dialogue, Daigle begins to very openly portray some of the many complicated and conflicting attitudes held by contemporary Acadians, including herself, about Chiac. Furthermore, we see the beginning of a fundamental disagreement between Terry and Carmen on the subject, one that will continue into *Pour sûr*. In fact, many themes and writing strategies seen in these three novels will continue into *Pour sûr*. If we interpret the trilogy as a series of rehearsals, then *Pour sûr* reads as a thrilling opening night in a packed house. We turn now to *Pour sûr* to analyze all of this further.

Chiac in *Pour sûr*

After *Petites difficultés d'existence*, Daigle devoted almost 10 years to writing *Pour sûr*, which was published in 2011. In interviews, she has clearly stated that this novel is a culmination of everything she learned in her practice as a writer over the course of her career before that point. Speaking to Andrea Cabajsky, she admitted:

Je n'ai rien contre les autres livres que j'ai écrits, mais c'est comme si je sentais que c'était un peu décousu. C'est comme si je voulais mettre dans ce livre-ci un peu tout ce que j'avais pu apprendre en écrivant mes autres livres. C'est ce qui me fait dire que c'est le « sundae sur la cerise. » C'est comme si, avec tous mes autres livres, j'avais travaillé, exploré, mais là, finalement, j'avais tous les trucs qu'il me fallait pour faire le livre (Cabajsky *Le sentiment vif* 249).

We note her unusual inversion of the expression - for Daigle, *Pour sûr* is not a cherry on top of a sundae but the other way around. In other words, it isn't simply a culminating or

end point, a text that comes after other texts, but rather a text that contains everything that came before it. I noted earlier that *Pour sûr* can feel like a “do-over” for those readers who are familiar with Daigle’s body of work. What I mean is that it can feel as though everything that came before it is here, again, just in layers, one over the other. The background and minor characters were created in earlier texts and now this set is populated by characters with agency and speaking parts. So rather than a culmination of Daigle’s education, *Pour sûr* is a reenactment of that education - a *bildungsroman* with the protagonist Terry Thibodeau’s development representing Daigle’s own journey and perhaps by extension the readers’ journeys, especially in regard to language and identity. It is only later in the novel that we understand that Terry is a writer, too (he has made a habit of taking notes and observations in little notebooks, and he has begun to write poetry as well), making this a *künstlerroman* too. (Lest we readers miss this important observation, Daigle makes it explicit in a fragment located near the end of the novel: “Bildungsroman? Künstlerroman?” [648]<sup>39</sup>). There are several important ways in which *Pour sûr* showcases the maturing of Daigle’s approach as a writer, and I explore some of them in my next chapters. For now, I will focus on the important shift we will see in her relationship to Chiac ([HYPERLINK: Back to page 164](#)).

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<sup>39</sup> 1521.67.12 Carnets de Terry.

### An Embodied Ambivalence

Canadian critics and prize committees received *Pour sûr* quite well. It won the prestigious Governor General's Literary Award, a Canada-wide prize administered by the Canada Council for the Arts, as well as the Prix Littéraire Antonine-Maillet-Acadie Vie, based in New Brunswick. It is worth noting that Daigle's masterful use of Chiac is a significant reason for the text's critical acclaim - and one of reasons for which it has been described as having all the makings of a great Acadian novel:

Le jury reconnaît dans ce roman de France Daigle, non seulement la maturité de l'art romanesque, mais aussi une maîtrise et une appropriation exceptionnelles des traits caractéristiques de l'Acadie urbaine. Par sa structure éclatée tout en fragments, qui n'est après tout pas étrangère à la fragmentation géographique de l'Acadie, par l'histoire de ses personnages attachants, par l'interprétation proposée de l'histoire acadienne et l'habile utilisation d'une langue particulière, *Pour sûr* a tout du grand roman acadien (*Prix littéraire...*).

It is true that in contrast to her previous texts, in *Pour sûr* Chiac takes center stage. It could even be argued that Daigle makes Chiac the main subject of this novel. The entire text is infused with the language, both explicitly and implicitly. However, it is also true that Daigle's ambivalence toward Chiac is pronounced, even palpable in this novel. Hundreds of fragments seem to celebrate the language and yet others articulate grave concerns about it. The most immediately obvious example of this ambivalence toward Chiac is in the novel's narrative passages, but Daigle also supplements those narrative passages with expository fragments like this one:

Salmigondis de français du XVIIe siècle et de français moderne, de mots anglais prononcés à l'anglaise, de mots anglais francisés et d'un mélange syntaxique empruntant aux deux langues, le chiac est surtout l'apanage des

Acadiens du sud-est du Nouveau-Brunswick. En dépit de sa résonance autochtone (Shédiac, Kouchibouguac, Tabusintac) rien n'est certain quant à l'origine du mot *chiac*. Et parler le chiac appelle encore aujourd'hui *un certain déshonneur* (Daigle, 24-25; emphasis added).<sup>40</sup>

This *déshonneur* has a long history. As Irene Gammel and J.P. Boudreau have noted,

Acadian French has always been a language that was:

...driven into the realm of the private, the secret; English is public and dominant. The resulting linguistic and cultural sense of schizophrenia is a reflection of the larger cultural marginalization of Acadia as a diaspora culture...Acadians, of course, have always been positioned at the extreme margins of Canadian culture: they were deported, they were denied the right to vote for many years, and they were subjected to enormous pressures of assimilation (2).

There is also a palpable power imbalance in relation to France and Standard French; Acadian French is seen as not-quite-legitimate, a bastardized form of Standard French that has evolved differently (and incorrectly) over centuries. Chiac is simply the latest iteration of this situation.

In this novel, Chiac is the language spoken by most of the characters, not just a few of them. This includes main characters like Terry and his friends and anonymous secondary characters too. In this way, the novel represents the linguistic diversity of the

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<sup>40</sup> 43.30.1 Chiac. Also, Philip Comeau and Ruth King write: "Because it is often spoken in close contact with English, Acadian French has typically been negatively stereotyped as *moitié français, moitié anglais* ('half French, half English'). While King (2000, 2008) has argued that the extent of English influence on Acadian varieties tends to be overblown, it is still the case that Acadian varieties spoken in close, long-term contact with English typically do exhibit extensive codeswitching and lexical borrowing (Flikeid 1989). Thus, Acadian French is characterized by both linguistic conservatism and linguistic innovation...This is particularly true for Chiac, where a high degree of English influence is suggested by characterizations such as *code mixte* 'mixed code' (Gérin 1984), *métissage français/anglais* 'French/English crossbreeding' (Perrot 1995), and *third dialect* – that is, neither French nor English (Young 2002).)" (Comeau, 181).

Moncton/Dieppe region. Multiple linguistic registers spoken by different characters provide a realistic depiction of contemporary real-life Moncton. Some characters speak a very pronounced Chiac:

– Y avont achet  toutte cte stoffe-l  pis   la fin y  tont w rse  ff que quante y avont st rt .  'a t rn   ut que le g y qui y eux avait vendu  tait pas trostable, m me si qu'y le connaissent s  m ch, wh ch qu'arrive souvent dans cte b siness-l ,   g ess. Un vrai r cket, c'est suppos  (74-75).<sup>41</sup>

Others speak a much milder version, with only the occasional borrowed word in English. Some characters, like Carmen, try to avoid English elements altogether and stick to Acadian French. Additionally, there are characters like  lizab th (who is Qu b coise) and  tienne Zablonki and Ludmilla Bell me (who are French), who speak their own respective versions of the French language.

Notably, Daigle herself (in the form of the author surrogate character as well as in monologues and all of the expository fragments that are attributable to her) does not use Chiac at all. Her manipulation of it in her other characters' dialogues, however, shows her to be a fluent and nuanced practitioner of the language. Her ambivalence toward the language is most vividly revealed, even embodied, in two characters especially, Terry and Carmen.<sup>42</sup>

For Terry, Chiac is not only a language that he speaks, but also a central and defining aspect of his character development. Terry notably undergoes an evolution on

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<sup>41</sup> 164.15.1 Monologues non identifi s.

<sup>42</sup> Something to be explored further - the ways in which gender and power come into play in this relationship - they do not play normative gender roles.

the question of Chiac; this mirrors Daigle's own trajectory on the topic. The evolving attitude is revealed to the reader in a variety of ways, but most strikingly through Terry's relationship and exchanges with Carmen. At the start of the novel, Terry tries to avoid using Chiac and he tries to please Carmen by using a "français correct" (63-64).<sup>43</sup> Terry grew up speaking Chiac and it is the language in which he is most comfortable, but for Carmen Chiac is charged with negative connotations and is something to be resisted (much like Daigle was raised to believe as a child):

Elle a souvent l'impression que le chiac résulte d'une certaine paresse, ou d'un manque de curiosité, de fierté, de logique, d'autant plus quand le mot français est connu de tous et facile à intégrer au parler courant (76).<sup>44</sup>

Due to its undesirable characteristics and reputation, Carmen wants Terry to avoid using Chiac and they agree that he will work on "improving" his French, especially to provide a good model for their children. This takes a great deal of effort for him, however, and it is so discouraging at times that he would rather avoid speaking altogether:

À force de se faire rappeler à l'ordre, Terry finissait malgré lui par insérer du français correct dans son parler, mais cela ne réussissait pas toujours. Des réflexes langagiers pas toujours compatibles clignotaient dans son esprit lorsqu'il ouvrait la bouche, créant parfois de nouvelles erreurs. De sorte qu'en certaines occasions, pour être tranquille, *il valait mieux se taire* (63-64; emphasis added).<sup>45</sup>

Much has been written about linguistic and cultural silencing in minority cultures, and it has certainly been a reality for Acadians ever since the Great Deportation. Gammel and

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<sup>43</sup> 140.30.8 Chiac.

<sup>44</sup> 168.20.2 Langue.

<sup>45</sup> 140.30.8 Chiac.

Boudreau acknowledge that cultural silencing “is a reality for many Acadians” (2), however they also argue that for Acadian artists, “that very silence paradoxically gives voice to speech” (2). They cite Henri-Dominique Paratte, who has identified, in Acadian literature, “[u]n silence intense a divers degrés, et ou se fonde, dans l’incertitude, dans l’errance, dans la difficulté d’être, l’expression acadienne elle-même” (Paratte 1). We see this process at work in France Daigle’s writing, as well - at the start of her career she avoided dialogues due to her unwillingness to use Chiac. This had a noticeable impact on the style and structure of her early novels (more on this in Chapter 2) but in the end, as I argue in the next section of this chapter, Chiac becomes a creative source for Daigle.

In *Pour sûr*, Terry is the character in which the cultural silencing and “linguistic schizophrenia” are embodied, but he also represents the “Acadian expression” that comes out of this silence. Although Daigle continues to be ambivalent about the language, her character development of Terry seems to suggest her growing awareness of the creative promise Chiac might offer. Terry is self-reflective, and readers follow along as he begins to understand that Chiac, this source of incertitude and subsequent silencing, is an integral part of his identity: “C’est yinque pour dire commensque le chiac est dēep dans moi” (114).<sup>46</sup> Later, he becomes aware that Chiac holds a transgressive power too. This transforms his experience of the language, which he now employs purposefully, even *strategically*: “De temps à autre -cela relevait d’un calcul intuitif -, Terry glissait un mot ou une expression anglaise dans son parler parce que malgré tout cette forme de

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<sup>46</sup> 260.30.12 Chiac.

*transgression* faisait également partie de son identité” (333; emphasis added).<sup>47</sup> In this way, Terry performs his “Acadianness,” which is also tied to transgression. For Terry, to speak Chiac is to transgress. And for Daigle, *to write in Chiac* is to transgress too. Gammel and Boudreau have written about this kind of transgression as a way of “meshing of linguistic flexibility with questions of identity” (3). They argue that “language mixing” by Acadian writers serves as a “tool of resistance” – something that Foucault might describe as a “reverse discourse” (Gammel and Boudreau 3). They explain this in the following manner:

Aware of the threat of assimilation for the minority culture, poets and songwriters strategically craft moments of language mixing and multiple language use to encode critical opposition, multi-voicedness and dialogical provocation (3).

In Daigle’s work, Chiac is a tool of resistance to both English and French. For as much as the English language presents a clear threat to the minority Acadian language and culture in New Brunswick, the rigidity of the French language is also a threat. I remind my readers of the passage from *Pas pire* that I cited above, in which the narrator announces a desire to decolonize and free, or emancipate herself. The French attitude that any change must be bad, a deviation from the one true French language, would render the Acadian position impossible, since in order to survive this minority population must adjust and must remain flexible, both linguistically and culturally. In Daigle’s own words, “le chiac, ce n’est pas juste une langue, c’est une mentalité” (Cabajsky *Le sentiment vif* 252).

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<sup>47</sup> 756.29.2 En route.

## Beyond the Quest for Legitimacy

This idea of Chiac as a “mentality” becomes a key to understanding *Pour sûr*. Because for Daigle this novel, like Chiac, is about creativity, flexibility and freeing herself from the expectations placed upon her by many forces, as well as those she has of herself. Part of Daigle’s ambivalence about the language has to do with the kind of “quest for legitimacy” that some of her contemporaries tend to undertake - she is obviously uncomfortable with that endeavor. Unlike other Acadian authors, Daigle is reticent about making this a celebration narrative of Chiac that seeks to make it legitimate. At the same time, she has clearly spent considerable time and energy developing a system by which to make Chiac a *legible* language in the written form.<sup>48</sup> Taking a closer look at both of these aspects of the text will provide us with a more comprehensive understanding of the important shift I have identified in this novel.

First, it is true that Daigle includes numerous passages that make a case for the legitimacy of Chiac as a language. There are fragments that explore the evolution of the French language and others that emphasize the arbitrary process by which languages are formed and valorized:

Mais où commence, où finit une langue? Quand une langue devient-elle une autre langue? Toute parole n’est-elle pas qu’une interprétation de la réalité, donc une sorte de traduction, de tentative fugace de langage, une lalangue? Et puis, que le français soit ancien ou actuel ou standard ou hybride, la

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<sup>48</sup> Could we think about the Acadian (read: Daigle) situation in terms of Judith Butler’s “ethical capaciousness,” which, as applied to Adorno’s thoughts on love and injury, “understands the pull of the claim and resists that pull at the same time” (Butler 101-103)?

langue, comme la vie, n'est-elle pas qu'un long processus d'hybridation ininterrompu? (504).<sup>49</sup>

In the power dynamic between France and Acadia that posits Standard French as “correct” and Acadian versions of French (including Chiac) as “vulgar,” Daigle upsets convention and challenges popular opinion on the topic with examples from history, such as the following: “À l'époque où dominait le latin, la langue française était une langue vulgaire, c'est-à-dire une langue parlée par le peuple” (492).<sup>50</sup> In other words, if Standard French was at one time considered a vernacular language - crude or common in relation to Latin - doesn't that problematize contemporary French elitism that considers Acadian French and Chiac as vulgar, crude or common versions of the French language? Many *Pour sûr* fragments express a healthy skepticism of any sort of hierarchization of language based on the essential value of a culture. There is also a category of fragments devoted to the word game Scrabble.<sup>51</sup> In Scrabble, of course, certain letters have greater value than others, and words must be accepted (read: “legitimate” according to the Scrabble dictionary) in order to “count” in the game. The game is a fitting, tangible model for some of the challenging aspects of the Acadian socio-linguistic condition.

The question about “what counts” is a strong theme in this text. Many fragments are devoted to a discussion of *La Bibliothèque idéale* for example - although Daigle never specifies which version exactly, there are clues that indicated she is referring to Bernard

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<sup>49</sup> 1161.112.9 Langues.

<sup>50</sup> 1143.112.8 Langues.

<sup>51</sup> I continue my analysis of this Scrabble category in both Chapters 2 and 3.

Pivot's 1989 text which contains 2401 works written in French. Daigle's fragments about this list are bizarre. In one, for example, she lists many of the authors alphabetically - Balzac, Cocteau, Diderot, Flaubert, Gide, Hugo, Maupassant, Proust, Sand, Sartre, Voltaire and Zola - and then lists them again in order of their years of birth (128).<sup>52</sup> Another fragment focuses on how many titles are included by authors whose last names start with certain letters (122),<sup>53</sup> while yet another lists the titles that were written as collaborations between two authors (139).<sup>54</sup> Daigle's focus on these arbitrary, even silly, aspects of the list underscores the futility of an attempt to compile an ideal reading list like this. Something will always be missing. As if to underscore that point, Daigle has included another full category called "Ajouts à *La Bibliothèque idéale*," in which she proposes her own texts to be added to the list (a diverse list of authors are represented in her choices, including: Christian Bobin, Agota Kristof, Gilles Lapouge, Harper Lee and Derrick de Kerckhove. There is also a narrative thread about *La Pléiade* and the books that are and are not represented in it. Ludmilla,<sup>55</sup> Terry's business partner with whom he owns the bookstore, is shocked, for example, to learn that the collection has never published Freud's work: "Mais il fallut se rendre à l'évidence, l'œuvre de Freud n'avait pas été publiée dans la Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. Ludmilla sembla meurtrie par cette

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<sup>52</sup> 297.46.7 *La Bibliothèque idéale*.

<sup>53</sup> 281.46.6 *La Bibliothèque idéale*.

<sup>54</sup> 323.46.10 *La Bibliothèque idéale*.

<sup>55</sup> Ludmilla Bellême is from France. She is Étienne Zablonksi's wife and is also a recurring character, having previously appeared in *Un fin passage* and *Petites difficultés d'existences*. Ludmilla serves as a sort of guide, or educator, for Terry; he often turns to her with questions about literature or the French language.

négligence, se retira dans le petit bureau du fond de la librairie comme un animal blessé dans sa tanière” (43).<sup>56</sup> With these categories, Daigle repeatedly calls into question notions of canon, classic texts, Les Belles Lettres, as well as the boundaries existing between literary traditions. At the same time, Daigle is also concerned with the construction of a new canon, a kind of international, global, interdisciplinary list that rejects the old methods of categorizing and assigning value to written texts.

The parallels to her commentary on languages cannot be overstated. Daigle asks, Who has the ‘right’ to change a language? Why are changes sanctioned by l’Académie française considered legitimate, while others, like those that come about in francophone regions like Acadie, are not? She offers examples of the ways in which Acadian French has simply retained certain aspects of the French language that once were commonly used in France:

Citant Maupassant en exemple, *Le Nouveau Petit Robert* ne laisse planer aucun doute sur l’existence du pronom populaire *y*, qualifiant de « populaire » un mot ou une expression que les classes sociales élevées n’utiliseraient pas. Il spécifie que le *y* a commencé par remplacer le pronom personnel *lui* avant de supplanter aussi le pronom *il*, au singulier comme au pluriel. On le retrouve ainsi chez Balzac et Anouilh, par exemple. Pour la forme interrogative, Balzac écrivait *c’est-y*. En Acadie, l’usage du pronom *y* est encore fortement répandu. Son féminin, *alle*, vieille forme française du *elle*, devient *a* devant un mot débutant par une consonne” (13).<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> 92.8.6 Librairie Didot.

<sup>57</sup> 11.30.2 Chiac.

There are other fragments that outline some of the recent changes made by l'Académie française:

(Becherelle retrouvé.) Les nouvelles règles de l'Académie simplifient aussi le pluriel des noms composés : lorsque le premier mot d'un mot composé est un verbe ou une préposition, le deuxième mot prendra toujours un s, ce qui donne des *perce-neiges* et des *après-midis*, par exemple. (Auparavant, ce deuxième mot était invariable.) (504-505).<sup>58</sup>

L'Académie accepte aussi que tombe le trait d'union et que s'écrivent en un seul mot bon nombre de noms composés comme *chauvesouris*, *milletpatte*, *croquemort*, *piquenique*, *poussepousse*, *tirebouchon* et *portemonnaie*. Alors, ne devrait-on pas écrire *des perceneiges* et *des aprèsmidis*? En effet, les lexicographes sont invités à emboîter le pas et à pratiquer la soudure (505).<sup>59</sup>

As is evident in these examples, Daigle does not shy away from sharing her observations about the arbitrary nature of some of these changes (or, at least, the arbitrary nature of what is accepted as a change and what is not). Nor does she shy away from expressing the frustration Francophones often feel, when they are part of a community whose language is considered to have evolved inappropriately, as compared to France. As one of Daigle's anonymous characters puts it: “ – Toutes ces mots anglais-là... moi, ma question est : hōw cōme que zeux pouvont faire ça, pis que nous autres, on peut pas?” (681).<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> 1163.131.11 Parenthèse(s).

<sup>59</sup> 1165.77.10 Grammaire.

<sup>60</sup> 1588.88.7 La liberté.

Daigle is careful to remind us that Chiac is not the unstructured result of random changes. Chiac, like any other language, has grammatical rules that must be followed, as is explained in the following conversation between two anonymous Acadian characters:

- Moi, c'est ceuses-là qui asseyont de parler chiac pour se moquer de nous autres. Y croyont que c'est aisé de parler comme ça bût quante qu'y asseyont, y oueillont que c'est pas si aisé que ça.

- Plusse, y ùsont tout le temps le même exemple : crössér la strêet.

- Ça pis *bäck*...Je vas retourner *bäck* au magasin.

- Tu! Drouette là ça prëve que parler chiac, c'est plus dur que ça paraît. Un vrai chiac mettra pas *bäck* pis *re-* dans la même phrase. Y dira qu'y va *bäck* y aller, pèriod. Le *bäck* remplace le *re-*, rîght? Y dirait pas même qu'y va aller *bäck*. Parce que *bäck* – comme le *re-*, *às ã mâtter ôf fãct* – va en avant du verbe. Ça fait yinque du cõmmon sêns. Je vas *bäck* aller au magasin. Ou au stõre, c'est selon.

- C'est dequoi qu'y faut que tu grandisses avec, pas dequoi que tu peux apprendre dans les livres ou pîckér ûp juste de même.

- *Faut que tu connaittes ton anglais pour pouère le bëndér au français.*

- Exactly! (209-210; emphasis added).<sup>61</sup>

Indeed, as one character concludes here, speaking Chiac is possible only for those who have mastered both English and French. It isn't something you can just "pick up," or learn from a book. Far from resulting from a kind of laziness, or lack of curiosity, pride or logic (all negative attributes assigned to it by Carmen), Chiac is creative, inventive and perfectly logical.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>61</sup> 488.35.4 Le détail dans le détail.

<sup>62</sup> France itself is no stranger to this kind of disruption of Standard French by English words and expressions, and there is a healthy debate there, even today, about the extent to which the

Also creative and logical is the system Daigle has developed to make Chiac *legible* in written form. As we saw in earlier texts, Daigle experimented with italics as a way of representing certain words in Chiac. But that technique fell short in a variety of ways. Here in *Pour sûr*, she uses the tilde and the *accent aigu* to create a highly functional and elegant system. She describes it herself, in a fragment toward the end of the novel:

Le tilde sert à distinguer les mots prononcés en anglais des mots prononcés en français. Il latinise l'anglais. Quant à l'accent aigu sur la terminaison d'un verbe censé être prononcé en anglais, il indique que la fin du mot doit être francisée. Il s'agit d'une forme fréquente de chiaquisation (438).<sup>63</sup>

When placed over the first vowel of a word, the tilde,<sup>64</sup> which is an accent not normally used in French nor in English, signals to readers that the word should be pronounced in its (Canadian) English language pronunciation. An accent aigu over the ending of the same word means the ending should be pronounced in French. If we take the word “bẽnder” from the dialogue above - the first part of the word, “bẽnd,” should be said in English (IPA /bend/). The second part of the word, “ér,” should be pronounced like the infinitive ending of a regular -er verb in French, for example the -er ending of the verb “parler.”

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government should intervene, through laws like the Toubon Law of 1994. Additionally, there is a long tradition, in French literature, of the disruption of Standard French in various ways, as a literary tool. Two examples include: Raymond Queneau's *Zazie dans le metro* (1959) and Emile Ajar's *La Vie devant soi* (1976). No question that these efforts are considered clever and creative.

<sup>63</sup> 1011.7.1 Détails utiles.

<sup>64</sup> The tilde is a grapheme that was once used as a mark of suspension, to represent missing letters. In mathematics it is used to indicate approximation. Both aspects are interesting in the context Daigle's work and the Acadian linguistic situation.

There is a powerful transformation that occurs when Daigle makes Chiac legible in written form - this is the shift I mentioned earlier in the chapter. Chiac has gone from being something that Daigle has to agonize about representing to being itself a *mode* of representation, a tool by which she accomplishes other things. Daigle can abandon the “quest for legitimacy” and instead use Chiac to achieve her creative goals.

In some ways, we can read the entire novel as behaving in a kind of Chiac-inspired mode, or to use Daigle’s word, *chiaquisition*. The structure of the novel mimics the diglossic (or triglossic), code-switching aspect of Chiac, mixing linguistic and cultural registers, and juxtaposing passages written in formal, literary or poetic language and references to highbrow intellectual concepts with passages of informal quotidian dialogue as well as the encyclopedia entries and lists of words and numbers.<sup>65</sup> The typography of the text provides clues, or textual “markers” that indicate the sociolinguistic register of each passage. Daigle distinguishes between the modes and

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<sup>65</sup> The Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics defines “diglossia (n.)” as: “A term used in sociolinguistics to refer to a situation where two very different varieties of a language co-occur throughout a speech community, each with a distinct range of social function. Both varieties are standardized to some degree, are felt to be alternatives by native-speakers and usually have special names. Sociolinguists usually talk in terms of a high (H) variety and a low (L) variety, corresponding broadly to a difference in formality: the high variety is learnt in school and tends to be used in church, on radio programmes, in serious literature, etc., and as a consequence has greater social prestige; the low variety tends to be used in family conversations, and other relatively informal settings. Diglossic situations may be found, for example, in Greek (High: Katharevousa; Low: Dhimotiki), Arabic (High: Classical; Low: Colloquial), and some varieties of German (H: Hochdeutsch; L: Schweizerdeutsch, in Switzerland). A situation where three varieties or languages are used with distinct functions within a community is called triglossia. An example of a triglossic situation is the use of French, Classical Arabic and Colloquial Tunisian Arabic in Tunisia, the first two being rated H and the last L” (Crystal 145). Actually, it may be more accurate to describe Moncton, N. B. using this latter term, “triglossic,” with Standard French rated as H, Chiac rated decidedly as L, and Acadian French either H or L, depending on who is doing the rating.

voices of her fragments with two distinct text sizes and formatting. She uses a standard-size font and formatting for the fragments written in a narrative voice (passages about the characters – Terry, Carmen and the kids, their friends and family, neighbors and colleagues), as well as for monologues by and conversations between unidentified characters who inhabit the same milieu. She uses indented paragraphs and a smaller font for the other fragments, including expository passages that resemble encyclopedia entries, fragments containing historical facts, references to philosophers and theorists and their ideas, and a wide range of other passages, containing such varied items as mathematical equations, lists of words (the names of colors, for example, or the words beginning with the letter “a” in the official Scrabble dictionary), references to other works of literature and even miscellaneous entries such as instructions on how to do embroidery. In all of these ways, the text itself engages in a kind of “literary code-switching” that enables it to “speak” to many different kinds of readers.

Finally, we are reminded of the scene in *Pas pire* in which a skeptical Bernard Pivot questions Daigle’s claim that in Moncton, language and the arts are maintained by “un peu tout le monde, et un peu personne.” Her response, we should recall, is to invite him to come and see for himself: “– Vous devriez venir voir. Vous pourriez juger par vous-même” (*Pas pire*, 185-186). In *Pour sûr*, Daigle delivers on that promise.

## An Open Secret?

“Terry réalisa qu’il aimait avoir un secret en réserve” (612).<sup>66</sup>

Rather than creating some kind of celebration narrative of Chiac, Daigle has simply made it legible for us, showing us “how it works” in all of its complexity. She includes a wide and diverse spectrum of Chiac-speaking voices and dialogues and represents a range of attitudes about it too. Perhaps most importantly, she does not hide her own ambivalence about the language, and she does not attempt to resolve it either. In fact, she embraces the ambivalence, infusing the novel with it and embodying it in her characters. In this way, Daigle chooses to “reside in the open secret,” as conceptualized by Anne-Lise François. In François’ fascinating 2008 “study of novels and poems in which ‘nothing happens,’” or rather, texts that “make nothing happen” (xv) she defines the open secret as “a gift that does not demand response but is there for the having, as readily taken up as it is set aside” (xvi). In *Pour sûr*, Chiac functions as such a gift, there to be “taken up” or not, as a matter of choice or discretion. Daigle’s reluctance has given way, not so far as to celebrate the language, but just far enough to acknowledge that there is something useful in it - something that can be pressed into service or “brought into play.”

In proposing her “theory of recessive action,” François draws from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s definition of an “open secret” as: “an essentially preventative or conservative

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<sup>66</sup> 1433.105.8 Réserves.

mode of communication that reveals to insiders what it simultaneously hides from outsiders or, more specifically, protects them from what they do not wish to know, from what it is in their power to ignore” (1). At the same time, François also reminds us of a warning by Foucault against the “problematic slippage...from a hard-won right to speak and/or enjoy to a compulsive duty to speak, take possession of, and enjoy...” (François 22). In *Pour sûr*, Chiac is indeed a form of communication that can reveal to insiders what it simultaneously hides from outsiders. And yet we see in Daigle’s ambivalence a safeguard against that problematic slippage identified by Foucault - we need look no further than the France Daigle character in the novel, who does not herself use Chiac in her dialogues. By making Chiac into a kind of open secret, Daigle simultaneously claims the right to use Chiac and the right *not to use* Chiac.

#### A Brief Note on the English Translation

When language is a central challenge for an author in the first place, translating their work will also be a major undertaking. Although I do not focus on it in this project, some commentary on the translations of Daigle’s work seems necessary. *For Sure*, an English language translation of *Pour sûr* by Robert Majzels was published in 2013, two years after the original version. Majzels had previously translated four other novels by Daigle: *1953. Chronicle d’une naissance annoncée (1953: Chronicle of a Birth Foretold, 1997)*, *Pas pire (Just Fine, 2000)*, for which he won the Governor General’s Award for

French to English Translation), *Un fin passage (A Fine Passage, 2002)* and *Petites difficultés d'existence (Life's Little Difficulties, 2004)*.

In the previous texts, Majzels was able to resolve fairly easily the creative challenge presented by Daigle's use of Chiac. In *Just Fine*, there are dialogues in which he simply uses the English without indicating that the original French had any mixing of the two languages. For example, on page 190 of *Pas pire*, Terry says (about the French writer he meets), “ – *But y m'a donné sa carte.*” In the English translation, Majzels writes: “But, he did give me his card” (138). In *Life's Little Difficulties*, which contains much more Chiac, he simply integrates French words into the translation - roughly matching the number of English words in each dialogue of the original French (Cabajsky *Le sentiment vif* 255). In this example, Terry is discussing a gift (a painting by a local artist) that he and Carmen will be offering to their friend Zed:

– Y m'a dit qu'y me ferait un bon prix. *But* comment être sûr que c'est Zed qui va l'avoir? Le monde va-ti juste *picker up any* cadeau, ou y'a-ti quelqu'un qui va les donner? De même, *at least*, je pourrais m'arranger avec c'ti-là qui va donner (*Petites difficultés...* 119).

The same passage in the English translation is as follows:

He said he'd give me a good price. But how can we make certain Zed's the one who gets it? Will folks be picking up just any cadeau? Or will someone be handing them out, you think? That way, I could arrange ça with the one who's doing the handing out (*Life's Little Difficulties* 94).

In this way, Majzels is able to maintain the sense that the language being spoken does mix French and English; he maintains a French flavor by including cognates (like

arranger) or French words that are more likely to be understood by his Anglophone readers (like *cadeau*).

With *Pour sûr*, however, his approach was necessarily transformed. As Majzels himself explained in a 2013 interview with Catherine Leclerc:

First, France herself has done more than increase the amount of Chiac in *Pour sûr*. She's also achieved a kind of purer Chiac, if I can use that word about a language that's been stigmatized. The Chiac of *Pour sûr* is much more than a mixture of English and French; there's more old French and French that is specific to Acadia and not influenced by English. The rhythm and musicality of Chiac is more evident than ever before. Its complex grammar and refined diction are deployed in a masterful way (Robichaud).

Majzels was concerned that if he “simply increased the mix of French and English” in his translation, he “would produce an ugly English” and the “characters would seem less intelligent than they are in *Pour sûr*” (Robichaud). As Leclerc points out, “instead of concentrating on language mixing exclusively,” in *Pour sûr* Majzels had to “introduce different uses of English that are stigmatized” (Robichaud). In Majzels words:

In *Pour sûr* I couldn't go on in that direction, because France Daigle had gone so much further into Chiac. I needed a more rigorous and structured language to translate her Chiac. But not a standard English, which would conceal the difference operating in the French. I was compelled to invent a *non-normative English*” (Robichaud; emphasis added).

France Daigle also understood this problem, saying about Majzels in 2013: “...c'était ça son défi à lui, de créer un anglais qui ne soit pas ordinaire” (Cabajsky *Le sentiment vif* 255).

Majzels wanted to achieve this without simply translating Chiac into an already existing minor language, and he needed to ensure that the Francophone Acadian context of the Moncton region was not erased in this process either (Robichaud). His solution?

In the end, borrowing from Newfoundlndese and Cape Breton Industrial, I decided to create a minor English of my own that would reflect the musicality of Chiac, that would resist normalization of the dialogue into standard English without being easily dismissed as Irish or some other recognizable language, but, and this was important, that would help make the characters as appealing as they are in the original (Robichaud).

Furthermore, as Catherine Leclerc points out, Majzels was able to recreate the playful nature of the original novel, weaving in language games, creating words in English to mirror Acadian pronunciation variations and even including references to himself, the translator, when translating passages where Daigle points to her earlier texts (Robichaud).

As I mentioned earlier, the English translation is not my focus in this dissertation, so I will keep my analysis to a minimum here and instead, simply show a few examples, so my readers can see for themselves how Majzels has approached the task. Here, a passage of dialogue between two servers at Carmen's bar, the Babar,<sup>67</sup> first in the original French, then followed by the English translation:

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<sup>67</sup> The name chosen for this bar, Babar, deserves some commentary. It is named for Jean de Brunhoff's popular children's book series, beloved by many, but also criticized for serving as a sort of colonialist and racist propaganda, especially in its early depictions of African peoples and the "Westernization" of the title character. There is an irony in this choice; it seems likely that Carmen and her colleague are unaware of the problems associated with the figure of Babar. There is a problematic figure in the Acadian cultural imagination, too, the title character in Longfellow's epic poem, "Evangeline, A Tale of Acadie." Although the poem has been criticized by some (academics/intellectuals) for its historical errors and reductive depiction of Acadians as a passive people of a bygone era, its title character, and the romantic vision of Acadian identity it engenders, has been embraced by Acadians throughout the Northeast U.S. and Canada (I attended *Évangéline* Elementary School in a small northern Maine town, Madawaska, for example) and Cajuns in Louisiana, too. As I discussed earlier in this paper, part of what made Antonine Maillet's *Pélagie-la-*

- Yoùsqu’est Lisa-M. anyway? Ça fait assez frîggen longtemps que je l’ai pas vue.
- Tu sais pas? Alle a eu une cãrpal amanchure dans le poignet à force de jouer de la flûte. Faut qu’a se fasse opérer.
- Awh ya?
- Sõ a peut pus lever des trãys pis ça.
- J’aurais pas pensé que t’attrapais ça yinque à jouer de la flûte.
- Au commencement y disiont que c’était une tûmour, bût c’était juste une rûmour (695-696).<sup>68</sup>

“Where’s Lisa-M. at? It’s bin a shockin’ long time since I seen ‘er.”

“You didn’t hear? She got de carpal tunnel in ‘er wrist from playin’ de flute. Dey’s gonna have to operate.”

“Awh, is dat so?”

“So she can’t be liftin’ trays an’ dat.”

“I’d never ‘ave tawt you could get dat just from playin’ flute.”

“In de beginnin’ some folks was sayin’ ‘twas a tumour, only dat was just anudder rumour” (*For Sure*, 687).<sup>69</sup>

Next, one of the expository passages - this one is found near the beginning of the novel and explicitly discusses Chiac:

Puisque le français acadien regorge de mots anciens et de tournures désuètes, c’est sans doute la forte et souvent insidieuse présence de l’anglais qui donne au chiac son caractère propre, et la prononciation tout à fait anglaise de ces mots pèse lourdement dans la balance. Un Français peut bien dire « parquigne », l’Acadien, lui, aura l’impression de faire du théâtre s’il doit en dire autant. Il prononcera donc tout naturellement « parking », comme il l’entend de la bouche des milliers d’anglophones qui l’entourent. On a affaire ici à une rupture d’ordre musical, rythmique, esthétique. Souvent le mélange des deux langues passe presque inaperçu, mais souvent il blesse tant l’oreille que l’entendement. Tout est question d’équilibre. Par exemple, la phrase *Je vas aouère besoin d’un troque ou d’un vãn pour haler*

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*charrette* so powerful was its depiction of a sort of “anti-Evangéline,” a heroine with agency, who does not passively accept the negative repercussions of the Deportation and who leads her family back to their Acadian homeland.

<sup>68</sup> 1630.108.10 Rumeurs.

<sup>69</sup> 1630.108.10 Rumours.

*mon botte ennewé* donne au moins l'impression de tenir dans un seul registre sonore. Par contre, une menace sourde couve dans la phrase *Si que je swïtch la lïght bãck òn pis que la maison ãxplode, ãxpect pas d'aouère ãver ãgain d'autres outils pour Father's Day* (44).<sup>70</sup>

Because Acadian French is replete with old words and archaic expressions, it is perhaps the strong and often insidious presence of English that lends Chiac its particular character, and especially the clearly English pronunciation of these words. Someone from France can say they've put their car in the *parquigne* without a second thought, but an Acadian would feel like a showoff pronouncing it that way. Acadians quite naturally say "parking" exactly as they've heard it hundreds of times from the mouths of the Anglophones that surround them.

We are dealing here with a musical, rhythmic, and aesthetic rupture. Often this mix of two languages is unnoticed, but equally often it offends the ear and defies understanding. It's all a question of balance. For example, take the phrase "*je vas aouère besoin d'un troque ou d'un vãn pour haler mon botte ennewé* (Least ways, I'll be needin' me some body's truck or van to haul me boat)." Here at least the sentence seems to maintain a consistent sonic register. On the other hand, a vague menace lurks beneath the surface of the sentence: "*si que je swïtch la lïght bãck òn pis que la maison ãxplode, ãxpect pas d'aouère ãver ãgain d'autres outils pour Father's Day* (if I goes to switch on de light and de whole house blows up, don't you expect no more o'dem tools fer Fadder's Day)" (*For Sure*, 36)<sup>71</sup>

Finally, just for fun, I leave you with a line I have pulled from a short conversation between two of Daigle's anonymous characters:

– C'est pas croyable le trouble que vingt-six lettres pis une couple d'accents peuvent faire (206).<sup>72</sup>

"Hard to believe just twenty-six letters an' a couple o' accents can make such a terrible lot of trouble" (*For Sure*, 204).<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> 94.30.7 Chiac.

<sup>71</sup> 94.30.7 Chiac. There is much more work to be done (on my part) in thinking about the English translation and the challenges and creative opportunities it presents. For further study.

<sup>72</sup> 478.22.4 Dialogues en vrac.

<sup>73</sup> 478.22.4 Overheard Conversations.

## Chapter 2: A “Structural Survey”

Chapter 1 focuses on the language France Daigle uses in her novels and specifically examines the transformation of her approach to Chiac, starting with avoidance at the start of her career and ending with a novel that makes Chiac into a main subject. This transformation is accompanied by other notable changes, including the ways in which Daigle organizes her novels - from the level of genre, to the ways in which she places words upon the page, as well as her narrative structure and a kind of three-dimensional approach she takes to her latest novel. This second chapter tracks and analyzes these changes, essentially completing a structural survey of Daigle’s body of work.

On a first read, the unusual structure of *Pour sûr* is striking and it immediately demands critical attention. Not including the index, *Pour sûr* is 729 pages long, composed entirely of fragments of varying lengths and different rhetorical modes and narrative voices. The text resists categorization by mixing literary genres, bending the rules of those genres and behaving unpredictably (and playfully) in a variety of ways. At the same time, the novel is written in a rigorously prescribed manner, abiding by a strictly defined structure that brings to mind the constrained writing techniques and projects

undertaken by members of the literary collective *Oulipo*.<sup>74</sup> Readers who are familiar with Daigle's earlier work will know that she has employed unusual organizational structures in her previous novels - although never on such a grand scale. Before taking a closer look at *Pour sûr*, it will be helpful to take a brief survey of the structure and format of the earlier novels, as well as some of the critical attention they have garnered.

Like *Pour sûr*, Daigle's other novels are meta-fictional in content and experimental in form, composed of short passages or fragments, sometimes organized to produce a visual effect on the page and at other times arranged in some kind of recognizable organizational system. I begin with this (chronological) survey of the earlier texts, to examine the ways in which her approach to structure and format has evolved over the years. Within this survey, I analyze the novels in small groups or phases that roughly share broad structural similarities. I then examine the role that Chiac has played in informing Daigle's evolving approach to structure, especially in the later texts. Finally in the latter part of this chapter I focus on *Pour sûr* specifically, and I explore the ways in which this latest novel was organized in new and innovative ways, further pushing the boundaries of the genre and thereby marking a new phase in Daigle's career and also in Acadian literature on the whole.

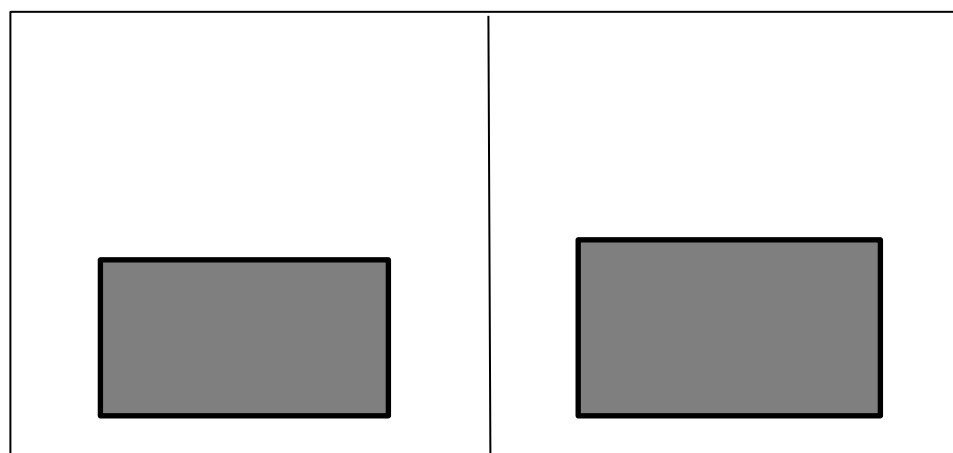
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<sup>74</sup> Oulipo is short for "Ouvroir de littérature potentielle" 'workshop of potential literature,' a group of writers and mathematicians (many of whom are French), founded in 1960, who aim to create literary works using constrained writing techniques. *Pour sûr* also contains numerous references to members of Oulipo, including Italo Calvino and Raymond Queneau.

### The First Three Novels (1983-1985) - Of Axes and DNA

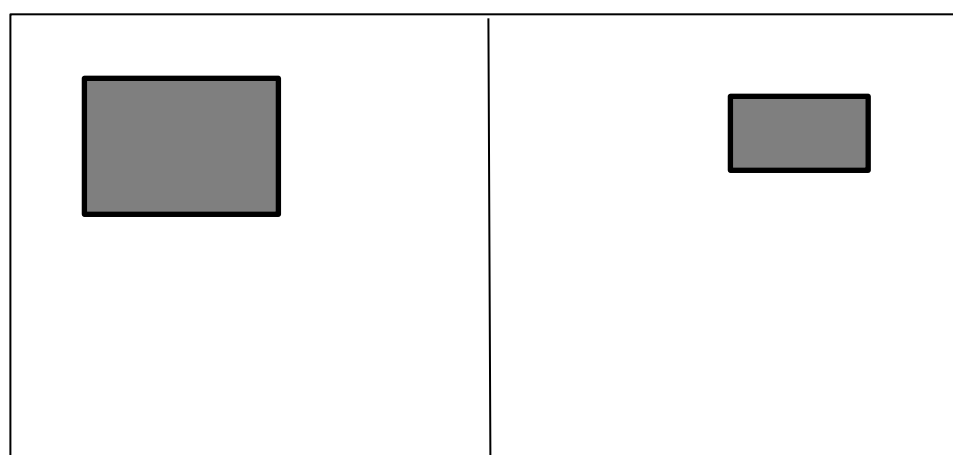
Daigle's first three novels, *Sans jamais parler du vent* (1983), *Film d'amour et de dépendance* (1984) and *Histoire de la maison qui brûle* (1985) are often considered critically as a trilogy because they relate to each other in both form and content. In fact, critics Raoul Boudreau and Anne-Marie Robichaud, in their article "Symétries et réflexivité dans la trilogie de France Daigle," argue that it is the structural aspect in particular that binds the novels together. They observe that the placement of the text upon the page, although done very differently in each novel, reveals an overarching visual arc when the three novels are considered together. This visual arc holds significant interpretive potential and warrants our close attention.

In *Sans jamais...* (in which the construction of a house serves as a metaphor for the writing of a novel) the written text (in the form of paragraphs of average length, one paragraph per page) is located on the bottom half of every page, with blank space above it, like so:



**Figure 1 - *Sans jamais parler du vent* (1983)<sup>75</sup>**

In *Film d'amour...* (which also features houses being built - this time as props for the film imagined in the title), the text is located at the very top of each page, with blank space below, like so:



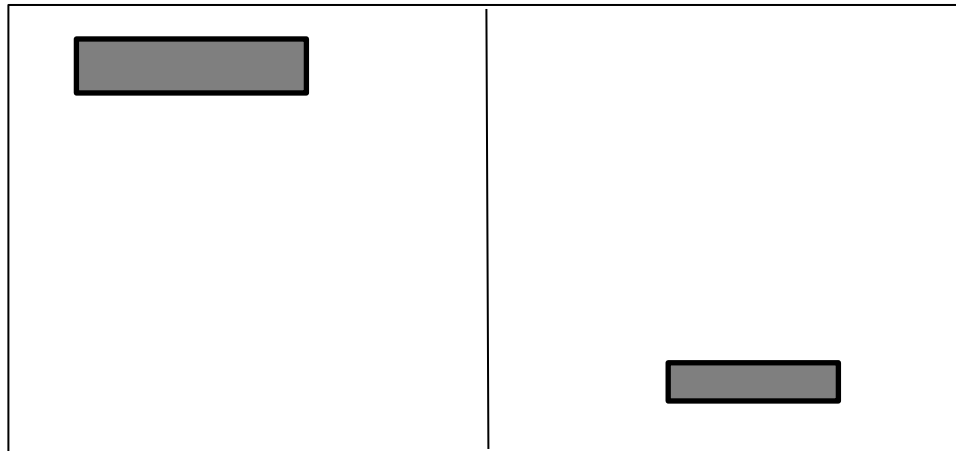
**Figure 2 - *Film d'amour et de dépendance* (1984)**

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<sup>75</sup> In Figures 1-5 and 7, the rectangles represent blocks of text. I have made an attempt to capture relative (and representative) sizes and placement of the blocks of text on the page, however they are approximate and not exactly to scale.

On the left hand pages, the text is composed of short descriptive paragraphs, and on the right hand pages it consists of concise passages of dialogue between unknown or anonymous interlocutors.

Finally, in *Histoire de la maison...*, (which features a woman watching a house as it burns), the text passages (even shorter than before) alternate in location from page to page. On left hand side pages, the text is located at the very top and on right hand side pages it is found at the very bottom.



**Figure 3 - *Histoire de la maison qui brûle* (1985)**

As I suggested in chapter 1, these early texts are more like prose poetry than novels - short, composed of short sentences and passages surrounded by a lot of blank space on the page. Daigle's experiments with form in this manner evoke the work of French symbolist poets like Stéphane Mallarmé,<sup>76</sup> Paul Verlaine and Charles

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<sup>76</sup> It will be helpful to keep Mallarmé's 1897 poem *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* in mind when considering Daigle's most recent novel *Pour sûr*. In chapter 3 I analyze the playful, game-like aspects of the structure of that text.

Baudelaire.<sup>77</sup> Boudreau and Robichaud see Daigle's placement of blank space in relation to the textual passages as particularly significant. They argue that in her work, blank space stands in for the writing process, serving "comme une métaphore du travail de l'écriture" (144), and they reiterate an assertion made by Boudreau in an earlier article, that blank spaces represent all that is erased, excluded or not said in the text (144). They propose that the alternating of textual passages and blank spaces in all three of these novels unites them into a creative and cohesive organizational structure in which the textual passages are tethered to the blank spaces in a significant way. They liken the string of blank spaces to an axis around which the text turns: "Symétriquement opposés dans les deux premiers romans, les espaces blancs s'élargissent dans le troisième, pour devenir l'axe autour duquel tourne le texte" (144).

This "axe autour duquel tourne le texte" is a compelling concept, proving useful in a broader analysis of Daigle's oeuvre. For example, if we build on Boudreau and Robichaud's idea that the blank spaces stand in for the process of writing, the "axis" of blank space serves as a vivid visual representation of the self-conscious, metafictional quality of Daigle's work. Boudreau and Robichaud observe this to be the case in these first three novels, writing that "le principal sujet de l'histoire est la fabrication du roman lui-même" (148); I would argue that this is also true of everything Daigle has written since then. Throughout her career Daigle's work is imbued with references (both implicit

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<sup>77</sup> As is mentioned at numerous points in this dissertation, Daigle's work refers constantly, both implicitly and explicitly, to the French literary canon.

and explicit) to the act of writing or creating. The end product delivered to us as readers is invariably accompanied by references to the creative writing process that led to its existence. Product and process are inseparable for Daigle, intertwined really - which makes the “axis of rotation” image particularly apt. Daigle’s textual passages do not exist alone and are tethered at all times to references or metaphors that represent her creative process.

Once the “axis of rotation” image is applied to Daigle’s work in this one way, other examples are revealed in turn and the image becomes a useful means of conceptualizing additional aspects of her oeuvre. We find “axes” throughout her oeuvre - both structurally and thematically, both intra-textually within novels and intertextually between them. In *Pour sûr* for example, there are themes so pervasive and important as to serve a kind of structural role, upon which the book is built - as “axes” that transect the novel and connect fragments to each other along the way. One example is the game of Scrabble, which is such an important theme as to have its own category (of the 144 categories in the text) and which is also mentioned in other innumerable fragments (of other categories) throughout the text. References to Scrabble transect the novel, and in this way act as a kind of axis upon which numerous other fragments and themes are constructed. This brings to mind the image of a double-helix (like a strand of DNA), which has strands of molecules connected together and twisting around a common axis. In *Pour sûr*, Scrabble is like a strand of DNA because it is a basic unit which enables Daigle to string together numerous related ideas and explore issues of language, writing

and printing, the relative value of letters, words, and by extension, the languages they form. This model works when applied to one book, like here in *Pour sûr*, or across several books, like the metafictional “axis” of blank spaces that connects Daigle's first three novels. Furthermore, it is a model that transects Daigle’s oeuvre overall, in the form of certain ubiquitous themes and writing techniques that are present - in some form - in every one of her novels. Some examples include: the theme of language and the difficulty of expressing oneself as an Acadian (choosing not to speak at times, or to speak selectively); the metaphor of construction (the act of building a house or structure that represents the creative writing process); an acknowledgement of the reader’s role (and the constant presence of a reader who is witness to the writing process that is chronicled in the work at hand); and a consistent juxtaposition and blurring of fiction with nonfiction (fictional characters and plots with references to real-life people, places and things, often centered in a contemporary Acadian or Canadian context). We can conceive of these themes as the DNA strands of France Daigle’s work, the basic building blocks of her oeuvre that twist and turn through - and between - her novels. Certainly Daigle goes to great lengths to ask (and even demand) that her readers make intertextual connections between her novels. In many case this is more subtle, but often she does this quite overtly, referring to her previous novels by title. In *Pour sûr* alone there are dozens of fragments that refer explicitly to her previous novels and characters in this manner. The first example of this is (notably) a reference to Scrabble:

Dans son ouvrage 1953. *Chronique d'une naissance annoncée*, la romancière acadienne France Daigle ne fait aucune mention de la vente,

cette année-là, de 312 000 jeux de Scrabble, 6 000 par semaine en moyenne (12).<sup>78</sup>

In this one example Daigle immediately clues the reader into one way in which she means her work to be read - intertextually - but she also underscores the importance of this particular thematic subject, Scrabble, while highlighting all which is “not said” in these novels. Scrabble, even in its *absence* from mention in the 1995 novel *1953. Chronique d'une naissance annoncée*, suddenly becomes a topic associated with it, post-publication. “Scrabble” now transects Daigle’s *oeuvre*, beyond just *Pour sûr*, and in a way that reinforces the DNA imagery I have described previously - with “that which is not said” serving as an axis upon which the texts are built, and around which they turn, across Daigle’s body of work. Of course, the game of Scrabble, with its letters on little wooden tiles that can be put together (arranged and rearranged) to form words, that are in turn built upon each other on the board, can be seen as a metaphor for printing and for the act of creative writing, too. The act of writing was clearly an important theme in Daigle’s first three novels, and it is again in the following three, which I will examine now.

(HYPERLINK: Click on the number 34 to go back to that footnote.)

### The Second Three Novels (1985-1991) - Opening the House to the World

Daigle’s next three texts are *Variations en B et K* (1985), *L’Été avant la mort* (written in collaboration with Hélène Harbec, 1986), and *La Beauté de l’affaire* (1991).

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<sup>78</sup> 12. 9.45.3 Détails inutiles.

In these novels, Daigle continues to make creative use of the relationship between blank spaces and textual passages, and the textual passages are still short (i.e. fragments). All three novels are organized unconventionally - the textual passages in *Variations en B et K* and *La Beauté de l'affaire* form visually striking patterns and the way *L'Été avant la mort* is formatted represents, in a tangible manner, the notable shift in Daigle's work which is found in this era of her career.

The first text, *Variations en B et K* is subtitled "*Plans, devis et contrat pour l'infrastructure d'un pont.*" Indeed, this imagery of a bridge seems to be visually represented in the very structure of the text. Paragraphs of large font text are located at the top of the page, with paragraphs of very small font text at the bottom of the page, closer to the book's spine. The visual effect of the blocks of text upon the page is that of piers providing support to a bridge sitting above them.

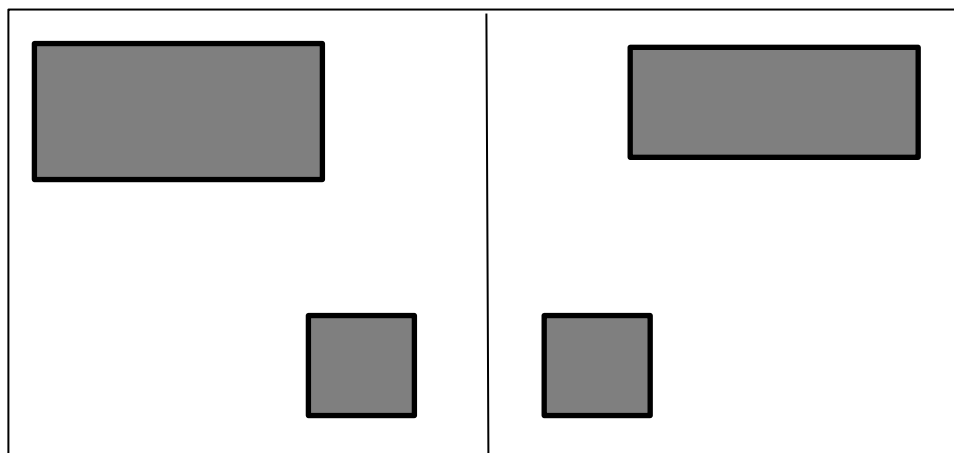


Figure 4 - *Variations en B et K* (1985)

The narrative parts of the text are found in the paragraphs at the top of the page and have to do with a family with two daughters who are alternatively camping on a beach in coastal New Brunswick and in a desert somewhere in the Middle East. The tent, rather than a solid house, is a unifying image in these narrative threads - a temporary structure perhaps meant to represent a “fleeting” story or written record. This imagery is underscored by the fact that the entire book is written in an italicized font. Daigle’s use of italics seems significant, lending a certain informality and intimacy to the novel. The passages are written in a kind of travel diary style; this example is from page 36:

*“L’ainée. Hier soir elle voulait aller se plaindre aux gardiens du terrain parce que nos voisins étaient un peu fêtards et bruyants. Elle dit qu’elle aime ça se plaindre et qu’il faut toujours se plaindre quand on a la chance.”* The small paragraphs at the bottom of the pages (also in italics) are written like captions for photos/images that we do not see in the text. Each imaginary image or set of images is described in detail but does not usually have anything to do with the travel diary style passage above it. In one example, on page 28:

*Gertrude Bell (ci-haut), fidèle collaboratrice du colonel Lawrence ou Lawrence d’Arabie, opta de rester en Iraq malgré la retraite de Lawrence en Angleterre suite à l’écroulement de son rêve. En bas, ceux celles qui encourageaient les révoltes des Kurdes (28).<sup>79</sup>*

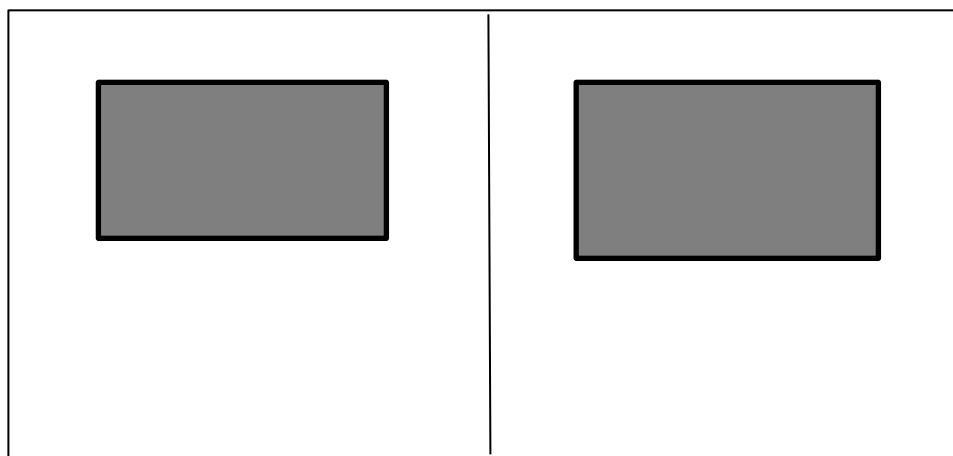
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<sup>79</sup> I have formatted this citation differently than others in this dissertation, in an effort to more closely represent the way the fragment appears on the page in the actual book.

There is no actual image of Gertrude Bell on the page here. Instead, readers are left to imagine this and other images described in these short photo caption-like passages. As I proposed in Chapter 1, there is a kind of “graphic novel” quality to some of Daigle’s work that is pushed to a certain extreme with these ekphrastic passages. This particular example, with its references to renowned historical figures Bell and T.E. Lawrence, also highlights a new aspect to Daigle’s work - a conflation of history, myth and fictional characters that will become a trademark of her work in subsequent novels. This novel is also experimental in that it incorporates an inordinate number of words beginning with the letters “ B” and “ K” - as would be indicated by the title. Critic André Brochu has suggested that Daigle means to use these letters to represent “l’ici” and “l’ailleurs” (Bouctouche and Kouchibouguac are places in New Brunswick, for example, and Bédouins and Kurdes refer to ethnic groups in the Middle East) and that: “Le but de l’opération, qui est beaucoup plus qu’un exercice de style, est peut-être de montrer ce qu’il y a de familier, de bon (B) au cœur de l’ailleurs (K) et inversement, d’ouvrir au monde la maison (la lettre B dans l’alphabet phénicien *représentait la maison, c’est-à-dire, pour les modernes, la personnalité*)”(Brochu, 138). In this last sentence, Brochu cites directly from page 23 in the text, so it is in fact Daigle herself who has identified this association of the letter B with “the house.” I would argue that it is in fact the image of the tent which offers an even more compelling metaphor for Daigle’s “opening of the house to the world,” as the tent here serves as a bridge between her own community and the outside world, here represented by the Middle East, halfway around the globe. The novel’s

narrator is “seeing” both places essentially from the same perspective (from inside a tent), a perspective which literally necessitates an “opening” of the “house” to the “world” beyond it. When considered in light of her “house = writing process” metaphor, this idea proves rather prescient, predicting an important shift that occurs with Daigle’s next novel, *L’Été avant la mort*.

In *L’Été avant la mort*, Daigle opens her writing process (her heretofore very personal, figurative “house”) to the world in a tangible way by writing the novel in partnership with another Canadian writer, H  l  ne Harbec (who was born in Qu  bec but lives in Moncton). At first glance, this novel has a rather ordinary format compared to Daigle’s first four novels. The novel’s paragraphs of written text occupy the top half of every page, with some variation in length but nothing too extreme.



**Figure 5 - *L’  t   avant la mort* (1986)**

One unique aspect to this novel’s physical structure, however, is that it is organized into two separate (at least physically), consecutive novellas. These two parts

share the same title (*L'Été avant la mort*) but are assigned different dates on their title pages (Daigle's part is dated "mai 1985" and Harbec's "novembre 1985"). By literally, physically dividing the text into two separate works attributed to the two authors each in turn, Daigle and Harbec make the collaboration impossible to ignore - but the manner in which it is done also has other implications. This is not a text collaboratively written word by word, but rather it is one story told twice by two different people in two different styles.<sup>80</sup> In this way, the novel's structure tangibly illustrates the aforementioned "opening of the house to the world" as the first novella is Daigle's and it is followed by Harbec's. The style in which each part is written underscores this idea, since Daigle's part is written like an intimate personal journal (the "house") and Harbec's part is a clear departure from that, written in several different narrative voices (the "world").

Both parts tell the story of a woman who is dying of cancer. The story is set in the summer months preceding her death in November. Harbec's part is physically more substantial - it is roughly double the page length of Daigle's<sup>81</sup> and with longer paragraphs too. The process of writing is a prominent theme in both parts, as the dying woman and her life partner (also a woman) are depicted engaging in concurrent<sup>82</sup> writing projects (they have promised to each write a certain amount each day) over the course of the

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<sup>80</sup> Raymond Queneau's *Exercices de style* (1947) comes to mind - one story told many times in different styles. But Queneau's text is written by one author, whereas here we have one story told by two different people.

<sup>81</sup> Daigle's part is 24 pages long (pages 7-31) and Harbec's part is 41 pages long (pages 33-74).

<sup>82</sup> I have been unable to find any information about the nature of Daigle's collaboration with Harbec on this novel; perhaps they, too, wrote their respective sections concurrently in a similar fashion.

summer. In keeping with Daigle's meta-fictional style, the writing projects are described so that it appears that the texts we ourselves are reading are the ones the novel's characters are in the process of writing. While the two parts essentially tell the same story, there are notable differences between them stylistically. The half written by Daigle is written in the first person, like a series of journal entries written by the dying woman's partner. It is an intimate account of the summer's events, with the dying woman (referred to frequently and always as "elle") serving as the main subject of the entries. At times, the narrator describes her dying partner's state of health, with entries such as: "Certains matins, elle semblait avoir pris du mieux. Si elle avait bien dormi, si elle n'avait pas eu trop chaud, si elle avait bien respiré l'air frais, alors la tension de vivre ou de mourir prenait un peu de recul"(26). Other entries describe the shared writing project and take on a contemplative tone:

Le 1er août, elle put encore s'allonger à côté de moi et griffonner quelques phrases sur ses feuilles lignées. Elle ne sait toujours rien de ce que j'écris. Elle ne sait pas que je suis pratiquement en train de l'enterrer vivante. Je lui ai demandé qu'on abandonne ce projet mais elle n'a pas voulu. De temps à autre pendant la journée, je me vois mettre le feu à mon cahier. J'ai peur de nous avoir jeté une sorte de mauvais sort. J'ai peur qu'une fois écrites certaines situations prennent soudainement vie et forme, comme appelées à l'existence par conjuration. Brouillages de nos désirs et de nos réalités. Mais elle veut continuer (27).

Notably, Daigle's narrator describes reticence about the writing project, fearing the consequences of putting certain things down on paper and a certain blurring of fiction and reality. A reader cannot help but wonder if this is a fear Daigle herself has struggled with in her own real-life creative process.

Harbec writes her half in a markedly different style, with a narrative voice that changes often. Occasionally it is written in the first person, from the perspective of the dying woman. Other passages are written in the third person, about the dying woman and her writing project. Others still appear to be passages from that writing project, which is a play that features a character referred to as “la femme de la pièce” (ostensibly an autobiographical character as imagined by the dying woman). Finally, there are some lines of dialogue; these often take the form of questions posed by the daughters and are sometimes accompanied by responses from one of the moms.

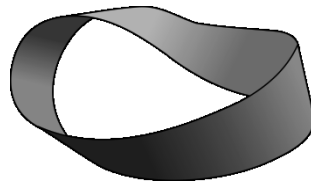
The passages of dialogue are unique to Harbec’s half of the novel and are written in standard French. They are never quite explicitly attributed to specific characters - there are no dialogue tags so readers must make assumptions about who is speaking at any given time. At first glance the dialogues seem to exist primarily to provide moments of levity in a text that is otherwise concerned with a heavy, disheartening topic, but other functions soon become apparent. The dialogues do not drive the narrative but rather seem to play a kind of interruptive role. This is especially true of those comments made by the daughters which often seem to interrupt the narrator’s thoughts. The narrator’s thoughts are consumed with her impending death and with her writing project: “Elle ne pense qu’à la pièce. Exprimer l’inextricable multiplicité du moi”(71). She is intent on writing her play with the “femme de la pièce” protagonist but her process and her preoccupation with her illness get interrupted with innocent reminders of her daughters, family and life, such as: “Maman, je n’ai plus de papier pour faire les plumes du devant de mon hibou” (73).

The dialogues represent the dying woman's "real life" which constantly intrudes upon or interrupts her solitary, individual creative process. They serve other important functions too. For example, in another dialogue, we see the blurring of fiction and reality anticipated (and feared) by Daigle's narrator: "Maman, c'est drôle, on dirait que cette femme est jeune et vieille. Pourquoi est-ce que tu la regardes tout le temps, maman?" (57) The daughter's question is about the "femme de la pièce," a fictional character created by the dying woman in her play, and that the daughter should not, in theory, be able to "see." It is a kind of *mise en abyme* with the "femme de la pièce" representing the dying woman (*la multiplicité du moi*) and where the boundaries between the two characters (and the two fictional worlds/layers) are increasingly fluid.

The "femme de la pièce" commits suicide on the last page of the novel and a voice intones a kind of manifesto that includes the line "Refuser de mourir avant d'avoir remis mon œuvre ou faire de ma mort une œuvre" (74). In this way, the dying woman takes control of her own narrative, creating a character who takes control of her own destiny by dictating the terms of her own death. Although some might be tempted to read this suicide as a cautionary tale, I think a more compelling argument is that it represents the power of creative fiction and the power of a writer using fiction to control their narrative. In this way it is an effective rejoinder to the "fear" that is expressed by Daigle's narrator in the first half of this novel.

This example underscores the ways in which the two parts of *L'été avant la mort*, although labeled and positioned sequentially, actually exist in constant dialogue with

each other. Daigle's half anticipates Harbec's, which is both "a response to" and "a retelling of" Daigle's story. The two parts form a whole, a novel that is written by both authors. In this way, the text resembles a kind of Möbius strip - imagine a strip of paper that is twisted once and then reattached at the ends.



**Figure 6 - Möbius Strip**<sup>83</sup>

Although initially a strip of paper with two surfaces (like the two parts written by our two authors), once twisted and attached, the Möbius strip has only one surface that loops around and around (two parts becoming one novel, written by both authors).<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Image taken from <https://openclipart.org/detail/18684/mobius-strip> - open use is permitted and encouraged. For more information, see: <https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/>.

<sup>84</sup> I have borrowed this concept from Alexandre Leupin, who applied the concept of the Möbius strip to the *Roman de la Rose*, essentially as a means of solving the problem of the authorship of the text by both Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun. He wrote, "Hence, instead of being opposed or merged into a unity, the two parts of the *Roman* will be united on the single side of a surface that endlessly designates at the same time Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun and alternates between them" (Leupin, 62). Leupin also addressed the empty space, writing that the: "Möbius strip is also wrapped 'around' a central void of sense and nonsense" (64), which he later likens to "that which the text cannot represent" (69) making this metaphor function very similarly to our Daiglian rotational axis as proposed Boudreau and Robichaud. Leupin also argues that this image is useful as a means of conceptualizing the author/reader relationship, writing: "The Möbian structure that informs medieval exegesis shows clearly that the reader is always involved in the observation of text, even if unconsciously (that is, even if the interpreter does not want to know anything about his or her own involvement). Writing texts, then reading them, and writing commentaries on them again loops around a central void—an unconscious truth and the desire of the reader" (71-72). In chapter 3, I explore the ways in which this is the case in *Pour sûr*, using reader response theory to analyze the author/reader relationship in the novel.

There is an empty space in the middle - the Möbius strip loops around and around it in an imagery that resembles, in some way, the rotational axis I have described in Daigle's other novels.

In the end, although this collaboration with H el ene Harbec is seemingly an outlier in Daigle's body of work, it proves fruitful to consider it closely in our analysis of the structure of Daigle's novels over the course of her career. In a way, Harbec and her contribution to this novel are a kind of "interruption" too - an interruption of Daigle's writing career. Although it appears to be the first and last time that Daigle collaborates with another writer in this particular way, by co-writing a novel, the project does portend several other examples of creative collaboration, both real and imagined<sup>85</sup>, in the ensuing decades of Daigle's career.

Starting with her next novel *La Beaut e de l'affaire*, Daigle's work increasingly explores questions of art as a collaborative or community effort. In this novel, we once again find themes of architecture and construction serving as metaphors for the process of writing and these themes transect the novel in the same twisting, turning way we see in Daigle's other books. In addition to these themes, there are concurrent narrative threads, three parallel stories about three sets of characters. As V eronique Roy has observed, these characters represent three different types of artists: 1. the solitary genius as represented by an old man building a hut on an island, 2. an architect who (accompanied by his wife)

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<sup>85</sup> Her theater work in collaboration with the Moncton Sable theatre collective in the late '90s is one real-life example.

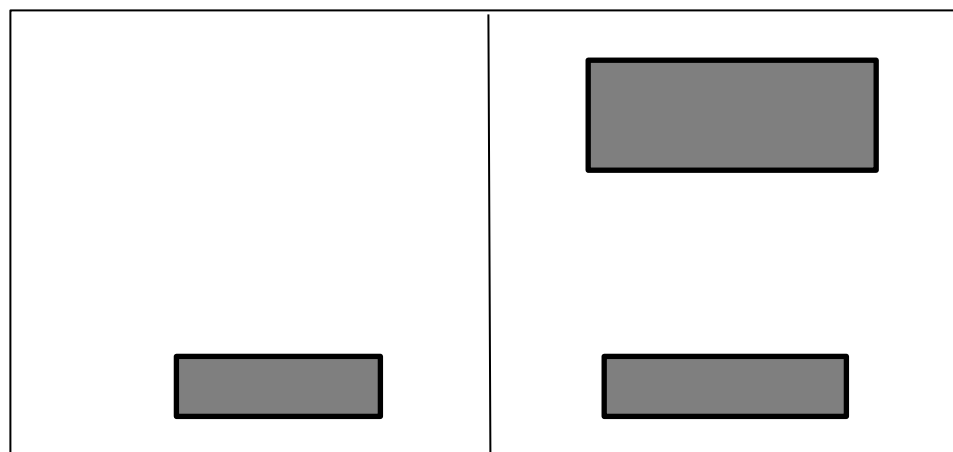
searches for inspiration from a divine source referred to as le “Grand Bâtitseur” and 3. a group of Acadian writers who are out of work and engaging in a collaborative project to construct a public park.

As this larger cast of characters would indicate, this novel, too, is concerned with a process of “opening the house to the world” - a fact made explicit by its subtitle: “*Fiction autobiographique à plusieurs voix sur son rapport tortueux au langage.*” Daigle takes pains to label this as a work of autobiographical fiction but she also emphasizes a change in how that autobiographical narrative will be told. This is not a text made up of journal-like entries written in the voice of a single narrator but rather of several concurrent narratives told in different narrative voices. The characters representing the three different types of artists are all engaged in some kind of creative expression, each perhaps representing one aspect of Daigle’s own creative process. In this novel, metafiction and auto-fiction are both told “à plusieurs voix.”

This change, from individual to collective voice, is actually emblemized in the structure of the text in another, graphic way as *La Beauté de l’affaire* returns to a visual motif we saw in earlier novels, with paragraphs of text accompanied by blank spaces on each page.<sup>86</sup> Here the paragraphs of text appear in three locations, at the bottom of the left hand side pages and then at the very top and very bottom of the right hand side pages.

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<sup>86</sup> In one fragment, Daigle wryly makes a reference to Marguerite Duras that acknowledges this unusual structure: “Duras, elle, au moins, remplit ses pages. Les livres coûtent cher. Personne n’aime se faire avoir” (21). This fragment is one of innumerable references Daigle makes to the French literary canon in her work, but it also highlights the role of the reader, who makes demands upon any writer. There are several other references to Duras and her work in this novel - and in other novels



**Figure 7 - *La Beauté de l'affaire* (1991)**

The rough triangular shape created by the positioning of these paragraphs of text on the page holds [a decent amount of] interpretive potential. In one reading, it resembles a “lesser than” mathematical symbol “<” which would in fact represent a smaller quantity (Daigle’s individual voice) to the left of, and implying a movement towards, a larger quantity (the collective voice). In another reading, for those readers who are familiar with Daigle’s later work, this triangle will resemble an actual river delta, which is a landform with significant symbolic value in Daigle’s later novels, most significantly in *Pas pire*.<sup>87</sup> Like a bridge, a delta is something that exists “between” two places but whereas a bridge is a structure that *facilitates* movement between two land masses, a delta is a messy boundary zone between the land and the sea. This is a liminal space where the land and

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too, the style of *L'été avant la mort*, for example, is similar to Duras’ work - how she depicts silence, for example.

<sup>87</sup> See Carlo Lavoie’s book chapter on the symbolic presence of deltas and bridges in Daigle’s work.

sea meet and interact, each interfering with the other, each “bleeding into” the other, and it represents a much more complicated movement or point of contact. This of course symbolizes the complicated cultural experience lived by contemporary Acadians, who personify this kind of “in between” state as members of a linguistic and cultural minority who, rather than choose between French and English, have created a language (and culture) that combines elements of both. Finally, the rough triangle formed on the pages of this novel resembles the Greek letter “delta” - which of course represents “change.” Indeed this novel does mark a change in Daigle’s work, which is revealed visually in the next two novels.

#### The Next Two Novels (1993-1995) - A New Pattern at Play

Daigle’s next two novels, *La vraie vie* (1993) and *1953. Chronique d’une naissance annoncé* (1995) are designed completely differently than the previous texts and mark a clear transition in Daigle’s body of work. Although they are still written in fragments, in these novels the fragments are no longer buttressed or juxtaposed with blank spaces but are instead organized into numbered sections with titles. In these texts, a new kind of “axis” comes into play, the kind you might find in a coordinate system; Daigle’s novels begin to take on a mathematical feel, with sections, chapters and fragments plotted out on X and Y axes in a structured, two-dimensional geometric system. We will see that in *Pour sûr* Daigle pushes this geometric angle even further,

adding a third dimension to achieve the “cube” shape by which she structures that text. I will discuss this later in the chapter.

*La vraie vie* is plotted out in a very symmetrical manner; it is divided into five sections (or chapters), each of which has a “Première partie” and a “Deuxième partie.” Each “partie” is composed of 10 fragments - for a total of exactly 100 fragments in the novel overall. There is a table at the back of the book that lists the titles for every chapter and fragment (a precursor to *Pour sûr*'s index of fragment categories, perhaps?). Each “partie” contains two separate narrative threads that deal with different characters and plots; the fragments alternate from one narrative to another, back and forth throughout the “partie” until a final fragment at the end of each part, always entitled “Effraction” and always composed of a subject that is different than the two narrative threads in that particular part but related to some other narrative thread elsewhere in the novel. (In this way, each “partie” resembles a self-contained a double-helix, with two narrative “strands.”) At the beginning of the novel, the subjects of each strand are simple and primarily concerned with individual characters, but over the course of the novel, they get more complicated. In the first chapter of the novel, for example, there are only four characters (Élizabeth, Denis, Claude and Denise), each featured in their own narrative strand, but in the fifth and final chapter the strands have multiple subjects each, and we learn that several of the main characters in this novel are actually characters in a film that is being written by Denis (and which Élizabeth is helping to create).

*1953. Chronique d'une naissance annoncée* is also divided into numbered chapters with titles but Daigle eschews symmetry here - or rather she begins to introduce elements of asymmetry into the system by which she has organized the text. Although the novel's structure resembles that of *La vraie vie* in broad strokes, a close reading now finds incongruity at every turn. Whereas *La vraie vie* was made up of ten similarly structured chapters, *1953* begins with a "Préambule" and ends with a section entitled "Épilogues," with 8 chapters in between. It is written as a sort of autobiographical fiction, anchored in a chronicle of real life happenings. The main character is Bébé M, who is France Daigle as a baby and who is born in the year 1953 (the real France Daigle actually was born in that year). Other main characters include the baby's father (a journalist for *l'Évangéline*, a real local newspaper based in Moncton from 1887 to 1982, and for which France Daigle wrote in the seventies), the baby's mother and one of her nurses at the hospital (both women read *l'Évangéline* daily and readers are introduced to world events through their eyes as they read about them). In this novel, the "axe autour duquel tourne le texte" is the newspaper's reporting of real life events that occurred in the year 1953. Examples include: the publishing of Roland Barthes' book *Le degré zéro de l'écriture*, the awarding of the Nobel prize in literature to Winston Churchill, Joseph Stalin's death, a birthday party held for Albert Einstein, the coronation of Elizabeth II, the execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg.

The "Préambule" of the novel is of particular interest to us, as it "primes" readers for a specific reading or interpretive approach. The first line of this section (and of the

novel on the whole) is “La balle revient. Chaque balle est un défi” (9), and this line is repeated, in various forms, throughout the novel, like a kind of refrain for emphasis. The back and forth motion evoked by this line represents the relationship between an author and her readers. In this epilogue, a “Problème d’auteur” (9) is followed by the line “Et la balle revient” (9) and a “Problème de lecteur (10) by “Chaque balle est un défi (10). Daigle also addresses her reader directly in this epilogue, engaging them in a new, more explicit way. She describes the process she underwent in writing her previous novel, *La vraie vie* - “La dernière fois que je me suis assise pour écrire quelque chose comme un roman, j’avais commencé par une espèce de longue réflexion...” (10). She then includes, in italics, the “first chapter she wrote” when writing *La vraie vie*, which, as she explains, she had decided to leave out of the final published novel. Whereas in previous texts Daigle used unusual structures and occasional intertextual references to encourage an intertextual approach on the part of her readers, in *1953*... she does this explicitly, openly declaring certain connections in the “Préambule” and liberally seeding the rest of the novel with references to *La vraie vie* and its characters.<sup>88</sup>

Daigle is beginning to enlist her readers in a collaborative interpretive process while also compelling them to take an intertextual approach to her oeuvre. In fact, with these references to *La vraie vie*, we see that *1953* can really exist (and be fully read, interpreted) only in relation to its predecessor, and Daigle begins to establish a contract

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<sup>88</sup> Precursor to later novels, especially *Pour sûr*, which privileges the reader’s role in the interpretation of the novel.

with her readers that encourages them to approach her work as one long oeuvre that rolls out over time, rather than a series of independent, autonomous texts.

Underscoring this contract is a change in *narrative* structure that occurs concurrently with the change in physical structure we have described. In these novels, Daigle begins writing recurring characters, including perhaps most notably “Élizabeth,” a doctor from Montreal P.Q. who lives in Moncton N.B. and who, we will see, reappears in most (or all?) of Daigle’s subsequent novels including *Pour sûr*. Élizabeth and the other characters still do not “speak” in dialogues; their thoughts and feelings are conveyed by a third person omniscient narrator. The “axis of rotation” remains a useful conceptual tool here, as the “blank spaces” of earlier novels are replaced by a different iteration of “that which is not said” - the missing dialogues of Daigle’s increasingly developed and compelling characters.<sup>89</sup> In chapter 1 I proposed that Daigle’s writing of her early novels - anything before the introduction of Chiac in *Pas pire* (1998) - can basically be conceived of as a kind of set construction, the preparation of a “backdrop” or virtual world for eventual population by living, breathing (read: speaking) characters like Terry and Carmen and their friends and family. Indeed, the recurring characters in *La vraie vie* and *1953...*, although more fully developed than those in Daigle’s previous novels, are not presented as protagonists with much agency. They are minor characters waiting for

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<sup>89</sup> Jeremy Rosen does an interesting study of minor characters (*Minor Characters Have Their Day* 2016). It is a phenomenon we have seen in extreme contemporary literature - rewriting stories from the perspective of minor characters. I plan to explore this in a later work. For now, I simply observe that Terry starts out as a minor character in *Pas pire* but he is decidedly a main protagonist in *Pour sûr*. The transformation here happens over the course of Daigle’s saga.

something to happen. Daigle seems to acknowledge this directly in *La vraie vie*, where her character Denis, who is in the process of writing/directing a film, realizes that his goal is to stage only minor characters or extras, rather than protagonists who demonstrate any evolution. In a fragment titled “Des figurants” we see this at play: “...Denis se rend aussi compte que tous les personnages de son film seront des figurants, qu’il ne veut pas raconter la vie d’une personne en particulier mais la vie en général. Bref, il veut montrer non pas l’évolution des personnes, mais simplement leurs déplacements. Il croit que le sens surgira spontanément de ces déplacements (46). Élizabeth exemplifies this approach in Daigle’s work ; she is someone who “voudrait avoir une vie” (*La vraie vie*, 9), and who is “...souvent contente de se tenir aux abords de la vie” (*1953...*, 76). In fact, the mood conveyed by Élizabeth is one of keeping distance, “Elle a même développé un certain talent pour le recul, la distance”(76), and of swimming in place, “Elle conçoit d’ailleurs sa capacité de recul comme de la nage sur place : ne pas trop prendre d’ampleur afin de ne pas avancer, mais bouger quand même assez pour éviter de caler”(76). Is Daigle herself “swimming in place” during this period of her career? What might this have to do with her relationship to Chiac? Given the context, in which many contemporary Acadian artists were using Chiac in their work even as Daigle continued to avoid it - was she beginning to feel a kind of pressure to do so herself?

### The Theater (1997-2001)

As I explained in Chapter 1, the late 1990s were an incredibly important transition in Daigle's work, as Daigle, in collaboration with a Moncton theater collective, wrote three experimental plays that used Chiac in their characters' dialogues. I do not examine these plays here except to say that this is also the moment in which she began to incorporate Chiac in her novels and that the theater experience had a clear impact on Daigle's literary approach in this and other ways, too. This I illustrate in the following pages.

### Post-Theater but Pre-*Pour sûr* (1998 - 2002)

As I propose in chapter 1, if we think of Daigle's pre-theater novels as a long process of set development, the next three novels resemble rehearsals, where Daigle develops and practices several of the key characteristics of *Pour sûr*. One of these is her use of Chiac, as I have described in chapter 1. Another is her experimentation with both narrative and organizational structure. Each novel's structure is more complex than the one preceding it and all three are experimental in ways that Daigle repurposes in different ways in *Pour sûr*.

*Pas pire* (1998), for example, has an organizing structure that relies on even numbers, is easily identified and stays consistent throughout the text. It is written in four parts, each of which is composed of six chapters. Each chapter is composed of six fragments, for a total of 144 fragments. In *Un fin passage* (2001) Daigle uses odd

numbers and makes the structure more abstract and less immediately obvious to readers. It is written in seven chapters (named for the days of the week). Each chapter contains between 13 and 15 fragments, for a total of 95 fragments in the book.

In *Petites difficultés d'existence* the organizing structure is much less obvious at first. It is written in 14 chapters, each made up of between 6 and 9 fragments. The chapters are numbered in a seemingly random fashion; they are in neither consecutive nor sequential order. (The “first” chapter is chapter 21, followed by 50, 17, 12, 16, 13, 30, 7, 20, 25, 15, 55, 64, and 40.) Each chapter has a title and underneath each title is an image of a Yi King<sup>90</sup> hexagram that corresponds to the number of the chapter. We discover that the novel is organized in a way that relates to the narrative, for in this text Terry has taken up the practice of Yi King divination. He has chosen the “Method of Sixteen” version of this practice. He throws marbles, which produces random numbers (between 6 and 9) - these are then turned into hexagrams that can be looked up in his Yi King interpretation books. Terry has 4 different versions of the book - one of them in French - and consults all 4, comparing the results and choosing his interpretation accordingly. This novel can be interpreted like a giant Yi King divination session; each chapter is made up of between 6 and 9 fragments, which could mimic a throw of the marbles and would mean that the novel is made up of at least 2 full hexagrams. Daigle plays with this structure though, adding 2 extra chapters, for example, with no real explanation about the discrepancy.

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<sup>90</sup> I use the term as it is spelled in Daigle’s text, which is one of the accepted French language versions of the term. In English, “I Ching” seems to be the preferred/accepted term. I have used Geoffrey Redmond and Tze-ki Hon’s *Teaching the I Ching (Book of Changes)* as a reference in this section.

Furthermore, Terry makes a big discovery at the end of the novel when he realizes he has been using one extra marble all along.

Although we could spend an entire chapter on the significance of Yi King in this novel, I will keep my analysis to two main observations. First, the Yi King references and structural elements allow Daigle to begin to pose fundamental questions about the nature of knowledge itself, and about the interpretation of texts. Terry's practice of reading several different versions of the Yi King manual suggests that there are many different ways to interpret a text and encourages multiple readings and re-readings of it too. At the same time, the discrepancy in the supposed organizational system for this novel, as well as the mistake Terry discovers he has been making would seem to encourage readers to be wary of defined or declared systems, and perhaps to be wary of their own preconceived notions and/or of being too confident in their interpretations of the work at hand. Second, Yi King means "Book of Changes" - and this period in Daigle's writing career is indeed a time of great changes.

Beyond the organizational structure of the fragments and chapters, these three novels are notable for their introduction of several new recurring characters, indeed an entire cast of them. Élizabeth is still present but she is no longer "swimming in place" - in *Pas pire* she travels to Europe and meets (and has a love affair with) Hans, an enigmatic character we will also see in the ensuing novels. Other new recurring characters include Terry, Carmen, their little boy Étienne, Étienne Zablonki, his wife Ludmilla Bellâme and a number of other neighbors and friends, many of whom I have already mentioned.

The frame story we see in *Pas pire* disappears in the two novels that follow. We no longer have a France Daigle character, nor does any other character discuss the text we have in hand. There is a notable blending of the narrative threads here too; the parallel stories are now all interconnected. The effect is that these novels allow Daigle to develop her fictional characters and set the stage for the stories she will make more elaborate in *Pour sûr*. As I have already mentioned in chapter 1, these three novels form a trilogy with many continuous stories and *Petites difficultés d'existence* leaves readers hanging, with several narrative threads hinting at future developments. Daigle does take these up again ten years later in *Pour sûr*, continuing the saga and expanding the scope of the fictional world she has created.

#### *Pour sûr*: Toward a Hybrid Universe

I have already noted that it took 10 years for France Daigle to write *Pour sûr* and that she very consciously set out to make this a kind of masterpiece that contained everything she had learned and developed in her previous novels. In many ways, *Pour sûr* simply continues and elaborates on techniques and characteristics we saw in the earlier texts. In other ways, it is fundamentally, even dramatically different. In the ensuing pages, I describe the text's structure in more detail - my goal is to provide an overview of how the text is organized as well as how it functions.

First, a brief overview of the ways in which Daigle expands upon her already existing cast of characters, narrative structures and fictional universe. In *Pour sûr* we find most of Daigle's recurring characters from the three previous novels. All of the separate

or semi-separate parallel stories or narrative threads from the previous novels are more fully integrated now, and the plotlines that were left unfinished in *Petites difficultés...* are taken up again and continued and/or resolved here. Zed's loft development project is now up and running - the lofts are actively being sold and are inhabited by many of the characters Daigle has already introduced. Terry and Carmen own one, for example, and have had their second child, Marianne. Étienne Zablonski and Ludmilla Bellême also bought a loft. The Babar (Carmen's bar) is up and running, as is Terry's bookstore, co-owned with Ludmilla. Together these two establishments provide "spirits" in the community - libation and food for thought. There is a palpable sense of community that develops in each location, too. Terry does more than sell books; he provides his customers with suggestions about what to read next and he is always ready and willing to discuss a book, or writer, with interested patrons. As for Carmen's bar, we witness its development into a true watering hole and cultural center for Moncton's francophone population.

Élizabeth is here - she is still a doctor in Moncton but now rather than existing in her own separate thread, she becomes integrated in the Terry/Carmen community. She too lives in one of the lofts; she dates Zed for a time, and even becomes Marianne's godmother (Marianne chooses her out of the blue - there is an acknowledgment by Terry and Carmen that Marianne has an innocent child's "crush" on Élizabeth - we later learn that Marianne will date women as an adult).

Regarding characters specifically, two major changes occur in *Pour sûr*. First is the expansive use of Chiac. As I described in chapter 1, *Pour sûr* is the first novel in which Daigle truly showcases Chiac, making it as much a subject of the novel as anything else. There are numerous characters of all stripes - named protagonists, minor characters and anonymous voices - and they speak a wide diversity of versions and registers of Chiac, as well as French and some English too. Furthermore, there are countless other fragments that “discuss” the topic of Chiac - its history, its legitimacy (or not), the challenges that come with speaking, understanding or writing it, an imagined future for it, etc. The novel is essentially one giant conversation about Chiac - in this way it functions like a Bohm Dialogue. This is a concept proposed by the American theoretical physicist David Bohm, wherein a large group of people comes together to engage in free-flowing and judgment-free conversation that eventually allows the group to understand itself better (Bohm, “Dialogue - A Proposal;” Bohm, *On Dialogue*).

Second, the author surrogate character of France Daigle returns and she interacts directly with many of her characters in a series of fragments labeled “Duos,” which is something I analyze much more closely in chapter 3. Any divisions that once existed between parallel stories have now disappeared. Daigle interacts with protagonists like Terry and Carmen for the first time, and she also interacts with characters from previous novels (Hans and Claudia) as well as characters that are new to this text and even anonymous ones.

Third, in addition to the blurring of boundaries between narrative threads involving different sets of characters, there is a blending of fiction and reality which is more pronounced than we have seen in Daigle's other novels. In *Pour sûr*, the fictional universe Daigle has been carefully constructing in her ongoing, multi-text saga is fully integrated into the real world of Moncton and Dieppe. Fictional characters interact with real-life ones and fictional aspects of the landscape and cityscape are overlaid on top of the real world geography (Zed's lofts, for example, are located in a real location in Moncton N.B.). This is an important aspect of *Pour sûr* that facilitates my proposal of the novel as a kind of hyperreality - more on this in chapter 3.

This hybrid universe of *Pour sûr* is revealed to readers in a hybrid text as well. In the next section, I move beyond the characters and narrative structure of the novel to describe the ways in which its actual text, fragments and pages are organized.

#### *Pour sûr*: Labels and Margins

Daigle bases the novel's organizational structure on the number 12. She is explicit about this decision in several fragments. In one example, she writes : "C'est dans son roman *Pas pire* que la romancière acadienne France Daigle se penche pour la première fois sur la symbolique du chiffre 12, qui, multiplié par lui-même, mènerait à la plénitude" (55).<sup>91</sup> Already, we note the self-referential, intertextual aspect of this fragment - this is

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<sup>91</sup> 123.12.1 Structure.

something I discuss in my next chapter but is worth noting now as a big change from the two novels that came before it. After the brief interlude that is provided by *Un fin passage* and *Petites difficultés d'existence*, Daigle's penchant for metafiction is back - and as we will see, in a remarkably expanded fashion.

Why the number 12? Daigle herself seems unsure, musing in another fragment about how she should have chosen the number 7.<sup>92</sup> Given the fact that Acadians are overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, connections to Christianity cannot be ignored (there were 12 apostles, for example). However, the number 12 has significance in a wide variety of religions, traditions and disciplines. There are 12 Tribes of Israel, for example. In mathematics, 12 is one of only two sublime numbers. Both the Western and Chinese zodiacs have 12 signs. In Greek mythology, Hercules was made to complete 12 labours. Most calendar systems assign 12 months to a year. Although Daigle does not explicitly say it, her choice of the number 12 as an organizing tool is emblematic of the way in which *Pour sûr* is at once a local and a global text, a novel that is anchored in a particular ethnic experience, yet contains information and themes that will resonate cross-culturally and interdisciplinarily.

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<sup>92</sup> "L'aveu, donc: depuis que le monde est monde le chiffre 7 a de mille et une façons symbolisé la plénitude, la perfection, la totalité. Qui plus est, le 7 est plus universellement symbolique en ce sens que le chiffre 12. Voilà. C'est dit. Les curieux iront découvrir dans le *Dictionnaire des symboles* de Chevalier et Gheerbrant de quelle manière le 7 est omniprésent dans pratiquement toutes les cultures de la terre" (278, 633.70.6 Erreurs). See chapter 3 for more of my analysis of Daigle's discussion of errors in the text, as well as the ways in which the novel prompts willing readers to do research in a variety of disciplines.

Let us take a closer look at how Daigle uses the number 12 to organize the novel. The book is divided into 12 chapters, each of which is composed of 144 fragments (12 times 12). This makes for a total of 1728 fragments in the book.<sup>93</sup> Daigle has catalogued these fragments into themes. There are 144 themes (12 times 12 again) and each theme has 12 fragments assigned to it. The reader is made aware of these themed categories in the margins of the text, which are reserved for labels - one label for each and every fragment, even the epigraphs and footnotes. These labels follow a standard formula, which I will illustrate with a few examples. My first example is the following fragment, found on page 72, a page on the left side of the book, which is why the label appears in the margin to the left of the fragment, like so:

159.12.3	Un roman écartelé, donc. La sérénité étant, après
Structure	tout, quelque chose qui se mérite.

“Structure” is the name of the category to which this fragment has been assigned. The number above this word (159.12.3) is composed of three parts. The first part (159) indicates the order of the fragment in the actual book, from 1 to 1728. The second number (12 in this example), indicates the order of the fragment’s category, as listed in the index at the back of the book. In this case, the category “Structure” is (fittingly) the 12<sup>th</sup> category listed in the index. Finally, the third number in the label (in this example the number 3) is always a number from 1-12 and appears to be assigned arbitrarily. It does

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<sup>93</sup> Massive as it is, Daigle writes that she initially envisioned an even more ambitious project: “Possibilité envisagée, au début, d’écrire un fragment pour chacune des 6 faces de 1 728 cubes. À la fin, le livre aurait compté 10 368 fragments, 6 fois le nombre de la présente version. Projet monstre. Aucun désir de chevaucher un monstre” (173, 407.54.7 Oubli/rappel).

not always correspond to the order in which the fragment appears in the book. If we look at this category as it is listed in the book's index, we find the following:

## 12. Structure

123.12.1  
 129.12.2  
 159.12.3  
 173.12.4  
 179.12.5  
 191.12.6  
 195.12.7  
 205.12.8  
 211.12.9  
 275.12.11  
 287.12.10  
 1181.12.12<sup>94</sup>

In this case, most of the fragments are assigned (third) numbers that correspond to the order in which they appear in the book, but as you can see, numbers 10 and 11 are swapped. So the fragment assigned the number 11 comes earlier in the book than the one assigned the number 10. It may interest the reader to see these two fragments as they appear in the text, on pages 120 and 124:

275.12.11  
 Structure

Certains livres sont écrits pour être lus, d'autres ont pour seul but d'avoir été écrits.<sup>95</sup>

287.12.10  
 Structure

Cette structure sans doute parce que les êtres humains — et à plus forte raison les écrivains — ont besoin de milliers d'échappatoires.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Found on page 732.

<sup>95</sup> Daigle, 120.

<sup>96</sup> Daigle, 124.

I will refrain from doing any analysis of the *content* of these two fragments for the moment, as they do figure in my analysis of the metafictional and game-like qualities of the text in chapter 3. Here, I focus instead on just the structure of the text, the labels and categories and numbering thereof. There are some categories in which the fragments are completely out of order, and a handful of them (16 total, listed in Appendix 3) in which the fragments are labeled in the exact order in which they appear in the text.

It may be helpful to provide another category as an example. I have chosen category #126, entitled “Techniques,” which contains fragments that cover a wide range of topics, discussing techniques that may be used to succeed in such varied endeavors as applying make-up, straightening nails and fly-fishing. In the index at the back of the novel, this category appears as follows:

126. Techniques

632.126.11  
 787.126.5  
 845.126.1  
 849.126.9  
 880.126.6  
 982.126.2  
 1006.126.12  
 1262.126.3  
 1363.126.7  
 1420.126.8  
 1596.126.4  
 1679.126.10<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Found on page 745.

As we can see, the numbers in the third position of the labels are completely out of order here. The first label in the list (632.126.11) corresponds to the first of the list's fragments to appear in the novel - we find it on pages 277-278. It is a narrative passage (too long to cite here) in which Terry teaches his children some tooth brushing techniques. The second label in the list (787.126.5) corresponds to a short fragment that we find on page 345 (a right-hand side page, so you see the label in the right side margin here):

Pratiquer l'écobuage d'une terre consiste à en dégager les mottes et à brûler plantes et racines afin que les cendres enrichissent le sol.	787.126.5 Techniques
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The last label listed in this category (1679.126.10) corresponds to a short fragment on page 714:

1679.126.10 Techniques	La langue comme outil de séduction.
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Again, I will refrain from commenting too much on the content of these fragments, although the juxtaposition of fragments about everyday activities with those about using language as a tool is certainly significant and is representative of what Daigle skillfully and seamlessly does throughout this novel in many different ways. I will point out, however, that this seemingly arbitrary labeling method does lead readers to rethink their usual reading approach. In addition to reading this novel in the usual page order, as you would most novels, other possibilities are presented here - to read the novel category by category, for example, or even finding each fragment in the order to which it is assigned

(the 3<sup>rd</sup> number position in the label) within those categories. The labels in the margins, and the system by which they are organized make such reading approaches possible and even easy to accomplish. When moving from the French edition to the English translation, these labels become most helpful; the pagination is slightly different in the two texts but corresponding passages can be quickly and easily located via the marginal labels.

In *Pour sûr*, the margins are reserved for one thing only, these fragment labels. Other writers have made use of the margins in a variety of ways, of course, including French authors like Michel Leiris. For example, in *L'Afrique fantôme* (1934), written as an ethnographic study, the margins serve as a location for Leiris' notes to himself and general observations related to his role as secretary of the ethnographic mission. These notes increasingly turn into personal annotations, observations and impressions - the contents of the margins thus serve to transform the genre of the text into a kind of hybrid work, an ethnographic study which is also an autobiographical project. In contrast to Leiris, Daigle does not use the margins for her "notes to self" but rather she folds those notes right into the text, interspersed throughout and in between the narrative and expository passages. Whereas Leiris' book might be read as an ethnographic study with a personal journal or diary in its margins, *Pour sûr* is more like a scrapbook in the style of the "commonplace books" popular with writers in Early Modern Europe. The novel is a

pastiche or bricolage of different writing styles and intertextual references, along with fragments that read like journal or diary entries.<sup>98</sup>

In addition to suggesting different reading approaches, *Pour sûr*'s marginal fragment labels contain other layers of meaning. We are reminded of the work of Edgar Allan Poe. Lawrence Lipking has argued that in Poe's work, "The marginal note, like a pun, or like a manuscript found in a bottle, offers the reader a kind of puzzle; divorced from the context that first stimulated it, it renders no more than a fragmentary clue to buried possibilities of meaning. The more outrageous the clue, the better the puzzle" (610). Similarly, in *Pour sûr*, the marginal labels serve as clues that are sometimes misleading, causing readers to question the validity of the categories and the underlying structure of the text itself. Lipking argued that Poe conceived of the act of reading as "a continual decoding of the keys or intentions secreted in the text" (610). In *Pour sûr*, Daigle uses her marginal labels as just one type of clue that encourages her readers to approach this text as a kind of puzzle to be decoded, or like a riddle containing secrets to be uncovered. In other words, in this novel a fragment is never simply a fragment, but is always accompanied by a label that sometimes makes sense to readers and sometimes seems arbitrary.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Daigle's work has long featured a juxtaposition of passages that read like journal or diary entries with passages written in a narrative or expository style, leading critics such as Jeanette den Toonder to describe three of her novels - *La Beauté de l'affaire*, 1953 and *Pas pire* - as examples of French "autofiction" (den Toonder).

<sup>99</sup> This kind of arbitrary labeling process forces readers to engage in a kind of Saussurean semiology, or at least forces them to think about the relationship between signs and meaning – this is something I would like to explore further.

*Pour sûr*: Chapter Level and Index

In the same way that *Pour sûr* has an overarching organizing structure of chapters, fragments and categories, each of its twelve chapters abides, more or less, by a specific structure too. Each chapter begins with an epigraph, which is usually a citation from a contemporary novel or interview with a contemporary author.<sup>100</sup> Immediately following the epigraph is a fragment in the standard-size font which signals the “narrative” style I described in chapter 1. The next fragment is always in the indented, smaller font “expository” style. The fragments then alternate in this fashion, back and forth from narrative to expository through to the end of the chapter. There are a handful of moments in each chapter where the alternating sequence is broken and we find two expository passages in a row. This seems to correspond every time with the appearance of a footnote<sup>101</sup> in the near vicinity. And so, although it is not explained, it does seem that there is some sort of pattern even in the occasions where the structure breaks down.

At the very end of the novel, pages 731-747, we find the index of the 144 categories, catalogued in no apparent order, with a list of the 12 fragments (identified by their three part numbers) assigned to each. As I mentioned earlier, the fragments are listed (within their categories) in the order in which they appear in the text but the

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<sup>100</sup> Seven of these are very recent (from the 2000s) and the rest are from the three decades before that, except for one from 1957 - a quote from Roland Barthes' *Mythologies*. A list of the epigraphs (and their sources) can be found in Appendix 2.

<sup>101</sup> Incidentally, there are two different “footnote” categories: “142. Notes” and “143. Varia.”

numbers they are assigned from 1 to 12 do not correspond with that order, except for a few categories.<sup>102</sup> Following the index, there is a table of contents which lists the chapters by number (in order) and the pages numbers on which they start.

### Making Sense of It All

As readers attempt to make sense of the novel's structure, it quickly becomes apparent that the "rules" by which Daigle has organized the text are constantly being broken. Indeed, part of the process for readers becomes an attempt to identify the moments when those established patterns break down, when Daigle seems to undermine or subvert her own strict organizing structures. Furthermore, when we take a closer look at the alternating fragment styles, we notice that the two font sizes and formats, thought to distinguish between narrative threads and expository fragments throughout the novel, do not always follow that rule either. In fact, many of the so-called "narrative" style fragments contain material that would in theory be better suited to the expository style font/size.

How should readers interpret a novel that is written in a strictly constrained writing style but then riddled with moments that could be interpreted as "errors," mistakes made by the author in that constrained writing process? The reader's attention is drawn, over and over again, to those spaces in the text that are not supposed to exist, the

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<sup>102</sup> See Appendix 3.

“give” to the structure, or the “play” in the system. In this way, reading this novel is like solving a puzzle or riddle - readers find pleasure in second-guessing every aspect of the novel’s structure, looking for errors, fragments that don’t fit the patterns, outliers within the categories. My next chapter analyzes these game-like aspects of *Pour sûr*, using this analysis to formulate a particular reading and critical approach.

## Chapter 3: Play Again? Pour sûr!

- *Ce qu'il y a de particulier ici, c'est qu'il est pratiquement impossible de vraiment se prendre au sérieux.*<sup>103</sup>

**3. Loc. adv. (1665) VIEUX ou POP.**  
**POUR SÛR :** certainement.  
 - Dictionnaire *Le Petit Robert*<sup>104</sup>

If there is one thing certain about *Pour sûr*, it is that nothing in *Pour sûr* is certain. With the novel's title, France Daigle launches one of the many games she plays with her readers, a game in which she systematically dismantles notions of certainty and uncertainty and challenges her readers to question their approach to reading the text. Everything must be questioned here, nothing trusted outright and it is a text that constantly throws its readers off balance. Woe to the readers (or literary critics) who

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<sup>103</sup> Daigle, *Pour sûr*, 318. 726.101.2 Duos. In this "Duos" passage, France Daigle speaks with Ludmilla at her home (one of the lofts) while they wait for Ludmilla's husband Étienne to return for a previously scheduled interview with Daigle. Ludmilla is answering Daigle's question about how she likes living in Moncton, NB.

<sup>104</sup> Robert, Paul, Rey-Debove, Josette, Rey, Alain. "sûr, sûre." Def. II. B. 3, (2015)

attempt to conquer this novel, they will be thwarted at every turn. Yet, there will always *be* another turn, for this is a text that compels its readers to keep trying. It is engaging and absorbing, holding its readers' attention even as it challenges them to the point of frustration. It is also playful and upbeat, even as it addresses relatively somber, complex or difficult topics. *Pour sûr* is both a puzzle and a game, and reading it can be a lively and rewarding adventure. In this chapter, I explore the playful aspect of Daigle's work and I begin to articulate a critical approach that is well-suited to the analysis of her latest novel. In examining the numerous references she makes to games and the game-like aspects she builds into the structure of the text, I analyze the ways in which the novel functions like a game and to what end Daigle employs this strategy as an author - in other words, what does she accomplish with this novel?

#### “Game Over” and Playing *Pour sûr*

On the very last page of *Pour sûr*, we find its main protagonist Terry Thibodeau paralyzed and unable to speak (*muet*). For readers, this is a perplexing conclusion. Nothing in Terry's story would seem to predict this unfortunate ending. Terry is, as we know, a character who represents both France Daigle and her readers, and the novel is a bildungsroman that depicts his education as well as the development of agency and creative expression (HYPERLINK: Back to 164). At the start of the novel, he feels unsure about his own voice and level of education, but before long he is a prolific reader who owns a bookstore. By the end of the novel Terry has developed the confidence to

write poetry. There is a hopeful, optimistic trajectory to this character (and to the novel) that makes this ending (his paralysis and loss of the ability to speak) seem strange.

On the one hand, the tragedy is not totally unexpected, as there are numerous moments throughout the text that foreshadow some kind of eventual calamity. In fact, there are several entire categories devoted to these moments, with titles such as, 60. Superstitions, 70. Erreurs, 78. Accidents and 104. Inquiétudes. So readers have been prepared for a tragic ending of some kind. At the same time, Terry's fate is ambiguous and the novel still seems to end optimistically somehow. Perhaps a close reading of this fragment, like the one we did of the novel's first scenes, will allow us to decode the ending in a similar fashion. The fragment, in its entirety, is as follows:

– Terry?...Terry?...

– ...

– Terry!

Et Terry ouvrit les yeux. Cela marchait à tout coup. Zed avait appris le truc il y avait très longtemps, en observant Élisabeth tirer Hans d'un sommeil qui aurait pu s'éterniser semble-t-il.

– Le poulain est né. C'est une pouliche. En pleine santé.

Même paralysé et muet, Terry demeurait le meilleur ami de Zed, qui lui rendait visite presque tous les jours.

– La plus jeune à Chico veut qu'a s'appelle Nadine. Peux-tu ouère ça! Y asseyont de la convaincre de l'appeler Dina – Nadine, Dina, c'est presque la même chose. Je sais pas si y allont réussir, alle est pas mal têtuse.

– ...

– Pis toi? Y allont-y te lever aujourd'hui? (729).<sup>105</sup>

First, Terry's disabilities are presented almost nonchalantly - they are not the main focus of the scene. This scene is about friendship, relationships, family and new life. We know

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<sup>105</sup> 1726.133.12 L'avenir.

the scene must be occurring a couple of decades in the future (in relation to the rest of the novel) because Zed's adopted son Chico is now himself a father. This is a positive development, as Zed adopted Chico after a tragic family situation and it is comforting to know that things have turned out well for this family. We also learn that Zed and Terry remain best friends and that, well, life goes on in the fictional universe that Daigle has created. Additionally, the reference to Élizabeth and Hans refers to a scene (just a few fragments back, also in the last chapter of *Pour sûr*) in which she revives him from a kind of fainting spell or coma. Their reunion in this scene is a re-telling (directly acknowledged in the text) of the ending of Longfellow's epic poem *Evangéline*, in which Gabriel and Evangéline, the long lost lovers, reunite while he is on his deathbed. In *Evangéline*, the original Acadian story, the ending is tragic. In the fragment with Élizabeth and Hans, there is a new ending, one that holds more promise, although it is not quite clear to readers exactly what will happen now that the lovers have been reunited. As for our scene with Zed and Terry, which is set in the future, I have two observations to make. First, the reference to the fragment with Élizabeth and Hans positions this scene as a re-telling (of a re-telling) of the story. We know that Zed is taking his cues from the scene with Élizabeth, but we also know that this ending will be different too. Second, it is clear to readers that this scene (Zed awakening Terry) is one that is repeated, over and over, most every day. So, it is a repeated re-telling of the story. What better metaphor for the lesson we have already learned about *Pour sûr*, that it is a novel that is meant to be read, and re-read, in a variety of ways and with a different experience/ending each time?

What if, for example, Terry's paralysis/muteness is not meant to be a permanent state but rather a kind of resting state, a character who is waiting for another "go around," another re-reading of the text?

In games that require a game piece or player character to move about the board, or virtual game world, we imagine that the game piece or player character remains in a kind of limbo or resting state in the intervals between sessions of gameplay. We know that Daigle uses the term "avatar" to refer to the characters in this novel. Terry is an "avatar" of Daigle - and of the novel's readers, too. Avatar is a term with several possible meanings, of course, but in a contemporary context it is a computing term for the graphic representation of the user of an internet program, video or online game, or virtual world. In games, players use their avatars to make their way through the game world, until the game is over. But when a game is over, there is almost always an opportunity *to try again*. As much as the words "Game Over" mean the end of particular attempt, a failure to succeed in a certain session of gameplay, they are often followed by the words "Play again?" or "Continue?" When Zed awakens Terry from his slumber, he also asks him "– Pis toi, Y allont-y te lever aujourd'hui?" (729) We can surely interpret this as an invitation to readers to "raise" Terry up and to "play again" by re-reading the novel in a new and different way.

Of course, we cannot ignore the biblical allusion here - Catholic Acadian readers (Québec and French readers too, for that matter) might see this as a reference to the story of Lazarus, for example. Even if Terry is not technically dead, his paralysis and muteness

could be interpreted as a kind of death, in this Acadian context, representing the loss of the voice Acadian writers have been claiming and developing for generations. We might therefore interpret Terry as a Lazarus figure, with readers playing the role of Christ who “raises him” up. Alternatively, perhaps Terry is himself the Christ figure. He is after all an everyman kind of hero who undertakes an educational journey that serves as a model for readers, in the way that Christ is said to have modeled his life and death (and resurrection) for his Christian followers. But for Terry, a resurrection is made possible only through an engaged readership, readers who actively raise up the character and start over, re-reading the text and participating in the creation of a new version of the story. We are reminded of Antonine Maillet, who was significant because she was the first to tell the Acadian story in Acadian French. France Daigle’s contribution is to engage her readers to become active participants (along with her) in the telling of an ongoing Acadian story. The telling of this story is collaborative, a multi-voiced narrative. *Pour sûr* models this with its immense cast of characters and polyphonic style, and by proposing multiple re-readings. Just like a game that can be played over and over, with a different experience and result each time, each reading of *Pour sûr* essentially creates a new version or experience of the story.

### Reading Means Meta-Reading

In the same way that *Pour sûr* [demands] multiple re-readings, it also demands a kind of meta-reading on the part of its readers. I have already outlined the ways in which

Daigle's work is self-reflective, self-referential and meta-fictional in that the author's role and creative process is constantly referenced and described and readers are continually reminded that they are reading a work of fiction (the same work of fiction that is being discussed by both the author and many of her characters in the text itself). Insofar as Daigle constantly refers to the author's writing process, she also constantly refers to the act of reading. She not only makes the act of reading a visible and normal activity in this novel, but she also encourages (and even requires) her readers to reflect on (and question) their own reading process and their interpretation(s) of the text.

How is reading made visible in this novel? The most obvious way is in Terry, whom we witness developing into a voracious reader over the course of the novel. As a new co-owner of a bookstore, he is literally surrounded by books, and his co-owner Ludmilla serves as a guide to Terry as he educates himself about the world of books and literature:

En démarrant cette librairie avec Ludmilla, Terry dut plonger rapidement dans l'univers des livres. *Il eut tout à apprendre*. Grâce à la patience et à la générosité de Ludmilla, maintenant il se tirait assez bien d'affaire (36; emphasis added).<sup>106</sup>

Terry's transformation does not go unnoticed by those around him, like his best friend Zed, who comments: "Tu lis pas mal asteure, ein?" (450).<sup>107</sup> Furthermore, Terry becomes a guide himself, recommending books to his customers and even lending out *La*

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<sup>106</sup> 72.8.3 Librairie Didot.

<sup>107</sup> 1048.63.3 Terry et Zed.

*Bibliothèque idéale* as a helpful reference (which has the added benefit of encouraging purchases at the store):

- Veux-tu l'emprunter? C'est vraiment intéressant à regarder juste de même. T'as pas besoin de toute lire.

Conscient d'être passé du vous au tu, Terry tendit *La Bibliothèque idéale* à la cliente.

- Vous pourrez l'amener de nouveau quante vos livres seront arrivés. C'était un truc à lui. Il avait plusieurs exemplaires de *La Bibliothèque idéale* qu'il prêtait par-ci par-là. Les gens le lui rapportaient généralement en se procurant quelques livres qui y étaient mentionnés. Certains commandaient l'ouvrage de référence lui-même (68).<sup>108</sup>

Terry enjoys recommending books and discussing them with his clientele; he enjoys learning about literature. His narrative arc casts reading as an active and community-oriented activity, an activity that can be *learned* and *cultivated*.

Daigle interweaves the fragments about Terry's development as a reader with with scores of other fragments that compel *Pour sûr*'s readers to be more actively aware of their own reading process, encouraging a kind of meta-reading that complements the meta-fictional aspects of the novel. These fragments take a variety of forms, ranging from passages that address the readers directly, to others that are much more implicit. Some fragments contain actual instructions for the reader, such as this one, which suggests that readers can go to another of Daigle's novels for more information about a relationship between characters: "Pour plus de détails au sujet de la rencontre de Terry et Carmen avec le peintre Étienne Zablonki, lire *Un fin passage* de Daigle, paru aux Éditions du

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<sup>108</sup> 146.8.9 Librairie Didot.

Boréal en 2001” (284).<sup>109</sup> Readers are thus encouraged to think about the connections among the novels and to see them as parts of a cohesive, integrated series. In other fragments, Daigle prompts readers to consider certain interpretations of the text. In this example, the fragment takes the form of a true/false question (there is an entire category of these) that invites readers to form an opinion about the France Daigle character in the novel: “Vrai ou faux : le personnage *je* du roman *Pour sûr* de France Daigle est un avatar de l’auteure, c’est-à-dire une figuration<sup>110</sup> de France Daigle” (571).<sup>111</sup>

Other fragments are less explicit. Rather than directly addressing readers, they contain musings that seem to suggest certain reading approaches - this one, for example, near the beginning of the novel: “L’expression *lire entre les lignes* n’a donc pas qu’un sens figuré” (45).<sup>112</sup> Ostensibly this passage is about typography, which is a topic to which Daigle devotes numerous passages. It also serves to encourage readers to think about reading between the lines of this novel, and not only in the figurative sense, but also in the very literal sense - that they should pay attention to the physical structure or architecture of the novel, the arrangement of text upon the page, the size and style of the font in which various fragments are written. Other “musing” styled fragments express thoughts or feelings of frustration that readers might actually be having about the novel as they read it. As we saw in chapter 1, it is only halfway into the novel that Daigle provides

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<sup>109</sup> 647.54.2 Oubli/rappel.

<sup>110</sup> Figuration can mean simply a portrayal of some kind, but can also mean a minor character or “extra,” which is notable in light of the ways in which Daigle plays with definitions of minor characters vs. protagonists in this novel.

<sup>111</sup> 1323.96.7 Personnages.

<sup>112</sup> 99.98.5 Expressions.

an explanation about the system she has developed for writing words in Chiac (438).<sup>113</sup> Just two pages later, we get this wry comment: “Le détail 1011.7.1 sur le chiac arrive un peu tard” (440).<sup>114</sup> Daigle has fun with the category labels too - for every fragment deemed “useful,” like the aforementioned description of her system for writing in Chiac, which is labeled “Détails utiles,” there is another fragment labeled “Détails inutiles” or some variation of it. These labels can seem rather arbitrary, or even like distractions from the story. Here, Daigle employs an anonymous character’s voice to relay the readers’ (possible) thoughts on the practice: “ – Moi, a me pīss ôff avec ses détails inutiles. Fīrst ôf āll, quisse qu’a croit qu’alle est? Pis sēcond ôf āll, whō cāres!” (212)<sup>115</sup> Fragments like these encourage a particular kind of identification with *Pour sûr* by its readers. When a text seems to “speak” for readers in this way, they begin to see themselves in the text in a tangible way. So, if certain characters are understood to be avatars of Daigle, other characters begin to seem like avatars of the readers. These musings by anonymous characters prepare readers to see themselves represented by other characters as well (I continue this argument later in my analysis of the Duos category of fragments).

In so many ways, Daigle encourages her readers to think critically about the novel and about their reception of it. At the same time, she also warns them about putting too much stock in their observations, and to be wary of seemingly obvious interpretations. In one fragment she explains that she sometimes purposefully gives her reader “false leads.”

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<sup>113</sup> 1011.7.1 Détails utiles.

<sup>114</sup> 1013.93.9 Le temps.

<sup>115</sup> 494.21.2 Détails plus ou moins utiles.

Que j'ouvre parfois des parenthèses que je ne referme pas, que je lance des amorces qui ne mènent nulle part. Que j'évoque des pistes qui finissent par s'évanouir. Que cela est trompeur. Les lecteurs et lectrices croient deviner un sens, imaginent une direction, une action probable, un dénouement possible. De fausses pistes en fin de compte (610).<sup>116</sup>

In this way, Daigle destabilizes her readers, encouraging and even celebrating their role in some cases while undermining their ability to interpret the text in others. Daigle also peppers the novel with references to errors or defects that readers might encounter in the text (and in her other novels) - there is even a category entitled "Erreurs"<sup>117</sup> that compiles several of these passages. What are readers to make of errors in the text? According to one such passage closer to the beginning of the novel, errors are a liability:

Un vice caché dans un roman publié est particulièrement difficile à rattraper. C'est tout à fait le genre d'ambiguïté auquel un auteur ou une auteure n'aspire pas. Car la découverte d'une erreur dans un livre en fragilise la lecture. L'erreur indispose le lecteur ou la lectrice; il ou elle éprouvera une sorte de gêne d'avoir à conclure un ouvrage moins que parfait (227).<sup>118</sup>

And yet just a few pages later, Daigle implies that errors often represent some kind of hidden potential:

Rares sont les erreurs pures. Il y a toujours moyen d'essorer une erreur pour en recueillir une explication, une justification, une motivation, un enseignement, un élixir, une prémisse, et même le pré-texte d'un autre livre à écrire (266).<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> 1429.88.12 La liberté.

<sup>117</sup> There are two other categories of fragments that serve a similar function - undermining the credibility of the text, putting what is written into question - these categories include: "Typo" and "Lapsus." For further reference, I have included a full list of the category titles in Appendix 1.

<sup>118</sup> 533.89.3 Agacements.

<sup>119</sup> 605.70.3 Erreurs.

Readers are thus primed to seek out the hidden value in any errors they might encounter in this text - in this novel, errors have potential. And Daigle does include actual so-called errors in the text. One example is a fragment that refers to a book by contemporary French writer Dominique Louise Pélegrin but misspells her last name as *Pélerin* (267).<sup>120</sup> It reads like a subtle typo but must have been done deliberately. If errors such as this one are deliberate, then we cannot call them errors at all, right? It is another tactic Daigle uses to encourage an active, engaged reading approach from her readers. Errors like this also serve to *differentiate* among different groups of readers - this typo, for example, would only be noticed by someone familiar with contemporary French writers or perhaps by someone who was curious enough to research the reference. This is just one of the multiple ways in which *Pour sûr* functions as a many layered text, with different layers of embedded meaning that can be unlocked or discerned by different kinds of readers.

Daigle makes this explicit of course, when she writes “...chacun peut le lire à sa façon” (457). Every reader will get something different in their reading of the text, but furthermore, every reader should be reading it more than once, even many different times. And each time will produce a different experience of the text. While this is not a new concept (it is arguably true about any novel), Daigle pushes it to an extreme in *Pour sûr*. As she explains, the fragmented structure of the text makes countless different readings possible:

En principe, chaque fragment est censé faire référence assez clairement à d'autres fragments de séries distinctes, histoire de féconder l'aspect

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<sup>120</sup> 607.95.1 Ajouts à *La Bibliothèque idéale*.

multidimensionnel de la structure. Donc, tous les fragments sont frappés et frappent à leur tour au moins deux fois (quatre contacts au total), ce qui crée un nombre incalculable (pour moi) de permutations. À partir de là, il devient virtuellement possible de lire ce livre dans tous les sens. Autrement dit, chacun peut le lire à sa façon. Mais ces excursions possibles à partir des fragments ne sont pas formellement identifiées ici. Il s'agit ni plus ni moins que d'une intention générale, qu'une version informatique de l'ouvrage rendrait possible (457).<sup>121</sup>

In this way, the text bears a resemblance to an oversize Rubik's cube<sup>122</sup>, with each potential reading not unlike a sequence of movements of the puzzle (algorithms) forming a unique path (among trillions) to the same desired solution. Although this passage suggests that it is a digital version of the text that would facilitate this kind of reading approach, there are certain aspects built in to the hard copy (the categories and index, fragment labeling system and typography, for example) that do enable readers to be creative in their reading. As we saw earlier, readers can choose to read the novel category by category, for example, or by following just one size font at a time. Unlike a Rubik's cube however, in *Pour sûr*, there is no "same" desired solution. For every point of entry, and for every sequence/algorithm "reading" offered by this text, there are as many end points - or exit points - as well. The text launches a willing reader into innumerable directions - research, connections to be made to the writers, texts, concepts to which she refers and tangents. And beyond the numerous modes of reading, there are numerous interpretations to be made. Daigle makes this rather explicit with a reference to Umberto

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<sup>121</sup> 1065.68.10 Projets.

<sup>122</sup> Tardif, *Voir*. Cited in a blurb on the back cover of the Boréal Compact edition of *Pour sûr*.

Eco's *The Open Work*: "À l'endos,<sup>123</sup> des extraits photocopiés de *L'Oeuvre ouverte* d'Umberto Eco. En relisant les passages soulignés, je constate à quel point cet ouvrage a eu un rôle important dans la conception même de *Pour sûr*" (681).<sup>124</sup> So Daigle has conceived of *Pour sûr* as an "open work" - she doesn't relinquish her own role as author but rather once again invites her readers to be active creative partners, partners who can arrange and rearrange the elements of the text she has written in order to provide different versions of the novel every time. She encourages her readers to be conscious of this role they play, and furthermore, she invites them to think critically about the synergetic relationship they have with her, the author. Her "Duos" category is like a blueprint for this - a series of conversations that model the kinds of roles readers might expect (or aim) to occupy when reading this text.

Each fragment in the "Duos" category features France Daigle herself, the author of this novel, in conversation with a character from the novel. These are among the most compelling passages in the novel - funny, brilliant and playful. In each case, the character in question has been reading the novel as it is being written, and has some reaction(s) to share with Daigle. The characters are basically performing a kind of literary criticism, often expressing thoughts that Daigle's actual readers might be thinking. The Daigle character responds, either in agreement or by defending her decisions as the author of the text. It is a case of art imitating life imitating art. In these conversations, Daigle stages the

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<sup>123</sup> There is a Canadian-specific meaning of this word that I think is being used here - "à l'endos" basically means "on the reverse side."

<sup>124</sup> 1589.57.12 Photocopies.

interplay between an author and her readers, and in so doing, provides both a model for her actual readers and some responses to their anticipated questions and criticisms.

In one “Duos” conversation, an anonymous character, “Anonyme #2,” expresses frustration because Daigle has not assigned them a name or gender. The conversation ends with Anonyme #2 accusing Daigle of being sexist:

- Dans tes livres, les hommes avont des plusse beaux rôles que les femmes.
- Vraiment?
- Tu t’en rends pas compte, ben t’es bõrderline chãuvenistic.
- Vraiment?! (512)<sup>125</sup>

In another “Duos” fragment, a character named Sylvia rebukes Daigle for her irreverence toward religion (545-547).<sup>126</sup> Sylvia is sticking up for those readers for whom religion is important (and likely expressing concerns that might be shared by some of Daigle’s real life Acadian readers).

Daigle’s conversations with her main characters continue in this vein, with the characters offering observations, seeking clarifications and otherwise modeling literary criticism. When Daigle speaks with Carmen, the conversation focuses on Carmen’s intention to model good French for Terry:

- Oui, pis faudrait pas que Terry m’entendrait. Je me laisse aller à dire des mots anglais quante y est pas alentour.
- Ben, tu dis des mots anglais avec lui aussi des fois.
- Je sais, pis chaque fois j’ai peur que ça l’encourage à faire pareil.
- Y est-y si fragile que ça? Linguistiquement, je veux dire...
- Je comprends pas tout le temps commensque ça se passe dans sa tête. Ou dans sa bouche. Pendant des jours le français va bien, pis là tout d’un

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<sup>125</sup> 1180.101.9 Duos.

<sup>126</sup> 1264.101.11 Duos.

coup, c'est comme si que l'anglais était couché partout dans le chemin en avant de lui pour le faire trébucher.

- Trébucher. J'aime ce mot-là.

- C'est toi qui me l'as appris!

La serveuse apporta nos verres. Puis nos frites. Carmen aimait bien ce qu'elle savait de *Pour sûr*, avait l'impression *de collaborer à l'intrigue* (433, emphasis added).<sup>127</sup>

In this conversation, Carmen and France Daigle are allies, partners, discussing the linguistic situation of their “project” together, which is Terry. The collaborative aspect to this partnership is underscored by the observation at the end of the passage, which indicates that not only does Carmen like what she knows, so far, of *Pour sûr*, but she feels *like an active participant in the creation* of the narrative of the novel.

When Daigle finally speaks with Terry (in the last “Duos” fragment in the book), he asks her outright whether or not he and the other characters are, in fact, avatars of her:

– On est des avatars de toi, c'est ça?

Il n'avait pas tort.

– Oui, d'une manière. Excepté que vous êtes mieux que moi.

– Ça, c'est parce que tu nous embellis, qui est kīnd òf nīce de ta part, bỹ thē wāy.

Je devais y réfléchir. Est-ce que je les embellissais vraiment?

– Je crois juste que je suis un filtre. Je fais ma djob de filtre.

Terry sembla apprécier cette image, quoique :

– Stīll, tu dois saouère quoisse qui va nous arriver, ein? (679-680).<sup>128</sup>

With this conversation, Daigle tackles the “avatar” question head on, while introducing some new layers of complexity to the idea. Older definitions of the term avatar define it as simply a copy or likeness of something or someone, a copy that may or may not quite

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<sup>127</sup> 1004.101.7 Duos.

<sup>128</sup> 1586.101.4 Duos.

capture the full essence of that thing or person. But here Terry and Daigle both agree that these avatars are “improved” versions of the author, which is more aligned with the modern, digital understanding of the term I described earlier in this chapter. In this current usage, an avatar is not only an image that a computer user chooses to represent themselves in an online space; avatars are often more beautiful or powerful versions of their users. In a computer game an avatar might be endowed with super powers. In an imaginary, virtual world such as “The Second Life,” an avatar is customizable - the user will often make it into a taller, thinner, better-looking version of themselves.

Even if Terry and Daigle agree that the characters in *Pour sûr* are (improved) versions of its author, the “Duos” conversations build on what we saw earlier (anonymous characters expressing the readers’ thoughts) and make it abundantly clear that they are meant to serve as avatars of the *readers* of the text as well. In each Duos conversation, the character models active reading behavior, questioning Daigle, challenging her artistic decisions, offering commentary. Daigle has done this kind of thing before, and these “Duos” conversations are the latest iteration of a technique which has evolved considerably over the course of her writing career. In her earliest novels, there is little to no mention of reading or readers. In *L’Été avant la mort* (1986) reading is mentioned only as an act that is *not* happening. The main characters of this novel are both writers, but their writing, while concurrent, is solitary. Surely they both know in general terms what is being written about (the imminent death of one of them) but neither character actually reads the other’s work: “Elle ne sait toujours rien de ce que j’écris”

(27). This relative absence of reading changes significantly in *Pas pire* (1998). In this novel, Daigle appears as a character who discusses her novel with a few different characters. There is only one character with whom she discusses the book in depth, however, and that is Bernard Pivot, the host of *Bouillon de culture*. Their conversation anticipates some of the questions readers and critics might have of the text in real life.

There are two main differences between the “characters who read” in *Pas pire* and those in the “Duos” conversations in *Pour sûr*. First, in *Pas pire*, the characters who discuss the book with the Daigle character (Bernard Pivot and others like Camil Gaudain and Chuck Bernard) appear in a completely separate narrative thread than do the “main” fictional characters of the novel (like Terry, Carmen, Élizabeth and Hans). This leaves readers with the impression that in one case they are reading about “real” people in one thread and “fictional” people in another. This impression is reinforced by the knowledge that most, if not all, of the “real” characters appear to be based on real-life people.

Bernard Pivot, for example, is an actual person who hosted a TV program titled *Bouillon de culture*. Chuck Bernard is also an actual person, a local woodcarving artist based in Bouctouche, N.B (Previl). Notably, there is one instance of overlap between the seemingly separate stories, made up of two brief moments of recognition and interaction between Daigle, Gaudain and Élizabeth. This only underscores the division between the two worlds at this point in Daigle’s oeuvre, as Élizabeth is a character who represents transition, outsider status, and an existence “in between” places. She is from Québec but lives in Moncton, she is often depicted in transit or during travels both domestically

between Montreal and Moncton and internationally on a European vacation (during which she has a love affair with Hans). Here she serves as a link or intermediary between the fully fictional and semi-fictional worlds of Daigle's text. By contrast, in *Pour sûr* there are no longer any clear divisions between the various fictional worlds or narratives. Daigle has conversations with characters of all stripes, from anonymous minor characters to Hans to Terry and Carmen. Fragments about real people - writers, philosophers and intellectuals both historical and contemporary - are interspersed throughout the text, side by side with fragments featuring the fictional characters. As in *Pas pire*, local celebrities are featured here too - people like Hektor Haché-Haché, a retired local professor in real life who is featured in the text when a crowd of locals comes to the Babar to celebrate his 100<sup>th</sup> letter "à l'Opinion du lecteur" (191). It is worth noting that the owners of the bar, Josse and Carmen, are excited about this new wave of clientele: "– C'est grêat! Quante on a rouvert, c'est exactement de même qu'on voulait ça! *Une vraie place pour le monde*" (191; emphasis added).<sup>129</sup> In this novel, engaged readers, and those who appreciate them, are people who *matter*, people to be celebrated.

In a second notable difference between the two novels, the "readers" in *Pour sûr* are, for the most part, regular people, as opposed to world famous literary critics, like Bernard Pivot in *Pas pire*. In *Pour sûr*, Daigle goes to great lengths to stage real, everyday people, in the act of reading, and expressing their opinions about what they are reading. Her real life readers can easily imagine themselves doing the same thing. As I

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<sup>129</sup> 448.18.1 Une place pour le monde.

have previously argued, these “Duos” conversations “stage” literary criticism - and in fact, they too are like a series of rehearsals, this time rehearsals that prepare Daigle’s real life readers to participate in a certain way. Furthermore, there are multiple readers - twelve different characters who have these “Duos” conversations with Daigle, as well as numerous anonymous “musings” and fragments featuring a class of literature students, etc - this polyphonic diversity of characters who are also readers reinforces the aspect of the novel that demands multiple re-readings of the text. Once again, we are reminded that there are many different ways to read this novel, interpret this novel, experience this novel.

In sum, *Pour sûr* is a text that requires multiple readings while encouraging meta-reading at the same time. In this way, it is a text that makes a *critic* out of every *reader*. At the same time, the text works a different kind of magic on scholars and literary critics. As I argue in the following section, this text makes a *reader* out of every *critic* too.

#### In Favor of a Lusory Critical Approach

In the same way that there are innumerable possible “readings” of this novel, there are as many possible critical interpretations to be made. As I suggested in my introduction to this dissertation, deciding on one critical approach to the novel is difficult and can seem near impossible. The options are dizzying and overwhelming, each path leading down numerous others. Furthermore, the text plays with critics, suggesting countless critical angles, flooding readers with references to psychoanalysts and their

work and at the same time openly suggesting that readers should be wary of being misled by false interpretive paths. In this way, the novel is actually an effective satire of literary criticism, in the tradition of texts by writers like Jorge Luis Borges (with his short story “Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*” for example) and Mark Danielewski (with his novel *House of Leaves*). One cannot help but suspect that to attempt to interpret this novel as a scholar is to fall for some kind of trick. All of this can render a literary critic immobile at first, unsure about which direction to take. Or, for that matter, whether to take any direction at all - there are only a few critical articles and book reviews out about this novel, though seven years have passed since its publication and it has been largely described as an important contribution to the Acadian literary canon.

Perhaps there is a way in which we can harness, or mine, these very difficulties in order to begin to articulate a critical approach that is specifically formulated to *Pour sûr*. In the same way that Daigle found an answer to her “Chiac problem” by embracing her ambivalence toward it, so too can a literary critic begin to articulate a critical approach that embraces the challenges inherent to its interpretation. I will call this a *lusory critical approach* and my goal in the next several pages is to lay out a framework that will identify the observations and broad ideas that have shaped my thinking, establish a rough working definition of the term (or perhaps rather a set of loose guidelines to follow?) and present the elements of *Pour sûr* that substantiate and illustrate the ways in which this approach might function.

### Observations (Or What We Know To Be True)

~ As I have established above, *Pour sûr* is a text that encourages meta-reading and challenges, even demands, that every reader perform literary criticism.

~ At the same time, it is a text that anticipates what literary critics might have to say and even, to a certain extent, satirizes literary criticism and challenges critics to rethink their approach.

~ The text blurs the lines between readers and critics. It is universally appealing and yet esoteric at numerous points and in myriad ways. It juxtaposes erudite passages about literature and philosophy with those containing local references, knowledge and history. There is something for everyone here, and the “experts” who will best understand one passage will not necessarily be the “experts” who will best understand another.

~ *Pour sûr* is a dense, sometimes frustrating text to read, with an unusual structure that mixes narrative passages with fragments containing numbers and mathematical equations, long lists of names, or words or titles of books. There is much here that could discourage readers. Yet the opposite seems to happen, as the novel somehow keeps readers engaged and re-engaged, compelling them to keep the pages turning and even inspiring them to read the text more than once. The source of this engagement is not immediately clear.

~ Daigle’s characters are relatable and compelling but the story lacks a grand, overarching dramatic arc. It is not the kind of gripping narrative that makes a page turner,

but rather a collection of interconnected stories about regular people and their everyday lives. Rather than serve as the source of engagement for readers, the narrative passages provide a kind of respite in this text. They are touching, funny, familiar and easy to read, especially to readers who understand Chiac. Even when depicting difficult or somber topics, the narrative passages are funny, optimistic, even upbeat. In the fictional world created by this novel, the narrative passages are like interludes, brief moments of entertainment interspersed between other passages that require more work on the part of readers.

~ Part of that work involves approaching the text as one might solve a puzzle. In book reviews and literary prize awards, the text has been described as a game and a puzzle, and indeed Daigle plays with her readers in many ways. Although the text is organized in a defined cubic structure, Daigle plays with the constraints, mis-categorizing certain fragments, playing with the numbers assigned to the fragments within the categories, etc. This is only one of the many game-like aspects of the text, which is also infused throughout with references to and elements of games. Here are just a few examples. First, there is an entire category devoted to the game of Scrabble (as I have mentioned in chapter 2). Beyond references to the game (the relative value of letters, for example, or the history of the game and when it was invented, etc), there are fragments that depict (recreate) the order of the letters and words that were put down in an actual game of

Scrabble - a Scrabble play-by-play of sorts.<sup>130</sup> Crossword puzzles are another game that is depicted explicitly in the narrative passages of the novel. Carmen loves to do crossword puzzles and, at a certain point in the novel, begins to enlist the help of her employees at the Babar in the process. Eventually bar patrons get involved as well - this encourages us to think about the distinctions between individual games and those that require collaborative efforts, “jeu de société,” etc. It is another way the Daigle encourages her readers to think about transgressing boundaries and doing things in an unusual way. Next, Daigle builds certain “games” into the text itself. There are two categories of surveys or opinion polls, entitled “Sondages/hommes” and “Sondages/femmes,” consist of short opinion polls about the game of golf and explicitly request the readers’ participation:

- 1. Selon vous, le golf est:
- a – Un jeu
- b – Un sport
- c – Ce n’est pas important.
- d – Je ne sais pas.
- e – Je n’ai pas d’opinion.<sup>131</sup>

- 1. Selon vous, le golf est:
- a – Un jeu
- b – Un sport
- c – Autre, précisez: \_\_\_\_\_.
- d – Je ne sais pas.
- e – Les sondages me fatiguent.<sup>132</sup>

Besides inviting readers to directly participate by choosing a response and/or in some cases creating one of the options themselves, these survey fragments are often funny -

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<sup>130</sup> One example of this is on page 18. Also, later in the novel (page 191), we learn that Terry’s neighbor systematically takes Polaroid instant snapshots of the Scrabble games he plays. He subsequently displays these like artwork on his walls - and that the Scrabble play-by-plays we see in the text likely depict those very same games. This encourages us to think about games as art - and also to imagine the ways in which a creative experience can be captured somehow - perhaps reading a book like *Pour sûr*, if we were to have an electronic version, could involve taking “snapshots” or simply recording the order of fragments in which it is read during different readings by different people.

<sup>131</sup> Daigle, 378. 869.62.1 Sondage/hommes.

<sup>132</sup> Daigle, 380. 873.69.1 Sondage/femmes.

with some of them ending in a kind of punchline fashion. They also tend to poke fun at accepted notions around the differences between the sexes. Throughout *Pour sûr* (and in previous novels) there are innumerable examples of Daigle challenging accepted gender norms. In her early work the narrator is often gender neutral, or ambiguous in some way. In these later novels, characters like Terry and Carmen constantly surprise us with gender non-normative behaviors and characteristics (Terry is more traditionally “maternal” than is Carmen, for example, sharing emotions, singing to the children, doing the cooking at home). This is a strong theme that warrants a more in-depth analysis but for now I do propose that the games in *Pour sûr* are another way that Daigle cues her readers to think about rules and transgressing of rules as a mode of operating in this world that she has created. The last example I will share here is related to this kind of transgression too; it involves word play. Daigle engages in this kind of practice in a variety of ways, of course, and her commentary on Chiac reminds us that there is a great deal of creativity and intelligence required in the development of a new language too. One of the more tangible (and enjoyable for the readers) examples of word play in this novel is explicitly so - a category of fragments entitled “Fictionnaire.” These are fragments that resemble dictionary entries for fake words that Daigle has created.<sup>133</sup> Each entry includes an

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<sup>133</sup> One is reminded of Gustave Flaubert's *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*, in which Flaubert takes existing words and provides his own humorous, often ironic, definitions. For her part, Daigle creates the words themselves, as well as their droll, yet plausible definitions. There are other contemporary works by French and Francophone writers, who have written novels in which they have inserted fake dictionaries or used the principle of entries in a dictionary -for instance Emile Ajar/Romain Gary's *La vie devant soi* with the character Momo creating his own explanation for words he has changed; or Loukoum in Calixthe Beyala's *Le Petit prince de Belleville*; or Ahmadou Kourouma's *Allah n'est pas*

example of the word being used in a literary context - each time a quote from a fictional work by France Daigle herself. The following three entries form a representative sample:

**frictionnaire**: n. m. – 2005. 1. Recueil d’unités signifiantes résultant d’un phénomène de friction des langues. « *Le fait d’avoir besoin d’un frictionnaire pour les comprendre confirmait leur exotisme.* » (Daigle)<sup>134</sup>

**perfiction** : n.f. – v.2005; illusion de perfection. « *Je suis désolée d’avoir à vous l’annoncer, mais vous vous êtes laissés bernés par une sublime perfiction.* » (Daigle)<sup>135</sup>

**bulleversée** : adj.f. – 2005; femme ivre de champagne. « Elle était bulleversée, la mignonne; son mari, lui, était ivre. » (Daigle)<sup>136</sup>

Given the particularity of this kind of language word play, it is worth taking a moment to see how Robert Majzels has treated these entries in this English translation. Here are the three corresponding passages:

**FRICITIONARY**: n. – 2005. 1. Collection of signifying units resulting from the phenomenon of friction between languages. “*The need for a frictionary in order to understand them confirmed their exotic nature.*” (Daigle)<sup>137</sup>

**PERFICTION**: n. –2005; the illusion of perfection. “*I’m sorry to have to tell you this, but you’ve allowed yourself to be duped by a sublime perfiction.*” (Daigle)<sup>138</sup>

**WOBUBBLEY**: adj. – 2005/2013; woman drunk on champagne. “She was wobubbly, the poor darling; her husband, on the other hand, was dead drunk.” (Daigle/Majzels)<sup>139</sup>

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*obligé*. In all these cases, we see characters taking liberty with the French language (Odile Cazenave, personal communication April 2018).

<sup>134</sup> Daigle 553. 1277.120.2 Fictionnaire.

<sup>135</sup> Daigle 456. 1061.120.11 Fictionnaire.

<sup>136</sup> Daigle 354. 809.120.12 Fictionnaire. (The quote is not italicized in this one; not sure if this is a typo or by design.)

<sup>137</sup> *For Sure* 548. 1277.120.2 Fictionary.

<sup>138</sup> *For Sure* 452, 1061.120.11 Fictionary.

<sup>139</sup> *For Sure* 351, 809.120.12 Fictionary.

My readers will note that Majzels has taken the liberty of inserting a reference to himself in this last example, which beautifully captures some of the challenges and creative possibilities inherent to translation in general, but especially a text that is so rich in word play and the use of a particular language or languages.

In sum - it is clear that this novel invites readers to think about games in numerous ways and that it constantly calls attention to the ways in which it is playing with its readers and expecting them to participate in that experience in some way. In lieu of a grand dramatic arc, I propose that it is these game-like aspects of the novel that keep readers engaged and motivated to read and re-read the text over and over. I also propose that an analysis of the game-like aspects of *Pour sûr* will be the key not only to understanding this text more broadly, but also the impact it will potentially have on its reading public.

#### Broad Ideas/Conceptual Framework

~ *Pour sûr* depicts both Daigle's experiences as creator of the text and also the readers' experiences as receivers and interpreters of the text. In other words, the subjects of this novel are its author and its readers. Furthermore, Daigle seems most interested in depicting the intersection between the two, the relationship between the author and her readers and the role each party assumes and/or is accorded as regards the interpretation of a text. By doing this, Daigle stages 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century literary debates about authorship

and readership, but she also reveals the ways in which many of the theories fall short when applied to a novel like *Pour sûr*. Taking a closer look at some of these theories will help situate our analysis and argument.

~ Some of Daigle's earlier texts were concerned with her (the writer's) personal story. *1953: Chronique d'une naissance annoncée* was a kind of autobiography, for example, with one of the main characters, Bébé M, representing Daigle as a child. In *Pas pire*, the author surrogate character named France Daigle reveals a lot about the real France Daigle, sharing recollections from her childhood, for example, as well as her struggles with agoraphobia. There is a noticeable shift in *Pour sûr*, however, because although Daigle is still hyper present in this novel, her readers have joined her in a powerful way. Roland Barthes famously declared that: "...the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (Barthes, *Image...* 148). In *Pour sûr*, both author and readers are very much alive. France Daigle makes the encounter between them the underpinning of this novel. Daigle places herself in the text in a great variety of ways, including references to her body of work, passages that describe her writing process, her character named France Daigle, who is the author of the text, and other characters, like Terry, who represent Daigle as author surrogates. But even as the characters are avatars of the author, they are simultaneously representing readers, too. They are reader or audience surrogates who represent a range of levels of participation, from simply expressing thoughts the actual readers of the text might have, to confronting Daigle's author surrogate character and making suggestions about the novel she is writing. By staging these interactions,

Daigle educates and challenges her readers to think about the role they play in the interpretation of a work of literature. *Pour sûr* is like a partial survey course on literary theory, moving from Barthes' "Death of the Author" to Foucault's ideas about "author function," and on to seminal works of reader-response criticism by the likes of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss. When Terry is left mute and paralyzed in the final pages of this novel, it can also be seen as a metaphor for the conclusion of these debates - his "Game Over" state of immobility represents a kind a stalemate between these ideas. It is also a punch line to a joke that Daigle has been setting up from the start. This is not the end for Terry but rather it is a potential new beginning. Zed's question about whether or not someone will "raise" Terry up today invites critics to abandon the expectations they had about this novel and/or the ideas they had about how they were going to interpret it or analyze it and rather consider re-reading it in a different way. To *experience* the text. In this way, a text that makes a critic out of every reader can make a reader out of every critic too.

~ Susan Sontag might have called this *transparence*. In her 1966 essay "Against Interpretation" she defined *transparence* as "experiencing the luminousness of the thing itself, of things being what they are" and declared this "the highest, most liberating value in art – and in criticism – today" (13). In her view, the "function of criticism should be to show *how it is what it is*, even *that it is what it is*, rather than to show *what it means*" (14). Sontag invited her fellow critics to "...recover our senses. We must learn to *see* more, to *hear* more, to *feel* more" (14). If we are to approach *Pour sûr* in this manner, we

will need to think about how we might show the ways in which the novel *is* a game, or set of games, and furthermore *how* these games function. And we will also need to consider the ways in which we should adjust our own critical approach in order to *experience*, or *play* the game or games ourselves.

~ What does it mean to experience, or play a game? Back in 1978, the philosopher Bernard Suits coined the term “lusory attitude,” to describe the attitude a person must take when playing a game. His definition was as follows:

To play a game is to attempt to achieve a specific state of affairs [prelusory goal], using only means permitted by rules [lusory means], where the rules prohibit use of more efficient in favour of less efficient means [constitutive rules], and where the rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity [lusory attitude] (41).

In short, playing a game, according to Suits, means making a “voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles” (41). We know that France Daigle made a “voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles” when she set out to write *Pour sûr*. In the tradition of writers like those in the Oulipo collective (Georges Perec, Raymond Queneau, Italo Calvino and others), she held herself to certain constraints, or rules, when writing the novel. We can therefore consider her writing process as requiring a kind of “lusory attitude” as defined by Suits. But for readers, it is a different story. The rules are always changing, or they are not quite clear. Reading this novel means staying nimble and being willing to surrender oneself to a constantly changing state of affairs. In other words, whereas for Daigle this text was about writing *within* certain constraints, for

readers it is about trying to read it *outside* of the constraints they might normally bring with them to the process. This will be an aspect of what I call a lusory critical approach. To return to Bernard Suits' definition of a lusory attitude, readers of *Pour sûr* do also need to be willing to "overcome unnecessary obstacles" in order to enjoy the text. But this Suits' definition focuses on the player's attitude and not the characteristics that make a game a game. Furthermore, unnecessary obstacles alone do not make a game - and there are countless novels (and other texts) that require this kind of approach by readers. Suits' definition is a good point of departure, but clearly falls a bit short, so we look for additional definitions that will inform our analysis.

~ There is an entire (and growing) field of game studies literature devoted to making distinctions between terms like "play," "game," "story," and "interactive narrative." Much of this is centered on debates about computer games and whether or not they can or should be conceived of as stories or narratives. Some scholars seek to maintain a healthy distinction between the terms. Espen Aarseth for example warns against a kind of narrativism or academic colonialism that assumes all games are stories that can be studied as such by literature and film studies scholars ("Genre Trouble"). Eric Zimmerman, on the other hand, argues that "games are always already narrative systems" (163) and joins other scholars who are interested in "intersecting games and stories to create something new out of the synthesis of both" (157).

~ Now, this dissertation is not about computer games, nor am I proposing that *Pour sûr* is more a game than it is a novel. It is, however, a novel that is very much concerned with

games and play in a variety of ways. Furthermore, in looking specifically to work coming out of contemporary game studies, I do not mean to ignore or deny the wealth of literature about games and play that came before it, the work of scholars like Johan Huizinga (*Homo Ludens* 1938), Roger Caillois (*Les jeux et les hommes*, 1958) or Mikhail Bakhtin (specifically in *Rabelais and His World* 1965). There are two main reasons I am drawn to contemporary game studies scholarship when analyzing *Pour sûr*. First, there are ways in which the text itself brings to mind the kinds of games that have been made possible by computer technology and I think this has important implications for what Daigle is able to achieve with this novel. Second, we know that France Daigle conceived of the idea of this novel at least in part as a result of a residency she did in which she was exploring “the extent to which the novel and digital technology could work hand-in-hand with one another” (Cabajsky *Le sentiment vif* 261). I believe, therefore, that these game studies debates, and the definitions that have been generated as a result of them, might be helpful to us in the analysis of a text like *Pour sûr* (in a reverse order of what Aarseth warned about above perhaps, a kind of academic post-colonialism that applies the strategies of the newer field of game studies to a text in a more traditional field).

~ Let us begin with some basic definitions of terms. Eric Zimmerman has proposed a definition of the concept of “play” that I find particularly useful. Zimmerman makes a distinction between the “formal” play activity required by a board game or a sport (he calls this Game Play), the “informal” play activity we associate with children (he calls this Ludic Activities or Informal Play) and all of the other ways in which people can “be

playful” (he calls this Being Playful, or Being in a Play State of Mind) (159). His overarching definition of the term is: “Play is the free space of movement within a more rigid structure. Play exists both because of and also despite the more rigid structures of a system” (159). As I briefly described earlier, *Pour sûr* contains examples of or references to every one of these types of play as defined by Zimmerman. It refers to formal Game Play in the form of Scrabble, crossword puzzles and sports like golf. There are many references to Informal Play, or children’s play activities. There is an entire narrative thread, for example, about Étienne and his friend Chico and their conflicting ideas about inventing new games to play every day (Étienne is in favor of this, Chico disagrees and would rather stick to familiar games).<sup>140</sup> Finally, Daigle showcases the Being Playful definition constantly, and encourages her readers to join her in adopting a “Playful State of Mind.”

~ There other ways in which game studies can shed light on our analysis of *Pour sûr*.

Let us take a closer look at the idea of digital technology specifically. When France Daigle talks about the conception of this book, she says :

En fait, ce livre-là, pour moi, poussé à l’extrême, serait un livre informatique. Il serait informatisable de la manière suivante : chaque fragment aurait deux possibilités de suite, donc tu en choisirais une, puis ça te mènerait à une autre et une autre. Donc, chacun le lirait d’une certaine façon différente (Cabajsky *Le sentiment vif*, 250).

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<sup>140</sup> See page 701 for a fragment from this thread in which Étienne discusses the problem with Carmen, seeking her advice.

So we know that Daigle had this kind of computer hypertext idea in mind when she wrote *Pour sûr* but that she wasn't at a point where she could realize that vision - she admits "Bon, il faut qu'il y ait une version écrite et ce sera celle-là pour le moment" (250). What she ended up creating, however, can still be thought of as a hypertext, in a rich tradition of literary works that encourage active participation on the part of readers in navigating the text in numerous and varied ways. George P. Landow, in the introduction to his book *Hypertext 3.0: Critical Theory and New Media in an Era of Globalization*, provides an excellent summary of the history of hypertext as a concept, taking us from the vision Roland Barthes proposed in *S/Z*, of an ideal "writerly text" that engages the reader to be a producer of the text (2-4) to Michel Foucault's conceptions of texts "in terms of networks and links" (2). In his 1997 book, *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*, Espen Aarseth proposed his own terminology and definition for literature that requires this kind of participation from its readers, writing: "In ergodic literature, nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text" (Aarseth *Cybertext*... 1). Aarseth also proposes several examples of non-linear but pre-technology texts that he would call ergodic literature, including the *I Ching* (which is featured in Daigle's *Petites difficultés*...and which I discuss in chapter 2), Guillaume Apollinaire's "Calligrammes" poetry, and Raymond Queneau's *Cent Mille Millions de Poèmes*, which is a paper book of sonnets with lines printed on different strips of paper that can be combined in innumerable ways (10). We can think of other examples as varied as the *Choose Your Own Adventure* series of children's book that were popular in the 1980s and 1990s and

Stéphane Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés*. Other novels and stories have been more recently described as hypertexts as well. Examples include: James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), Jorge Luis Borges' *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan* (1941, translated into English as *The Garden of Forking Paths* in 1948), Julio Cortázar's *Rayuela* (1963, translated as *Hopscotch* in English in 1966) and Mark Danielweski's *House of Leaves* (2000).

With its 1,728 fragments that relate to each other in myriad ways, with its index of categories and the labels that accompany every single fragment, prompting multiple readings in different combinations and approaches each time, *Pour sûr* can clearly be considered a hypertext in the tradition of these other texts. My aim, in the next sections, however, is to show that *Pour sûr* also bears important similarities to games in new media forms, even if it is not itself an electronic work.

### *Pour sûr*, a Lusory Critical Approach and New Media Games

~ As it turns out, Terry's fables provide us with lessons that can guide our comparison of *Pour sûr* to games in new media forms. First, he tells a story about Souricette and the labyrinth and second, another story about a deer that gets trapped due to a highway construction project (which I will describe more in depth later in this section). In the first case, the moral is to listen to your gut and to pay attention to how you feel inside; it is also a warning not to place a blind trust in traditional forms of education (university for example) . A lusory critical approach is not a strictly defined set of steps a critic would take but rather a mode or attitude to adopt when reading. This mode involves a

willingness to be playful, nimble and flexible. This mode is interdisciplinary and embraces the unorthodox. It means questioning and re-examining definitions of basic terms and concepts that sometimes go unquestioned. What is a novel? What is a game? Can a text be both at once? What does it mean to be a good reader? What does it mean to be a good critic? A text like *Pour sûr* challenges its readers to rethink what criticism is in the first place. What kinds of skills does it require? How can we make criticism more nimble or flexible? A luscious critical approach would find its origins in these kinds of questions.

A text like *Pour sûr* keeps reminding us that there are many different ways to be a good reader of a text, or a good critic of a text. As I have described before, *Pour sûr* is a text of many layers, layers of embedded meaning that can be accessed by different readers. We can conceive of this in the same way that a game, and especially a video game, can have different levels (novice, advanced, etc) of gameplay that are available to players of different skill levels or who have accumulated points or tools along the way. Players can “level up” as they gain skills, knowledge, experience and resources in the gameworld, and games can be played over and over, with a different experience each time. So *Pour sûr* is like an adventure game, with different nuggets of meaning being “available” to different players based on their knowledge or experience coming into the reading experience. Literary critics will be able to decode certain references that other readers might miss, but there are other references that will require a different body of knowledge. Here are a few examples of how this works in *Pour sûr*:

1. French literary critics will find pleasure in the novel's countless references and allusions to the French literary canon. There are direct references to French literary greats like Molière and Sartre and others to psychoanalysts and intellectuals like Lacan. Some of Daigle's encyclopedic fragments will remind these readers of Diderot, others written in essay styles will evoke Montaigne or Pascal. Many of the novel's epigraphs (found at the start of each chapter) feature citations from the work of contemporary French writers, including Benoîte Groulx (185), Gilles Lapouge (253) and Julien Gracq (561). In this "reading" of the text, the novel is like a survey or crash course in French literature. Alternatively, the novel could be imagined as a giant scavenger hunt for students of French literature, where the object is to identify the greatest number of French literary references.<sup>141</sup>

2. Local readers (those from the Moncton/Dieppe region of New Brunswick) will enjoy a reading as elaborate or perceptive as that of the literary critic, but for decidedly different codes. They will chuckle at the depictions of colorful local characters like Hektor Haché Haché or Chuck Bernard. They will recognize the numerous geographic references Daigle makes. And perhaps most importantly, local readers who speak Chiac will be best positioned to decipher the full richness of the passages and dialogue written in Chiac, due both to their capacity to understand the language in which they are written

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<sup>141</sup> Could we conceive of comprehensive reading exam (required in a literature PhD program, for example) taking the form of a scavenger hunt like this?

and the sentiments these passages often express about the language. The following passage (a dialogue between anonymous characters) is a great example of both aspects:

- Je sais pas qu'isse qu'y se passe, j'ai une crampe dans la jambe depuis à matin.
- Si c'était ton tchœur, c'est dans le bras que t'aurais mal. Unless que t'aurais mal dormi dessus ou dequoi de même. Dans cte cas-là tu pourrais croire que ça serait ton tchœur, bût ça serait yinque parce que t'as dormi crâmpé. Comme quante tu campes. Je sais pas àbout toi, ben moi je me réveille avec une crampe en queque part èverytime que je câmp. Câmp crâmp, que ma femme dit. Ouelle, faut que je hale òr ãlse je vas aouère une cawle. Prends garde à cte jambe-là!
- Ya! Merci pour l'information (que je voulais pas vraiment).
- Anytime!

Pourquoi cette prononciation tantôt française, tantôt anglaise de mots semblables dans la même tirade? Par habitude de l'anglais? Par gêne du français? Par goût de variété? Par nonchalance? Par intuition langagière? Par complicité? (198).<sup>142</sup>

As we saw in chapter 1, there are many passages that explore the complicated linguistic situation for Acadians of the Moncton/Dieppe region. These passages will resonate with local readers, of course, but also with any reader belonging to a postcolonial Francophone population or any other linguistic minority having to navigate a power imbalance with a linguistic hegemony. In another example:

Il devient fastidieux à la longue de faire l'apologie de chaque tournure de français acadien ou de chiac par rapport au français standard. Il va de soi qu'une langue ait ses propres couleurs et idiosyncrasies (230).<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> 462.35.10 Le détail dans le détail.

<sup>143</sup> 541.33.10 Chiac détail.

Passages like this do more than simply provide information that will be better understood by some readers than by others. They also express feelings that will resonate with certain readers. And because they are not attributed to specific characters, the effect on such readers is palpable - it truly feels as though the text is reading your mind, or perhaps like you are finding yourself in the text, alongside Terry and Carmen, alongside France Daigle herself.

3. Members of the larger Acadian diaspora for instance will recognize numerous references to Acadian history and the shared cultural and ethnic experience of the diaspora post-Great Deportation. Many of these are humorous, like this one:

Affichette dans un édifice de Moncton en rénovation :

We apologize for  
any inconvenience.

\* \* \*

Nous faisons des excuses  
pour n'importe quel  
dérangement.<sup>144</sup>

The inside joke contained in this passage will have members of the Acadian diaspora (or others familiar with its history) in stitches, as there are a number of layers to this notice/poster. It is a poster offering an apology for construction work (or something similar) and was clearly written in English first, then translated into French for the francophone population. Although “faire des excuses” can be a translation for

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<sup>144</sup> Daigle 654, 1531.17.11 Hasards. HYPERLINK: Back to footnote 30.

“apologize,” it also has a connotation of “making excuses,” which carries a very different meaning. “Dérangement” calls to mind the Grand Dérangement (Great Deportation, Great Expulsion), which today many people recognize is a very mild or understated way to describe what was in actuality, and at best, a dispossession and forced exile of an entire ethnic and religious population.<sup>145</sup> Furthermore, there have been (so far unsuccessful) efforts in recent years to obtain an apology from the British crown.

In this last example about the layers of meaning that are available to members of the Acadian diaspora, *Pour sûr* also functions as a kind of embedded narrative, in the way that it has been described by Henry Jenkins. Jenkins sees this concept as a “middle ground position between the ludologists and the narratologists” and which examines “games less as stories than as spaces ripe with narrative possibility” (*First Person* 119). Jenkins argues that game design is a kind of “narrative architecture” and I propose that Daigle has designed *Pour sûr* in this way too. As Jenkins explains:

Embedded narrative can and often does occur within contested spaces. We may have to battle our way past antagonists, navigate through mazes, or figure out how to pick locks in order to move through the narratively impregnated mise-en-scene. Such a mixture of enacted and embedded narrative elements can allow for a balance between the flexibility of interactivity and the coherence of a pre-authored narrative (126).

Indeed, readers of *Pour sûr* must, in a way, navigate through mazes (navigating the labels/index etc) and figure out how to pick locks (one example is learning to decipher

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<sup>145</sup> Historian John Mack Faragher (*A Great and Noble Scheme*) goes so far as to compare it to ethnic cleansing, although other historians argue that this takes the argument too far. [HYPERLINK: Back to footnote 31.](#)

the Chiac in the dialogues) in order to move through a “narratively impregnated mise-en-scene” that distributes nuggets of meaning for them to find and comprehend or enjoy. In this way, *Pour sûr*, like a “game world,” “becomes a kind of information space, a memory palace” (126). For readers of the novel, this is an entirely new approach to dealing with the complicated history of the Acadian diaspora. A memory palace is another word for “method of loci,” which is a technique used by competitive memory champions (among others) to remember items or list of objects by imagining a palace or set of rooms and thinking about moving through that space and seeing the items they are trying to remember.<sup>146</sup> Rather than dwelling on Acadian history, or trying to rewrite it the way that Antonine Maillet did, and instead of ignoring it altogether, Daigle simply distributes references to the history here and there throughout the text, to be deciphered, or not, as readers see fit. In this way, she handles history much the same way she handles Chiac - as a kind of open secret that is there but does not have to be taken up (see chapter 1).

~ In its capacity as a memory palace, *Pour sûr* also presents an opportunity for learning. This is a text that will educate the willing reader. In the second of the fables I identified above, Terry describes a young deer who gets stuck in the median of a new highway: “La morale de ct’histoire-icitte? Même si qu’on n’est pas supposé de le faire, c’est utile des fois de saouère comment grimper par-dessus les bouchures” (281-

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<sup>146</sup> Joshua Foer wrote an excellent overview of the topic for the New York Times in 2011 - the archived piece can be found here: <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/interactive/2011/02/20/magazine/mind-secrets.html>

282).<sup>147</sup> This is the first instance of the story appearing in the novel. Three-hundred pages later, the story is repeated, and notably, the moral of the story is expanded upon this time:

- Je dors pas, Papa, tu peux dire la morale.
- Si qu’ y a une morale à ct’histoire-icitte? Pour sûr qu’y a une morale! Y en a même deux! Pour une, faut que tu saves lire quoisse qu’y se passe autour de toi dans la vie, pis deux, faut que tu saves sauter des bouchures” (582-583).<sup>148</sup>

Daigle seems to be suggesting that a second read may offer new layers of meaning - in this novel, there is more to be learned or understood when hearing, or re-reading a story more than once. Furthermore, the moral of the story is of interest to us here, especially in the second fragment. Terry explains that, not only is it important to “know how to read what is happening around you,” it is also important to know how to “jump over fences” (*bouchure* in Acadian French is the equivalent of *clôture*).

There are many possible ways to interpret this moral. Perhaps Daigle means for us to think about transgressing the boundaries of academic disciplines, for example. I think she also means for us to see this novel as an open text that contains numerous entry and exit points. In other words, in the narrative architecture that Daigle has built, the blueprints always include several means of egress. A lusory critical approach means being willing to scramble over the fences and boundaries one meets along the way. It means seeking out the exits too, and being willing to exit and enter the text, over and over again. *Pour sûr* demands this of its readers – it is not a text you are meant to get lost in

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<sup>147</sup> 640.37.2 Histoires d’animaux.

<sup>148</sup> 1350.37.5 Histoires d’animaux.

for days but rather one that launches you out into the world. You might read a fragment or two and then look up an obscure reference that takes you down a research wormhole. You might get inspired in myriad ways to supplement your reading with experiences and research outside of the text. This constant movement into and out of the text lies in contrast to the idea of “getting lost in a book” or even Barthes’ “*jouissance*” in *The Pleasure of The Text*. We are reminded of a maze, perhaps, where the object is to find one’s way through multiple paths in order to find the exit. Or perhaps a more recent game phenomenon, the escape room, is a better comparison - where the object is to solve riddles and accomplish tasks (as part of a team) in order to find hidden clues and eventually solve your way out of a locked room. But whereas mazes and escape routes usually have just one correct path or solution leading to one exit, *Pour sûr* encourages a *va-et-vient* that might be more similar to the kinds of pervasive games that modern technology has made possible (Benford et al). A game like Pokémon Go comes to mind, which is an example of augmented reality gaming - players use an app on their phone to play a game that is mapped onto the real world environment and which requires them to move physically from location to location.<sup>149</sup>

### From Hybrid Universe to Hyperreality

In a postmodern world, however, everyday experience has come to seem increasingly gamelike, and we are aware of the constructed nature of all of our narratives. The ordinary categories of experience, such as parent, child,

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<sup>149</sup> <https://www.pokemongo.com/>

lover, employer, or friend, have come to be described as ‘roles’ and are readily deconstructed into their culturally invented components. Therefore the union of game and story is a vibrant space, open to exploration by high and low culture, and in sustained and incidental engagements by all of us as we negotiate the shifting social arrangements of the global community and the shifting scientific understandings of our inner landscape (Murray *First Person*, 3).

In the postmodern world as thus described by Janet Murray, the genre created at the intersection of games and stories becomes a tool by which we can understand our human condition. My goal in this dissertation is to show that France Daigle has harnessed the potential of this tool as well, in order to both understand and to shape and transform the world in which she writes.

It starts with the ways in which the Moncton/Dieppe saga that Daigle has created (mainly over the course of her last four novels) blends reality with fiction, making it difficult sometimes to distinguish between the two. This is something Daigle comments on directly in the first novel of the saga, *Pas pire*. When the author surrogate character France Daigle travels to France for an interview on *Bouillon de culture* : Bernard Pivot remarks: “Parce que dans votre livre, je ne sais pas si c’est un style courant chez vous, on ne distingue pas très bien le réel de la fiction” (*Pas pire*, 185). Even in this scene itself, both of the characters (Daigle and Pivot) are surrogates of real people, but the interview is fiction - Pivot has never had the real Daigle on his program. As I have described in previous chapters, the other novels continue in this same vein. Daigle stages real life people alongside fictional characters, engaging with each other in fictional interactions that are very realistic. By doing this, she creates a hybrid universe that is not contained

within one text but that is common to all four of her latest novels (it is, however, made most vivid and comprehensive in *Pour sûr*).

Folding reality into a fictional universe is not new or unique to France Daigle, of course. However, there are some distinguishing features of Daigle's hybrid universe that have important implications; specifically the way in which she borrows language and concepts from New Media transforms the reception of the text by her readers. For example, Daigle's characters are not simply characters - they are avatars of herself and of her readers. Many novels encourage readers to identify with certain characters and to empathize with their situation, but I propose that the ensemble of strategies Daigle uses, depicting her characters interacting with the author, providing surveys for readers to complete, continually suggesting avenues of research outside the text at hand, etc, together serve to transform the relationship readers have with the characters in the text. A different kind of interaction and identification is encouraged. An avatar in a game is not simply a character with which a player identifies but more so a character that a player can shape and personalize, then inhabit and manipulate in order to make their way through a game world. The visual element is not to be ignored - players can fashion avatars in various ways, sometimes choosing to make them into true likenesses of themselves, sometimes choosing to make them into more beautiful versions of themselves, as we saw before. Incidentally, in *Pour sûr*, the protagonists, although well developed in terms of personality traits and inner thoughts and feelings, are never really described in physical terms. We do not actually know what Terry, Carmen, Zed, Josse and other characters

look like physically. They, and all the others, including the anonymous characters, are like blank slates or avatars that have not yet been personalized.

Now obviously when reading *Pour sûr* in its current printed form, it is not possible for readers to actually physically change the way the characters look or behave, however, I believe that Daigle is going as far as she can in a print medium to suggest or encourage her readers to approach the characters with that kind of attitude. When Terry learns more and more about books, literature, etc, we as readers are not simply empathizing with him or identifying with him but we are also - due to the ways in which the text launches us into various avenues of research ourselves - learning more about books and literature etc. Additionally, when certain fragments instruct us to refer to one of Daigle's previous books, and if/when we follow those instructions, we are suddenly, in a real way, navigating the hybrid universe Daigle has created. For example :

Pour plus de détails au sujet de la rencontre de Terry et Carmen avec le peintre Étienne Zablonski, lire *Un fin passage* de Daigle, paru aux Éditions du Boréal en 2001 (284).<sup>150</sup>

Furthermore, we are encouraged to think about the hybrid universe as a space that extends beyond the confines of these texts - in a very tangible way. Daigle refers to Camil Gaudin, for example, who is the friend who accompanied Daigle to France for the Pivot interview in *Pas pire*:

Un ressortissant du roman *Pas pire* de l'Acadienne France Daigle, Camil Gaudin n'eut pas de rôle dans les deux romans subséquents de cette auteure

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<sup>150</sup> 647.54.2 Oubli/rappel.

*(Un fin passage et Petites difficultés d'existence)*, mais cela n'empêche guère son existence de se poursuivre en dehors du cadre romanesque (37)<sup>151</sup>

There is something comforting about the idea that Camil, though he hasn't been featured in these post- *Pas pire* novels, is still alive and well somewhere in Moncton and that he may reappear in future novels. There is also some ambiguity here - it's not ever clear whether Camil was/is a person in real life - perhaps it is more likely that we will run into him on the street in Moncton should we ever make our way there.

This leads me to my final argument, which is that Daigle's hybrid universe actually begins to behave a lot like the hyperreality proposed by Jean Baudrillard. In this case, the simulation begins to be indistinguishable from the reality it is supposedly recreating. Baudrillard used Jorge Luis Borges' fable "On Exactitude in Science" to describe a situation in which the map is made so exact as to ultimately cover and replace the territory on which it is based. As he explains:

Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory - precession of simulacra - it is the map that engenders the territory and if we were to revive the fable today, it would be the territory whose shreds are slowly rotting across the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges subsist here and there, in the deserts which are no longer those of the Empire, but our own. The desert of the real itself (166).

My vision of Daigle's work as being part of a project to create a hyperreal Moncton is an optimistic one. When Umberto Eco visited the United States and wrote about his

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<sup>151</sup> 75.96.10 Personnages.

adventures in *Travels in Hyperreality*, he proposed an understanding of hyperreality as a false reality, based on desire, that can be consumed as real - think Walt Disney, who Eco said, “had finally managed to achieve his own dream and reconstruct a fantasy world more real than reality” (45). I propose that Daigle is using this kind of a process to reconstruct a fantasy version of Moncton that her readers will love and want to know and make real.

In game studies, there is a phenomenon called the Proteus effect, which describes the ways in which the avatar that a player uses when playing a game can have an effect, not only on their behavior in later stages of the same game, but also on their interaction with people in the real world (Yee et al). I believe a similar effect is, or can be, at play in the experience of Daigle’s novel by its readers. When readers begin to inhabit and perform the roles that Daigle has made available to them - moving about the novel in creative ways, exiting and reentering the text over and over again, rereading multiple times and doing a great deal of research - they are inhabiting characters like Terry in a quite real way, which can, in turn shape their continued interactions with the text.

In reader-response criticism, Wolfgang Iser has described a crucial moment for a text, the “convergence of text and reader,” which is, in his formulation, what: “brings the literary work into existence” (Iser, 275). What Daigle does in *Pour sûr* is make that moment visible to her readers - they see themselves at the moment of convergence with the text. In this way, and in creating the hyperreality as I have argued above, Daigle challenges the boundaries of her readers so-called “horizon of expectations” (Hans

Robert Jaus's term). Finally, readers are not meant to think of themselves exclusively as receivers of knowledge but rather as both receivers and producers - responsible along with Daigle and other artists and writers, for the ongoing, ever-evolving project of telling their own story.

## Conclusion

L'aveu, donc: depuis que le monde est monde le chiffre 7 a de mille et une façons symbolisé la plénitude, la perfection, la totalité. Qui plus est, le 7 est plus universellement symbolique en ce sens que le chiffre 12. Voilà. C'est dit (278).<sup>152</sup>

France Daigle may have organized her novel *Pour sûr* around the number twelve but according to the fragment I have cited, which appears about a third of the way through the text, she later realized that the number seven might have been a better choice. Since it has been exactly seven years now since the novel's publication - and because there is something poetic about emulating her process - it seems only right to organize this conclusion as a series of seven observations.

I begin by commenting on two anecdotes/events that have occurred in the last year that will help me describe the Acadian context seven years after *Pour sûr*. Next, I share the questions with which I am left after this dissertation has come to a close, followed by ideas for future avenues of research.

### 1. In Which France Daigle Plays Tour Guide for Writer Madeleine Thien:

Daigle hasn't published any novels since *Pour sûr*, but since 2012 she has been writing a short twice-monthly column for *l'Acadie Nouvelle*, an independent French

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<sup>152</sup> 633.70.6 Erreurs.

newspaper published in Caraquet, New Brunswick (which is about three hours north of Moncton and is where she spends her summers). These short essays are actually a lot like the fragments in *Pour sûr*, covering a wide range of topics as varied as a review of Bernard Pivot's latest book (she's a big fan!) to an anecdote about buying potatoes<sup>153</sup> at the grocery store (she got the more expensive ones because she knew they'd give her more enjoyment).

The essay I want to describe here is one she wrote after the Frye Festival last year. Each April (since the year 2000), the city of Moncton NB plays host to this sizable (~16,000 participants yearly) and bilingual literary festival, named in honor of literary critic Northrop Frye, who spent his formative childhood years in Moncton. During last year's festival, France Daigle met the novelist Madeleine Thien, winner of the 2016 Governor General's Award for English-language fiction for her novel *Do Not Say We Have Nothing*. Thien had heard about Chiac and Daigle offered to accompany her around town in order to hear people speaking it in everyday settings. They traipsed here and there, searching unsuccessfully at first (school was out that day, everyone else seemed to

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<sup>153</sup> Because Daigle's writing is so erudite, containing constant mind games, references to local points of reference and esoteric allusions to European literature, philosophy and art (among others), reading her work becomes a process of creating new synergies. In *Pour sûr*, we were not simply reading 700+ pages but also the margins, the index etc and we have therefore developed our own approach to her work, constantly asking ourselves what a word might mean, what references she might be trying to make etc. A word as simple as "potato" takes on layers of potential meaning. Here, potatoes are a regional, cultural reference, as they have traditionally been a major crop in the New Brunswick region where Daigle's work is set. But they also might bring to mind the work of canonical French filmmaker Agnès Varda and specifically a short film she did about potatoes in 2013, *Patatutopia*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HsSOAeGzRiQ>.

be speaking French) until they finally overheard two men speaking Chiac in a small store.

As Daigle describes it:

Je fais signe à Madeleine, nous nous approchons. Mais il y a de l'interférence et d'une chose à l'autre je suis obligée de nous présenter et dire ce que nous cherchons. Nous sommes accueillies chaleureusement par deux hommes dans la force d'âge qui offrent de nous régaler linguistiquement.

Nous prenons 15-20 minutes pour causer de tout et de rien. Je pose des questions, les deux hommes parlent facilement, mais encore une fois, dans un bon français qui sort tout naturellement. Pourtant, il y a quelques minutes, l'un d'eux parlait on ne peut plus chiac! Je suis à la fois déçue pour mon invitée et rassurée pour notre français.

Pour finir, un des gars reconnaît qu'il est difficile de se mettre à parler chiac tout de go, hors contexte :

– Si tu veux entendre du chiac, vas au Bayon le vendredi soir après neuf heures, là tu vas en entendre du chiac! (*Acadie Nouvelle*).

This happened in 2017 and it is clear that Daigle continues to be somewhat ambivalent toward Chiac. She is happy to show it off as a cultural artifact but is also happy to know that young people can still speak “un bon français” when they so choose. I am struck by the way in which Chiac, in this anecdote, is a slippery thing - the young men in the conversation have every intention of speaking it with Daigle and Thien, but the knowledge that Chiac is expected makes it impossible for them to deliver. It is unclear if this is a kind of performance anxiety or rather simply an example of code-switching - perhaps it is a bit of both.

Furthermore, this anecdote positions Chiac as a kind of cultural curiosity, even a touristic draw for the city of Moncton. With increasing numbers of contemporary artists

and writers (Daigle among them) using Chiac in their work, the language has gained a certain renown, across Canada and internationally too. Daigle's hyperreality is perhaps more accurately a collectively created hyperreality, one she has been constructing in concert with others like Lisa LeBlanc (a "folk trash" singer/songwriter who is touring in the U.S. and Europe at this very moment) and Dano LeBlanc (no relation that I know of to Lisa, creator of *Acadieman*, the B.D. Acadian superhero). The anecdote above is an excellent example of a moment when the simulation supercedes the reality on which it is based - Daigle and her guest are unable to find the "authentic" Chiac experience they are seeking.

## 2. In Which Jass-Sainte Bourque Swears Off the Use of English:

I briefly mentioned Jass-Sainte Bourque in chapter 1 - this is a character that has been created by Xavier Gould, who graduated last year with a degree in theater arts from Mount Allison University in Sackville, N.B. Jass-Sainte, "un personnage caricatural, ambigu sur le plan sexuel, qui parle chiac, avec grand sens du drame et le don de nous surprendre" (Mousseau) has become wildly popular on YouTube and Facebook over the last year. The character is comical, speaking an exaggerated (if incredibly fluent) Chiac and expressing great pride in her contemporary Acadian language and culture.

Gould's most viewed video to date is one he recorded during last year's *Jeux de la francophonie canadienne*, a gathering for French-speaking youth, who compete in a series of competitions in three domains (art, leadership and sport). The Games occur

every three years in a different francophone location in Canada and in July 2017 they were held in Moncton. In this video, Jass-Sainte shares her disappointment about several experiences she had while volunteering at the Games earlier that day - hurting her shoulder while moving some benches, losing her favorite pink sunglasses and finally - the worst part - being addressed in English by an Anglophone at the end of the day. In the diatribe that follows, she lambasts the man for speaking English at the *Jeux de la francophonie*, “Sõrry, je ãnderstand pas, ãnything tu dis rĩght nõw, monsieur”<sup>154</sup> and declares her resistance to English moving forward - she will boycott English during the rest of the Games “J’va arrêter de dire des mots en anglais. Cũz chu f @%\*-ing dõne.” The video is profoundly funny - not only for Gould’s dramatic talent but also because the content highlights the absurdity of the contemporary linguistic situation for Acadians. During Jass-Sainte’s description of the steps she will take to boycott English, she unwittingly uses almost as many words in English as in French. “Evẽry tĩme que j’va au Dãiry Quẽen, ou au Bennic, ou whẽrever, j’va plus dire ‘un smãll cõne,’ j’va dire ‘un smãll cornet.’” The hashtags she uses on the video exhibit the same phenomenon: “#JparlePuAnglais4Now, #RightFiers, #Not, #JeuxDeLaFrancophonie.”<sup>155</sup>

It is important to know that this video was done in a particular moment in time and that Chiac is still very much a contested subject for Acadians, including Acadian youth. As we can see in Jass-Sainte’s second hashtag listed above, the slogan adopted by

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<sup>154</sup> All transcriptions are my own. The video in question is at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vt3EblLEXnY>.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

last year's Games was in Chiac, "*Right Fiers!*" Some in the community disapproved of giving Chiac such a public affirmation, especially in the context of an event that is meant to promote the French language. One example is Robert Pichette, 80, who was one of the authors of the Official Languages Act which made New Brunswick a bilingual province. He called this "One of the most asinine slogans ever to surface" (CBC News).

What is striking about all of this is that the arguments and sentiments shared in today's debates about Chiac haven't changed all that much from the 1960s when Michel Brault released his document *Éloge du chiac*. And the opinions are not falling neatly along generational divides either. A Facebook post made recently (February 2018) by a young Acadian woman named Roxann Guerrette even made the news due to the spirited debate it engendered in the comments. Guerrette is currently studying in France for six months and is self-conscious about the language she speaks - her post is entitled "J'ai honte de ma langue" (Delattre). Jass-Sainte Bourque jumped into the fray as well, recording a Facebook live stream video to comment on the debate as it was unfolding (and providing in-character satirical commentary about how we all have the same "langue" - in the sense of a the body part).

As we know, Acadian identity has, since Antonine Maillet, been intimately tied to language - but which language is it now? In Moncton N.B. today it clear that this is a topic that continues to be debated and negotiated. And perhaps, in the end, that is what is truly Acadian – the condition of negotiating one's language as a means of determining one's identity.

### 3. Is *Pour sûr* an Emblematic Acadian Novel?

When I read it for the first time, I was struck by this quality of the text, the feeling that Daigle had taken the baton from Antonine Maillet and was now the artist fighting some kind of Acadian cause. Many reviewers have suggested as much, especially due to the text's so-called celebration of Chiac. My thoughts on this have evolved considerably since that first reading. Mainly, I am left with more questions than I had before.

First and foremost, what does it mean to be a Francophone author today and where exactly does Daigle's work belong? It is Acadian but it doesn't feel particularly Canadian. Although it is firmly anchored in a certain ethnic, cultural region of the world, it is also decidedly global. Daigle's characters travel to and from Europe. Her style emulates European and Latin American writers. The text is infused with references to French and European thought, philosophy and literature. She largely ignores Québec and yet, her work can be seen as a kind of response to Québec literature at the same time. The "urbanness" of *Pour sûr* lies in contrast to the Québec *roman de la terre* tradition that is, while definitely in the past, still present in the cultural imagination. Daigle's eschewing of gender in so many ways (gender neutral characters from the beginning, protagonists who do not subscribe to any gender norms, etc.) also seems to exist in direct contrast to Québec, which has celebrated so many writers who focus on women's stories over the last decades (people like Anne Hébert, Marie-Claire Blais, Nicole Brossard, Marie-Célie

Agnant, Nelly Arcan, etc). Furthermore, her reluctance to claim her queerness is notable - and so different from Nicole Brossard's work in that regard.

Andrea Cabajsky has recently argued that Daigle's work should be considered an example of an "ultraminor literature," as it is "a doubly dominated literature positioned uneasily between centers of cultural influence in Paris and Montreal" (Cabajsky *Francophone* 158). As she explains, "As a writing strategy, the ultraminor aims to transcend dual marginality while establishing new frames of reference defined on local terms" (158). I agree with Cabajsky's determination that Daigle's novels *Un fin passage* and *Petites difficultés d'existence* "render Moncton a center of artistic consciousness whose appeal lies paradoxically in its marginality, that is, its distance from normative cultural centers" (169). Finally, Cabajsky argues that "Daigle's attempts to create new systems of value by which to redefine the terms of Acadian minority prove similarly bound to oscillate between the binary oppositions of center versus periphery and tradition versus modernity" (174).<sup>156</sup>

I agree with this last argument but with a caveat. I would like to suggest that the strength of Daigle's approach in writing *Pour sûr* is that she is transforming the relationship between herself and her readers so significantly that it provides her with a means of egress from these binary oppositions. In *Pour sûr*, Daigle invites her readers to

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<sup>156</sup> So far (as far as my research has been able to determine), this is the only peer-reviewed article about *Pour sûr* specifically. There are four book reviews about the original French version (Fortin 2011; Brun del Re 2012; Lefort-Favreau 2013; and Parayre 2014). Andrea Cabajsky also did a very comprehensive interview with Daigle in 2013 (Cabajsky *Le Sentiment vif*) and Catherine Leclerc did a great interview of the translator Robert Majzels in 2013 as well (Robichaud).

join her in a collaborative creative process that aims to democratize Acadian literary production on the whole. In so doing, she is also transforming the way that people think about being Acadian. The examples I shared above speak to the aspect of Acadian identity that has to do with constant negotiation of language - in Daigle's work, that negotiation is staged, making it an intellectual and literary pursuit, as well as a collaborative effort. Being Acadian in the world that Daigle has imagined can be all of these things at once, or to whatever degree an individual will choose.

#### 4. How *Pour sûr* Affected this Reader/Critic:

I have, in the main chapters of this dissertation, discussed the ways in which *Pour sûr* challenges its readers and critics, as it certainly did me at various points in the process. In sum, what this text did for me is it made me aware of the ways in which I perform the process of reading and literary criticism.

In practice, reading this novel for the first time took me much longer than I had anticipated, as it continually launched me into various avenues of research and also because it required me to refine my reading and note-taking approach. I realized early on that I needed to be able to categorize certain threads of meaning and find pertinent fragments later on when I began to write about the text. The system I developed was not particularly elegant, but rather a kind of *mélange*. I wrote copious notes in the margins of my paperback copy of the novel, transferring them periodically to an ever-growing, ever-evolving Word document on my laptop, and creating and organizing various lists of

words and concepts on an as-needed basis (finding all the page numbers and topics of fragments in a particular category, for example, or creating a Cirrus word cloud of the index to see if I could glean anything of value from the relative frequency of the words in that section).

Writing about this novel was also challenging, and rewarding, for two main reasons. First, as I have already explained, it was difficult to decide on a critical angle from among the many options I could take. It is also a fun book to talk about with practically anyone, which I did, and every conversation, whether with a professor of literature, my wife who is an architect or a friend who is a participant in online gaming communities, gave me more avenues to explore and consider. Second, during the writing process I felt a responsibility to “up my game” in creative ways. While I was not able to fully achieve many of the ideas I had in this regard, it was a great deal of fun to imagine the possibilities. To that end, in the next two passages (numbers five and six) I briefly highlight two of the projects I have envisioned for future research.

##### 5. Journal Article on Acadian Hyperreality:

In chapter three, I propose a way of conceptualizing Daigle’s hybrid universe as a kind of hyperreality that allows her to transform the horizon of expectations of her reading public. I would like to develop this idea further and submit it as an article for publication. I would also like to determine whether, since seven years have passed since

the publication of *Pour sûr*, there are any measurable indications that would support my argument.

#### 6. Imagining a Digital *Pour sûr*:

Daigle herself has talked about how she originally envisioned *Pour sûr* as an electronic text: “En fait, ce livre-là, pour moi, poussé à l’extrême, serait un livre informatique” (Cabajsky *Le sentiment vif* 250). I would like to realize this idea, in the form of a digital humanities project in which the novel would not only be digitized but also be made available in such a way that readers could read it in every which way, going from fragment to fragment in different directions. Furthermore, I envision a format that would allow for readers to suggest certain avenues to those readers that come after them, provide commentary (that can be shared and or to which responses can be made), and even a means by which certain “versions” of the text (either on the whole or in sections) could be saved as options from which future readers could choose. Perhaps we could even provide an opportunity for the reading community to “upvote” versions or certain avenues so as to create favorites among the options available to readers over time.

NOTE: There are models for this kind of project - two that come to mind are the web-based edition that was made of Julio Cortázar’s *Rayuela* - the *Proyecto Rayuel-O-Matic Digital Universal* ([http://www.oocities.org/espanol/rayuel\\_o\\_matic/](http://www.oocities.org/espanol/rayuel_o_matic/)) and Jonathan Basile’s electronic recreation of Jorge Louis Borges’ story “The Library of Babel” (<http://libraryofbabel.info>).

7. *Pour sûr:*

Bildungsroman? Künstlerroman? ...

“Lecteurroman?”<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Carnets/fictionnaire de Monique. HYPERLINK: Click on these page numbers to go to related fragments: 37, 105 .

## Appendix 1

List of fragment categories in *Pour sûr*

- |                                  |                              |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Chansons                      | 33. Chiac détail             |
| 2. Couleurs                      | 34. Lacan                    |
| 3. Statistiques                  | 35. Le detail dans le detail |
| 4. Scrabble                      | 36. Fraises                  |
| 5. Un film                       | 37. Histoires d'animaux      |
| 6. Le Babar                      | 38. Oignons                  |
| 7. Détails utiles                | 39. Freud par la bande       |
| 8. Librairie Didot               | 40. Ménage ton ravage        |
| 9. Le Potager                    | 41. La vie des saints        |
| 10. Typo                         | 42. Triage                   |
| 11. Emprunts                     | 43. Amour                    |
| 12. Structure                    | 44. Parrains et marraines    |
| 13. La paternité                 | 45. Détails inutiles         |
| 14. Zablonki                     | 46. La Bibliothèque idéale   |
| 15. Monologues non identifiés    | 47. Abandons                 |
| 16. L'Infirmier                  | 48. Inférences               |
| 17. Hasards                      | 49. Élisabeth II             |
| 18. Une place pour le monde      | 50. Fundy                    |
| 19. Détails intéressants         | 51. Mots croisés             |
| 20. Langue                       | 52. Cérémonie                |
| 21. Détails plus ou moins utiles | 53. Consommateurs avertis    |
| 22. Dialogues en vrac            | 54. Oubli/rappel             |
| 23. Patates                      | 55. Haïkus                   |
| 24. Élisabeth                    | 56. Pèlerinages              |
| 25. Meurtre                      | 57. Photocopies              |
| 26. Le film                      | 58. Prolongements            |
| 27. Voiture neuve                | 59. Savoirs                  |
| 28. Une vie de couple            | 60. Superstitions            |
| 29. En route                     | 61. Sciences humaines        |
| 30. Chiac                        | 62. Sondage/hommes           |
| 31. Questions avec réponse       | 63. Terry et Zed             |
| 32. Problèmes d'examen           | 64. Contraires               |

65. Cousins cousines	107.	Nécessités
66. Les vertus	108.	Rumeurs
67. Carnets de Terry	109.	Rêves
68. Projets	110.	Un jour de congé
69. Sondage/femmes	111.	Outils
70. Erreurs	112.	Langues
71. Intro broderie	113.	Collections
72. Équations	114.	Inventions
73. Virages	115.	Catherine et Chico
74. Hans	116.	Vrai ou faux
75. Tankas	117.	La mort
76. Avatars	118.	À propos du jaune
77. Grammaire	119.	La musique
78. Accidents	120.	Fictionnaire
79. Étrangétés	121.	Choses à vouloir
80. Cinquains	122.	Sports
81. Titres	123.	Carmen et Étienne
82. Moncton	124.	La religion
83. Jouissance et couleur	125.	La sexualité
84. Histoire	126.	Techniques
85. La Bourse	127.	Tactiques
86. Excuses	128.	Ferveurs
87. Le corps	129.	Fantasmes
88. La liberté	130.	Le travail
89. Agacements	131.	Parenthèse(s)
90. Lettres	132.	Lapsus
91. Le poète	133.	L'avenir
92. Questions sans réponse	134.	Marianne
93. Le temps	135.	Zed et Chico
94. Terry et Carmen	136.	L'inavouable
95. Ajouts à <i>La Bibliothèque idéale</i>	137.	Peurs
96. Personnages	138.	L'Autre
97. Les chiffres et les nombres	139.	Étienne et Chico
98. Expressions	140.	Caraquet
99. Noms	141.	Obsessions
100. Proverbes	142.	Notes
101. Duos	143.	Varia
102. Le trio	144.	Exergues
103. Disparitions		
104. Inquiétudes		
105. Réserves		
106. Us et coutumes		

## Appendix 2

## List of epigraphs in the novel

## Category 144 - "Exergues"

Chapter 1 : 1.144.1 - Page 9, DANIELE DEL GIUDICE, *Atlas occidental*, Éditions du Seuil, 1987

Chapter 2 : 145.144.2 - Page 67, JEAN GIONO, *La Pierre dans Le Déserteur et autres récits*, Gallimard, 1973

Chapter 3 : 289.144.3 -Page 125, ITALO CALVINO, *Leçons américaines*, Gallimard, 1989

Chapter 4 : 433.144.4 - Page 185, BENOÎTE GROULX, *La Touche étoile*, Grasset, 2006

Chapter 5 :577.144.5 - Page 253, GILLES LAPOUGE, *Besoin de mirages*, Éditions du Seuil, 1999

Chapter 6 : 721.144.6 - Page 315, NICOLAS BOUVIER, *Journal d'Aran et d'autres lieux*, Petite Bibliothèque Payot, 2001

Chapter 7 :865.144.7 - Page 377, ELIZABETH SMART, *À la hauteur de Grand Central Station je me suis assise et j'ai pleuré*, Les Herbes rouges, 2003

Chapter 8 : 1009.144.8 - Page 437, PATRICE DESBIENS, *Désâmé*, Prise de parole, 2005

Chapter 9 : 1153.144.9 - Page 499, STEPHEN KING, *Écriture*, Albin Michel, 2000

Chapter 10 : 1297.144.10 - Page 561, JULIEN GRACQ, *Entretiens*, José Corti, 2002

Chapter 11 : 1441.144.11 - Page 617, ROLAND BARTHES, *Mythologies*, Éditions du Seuil, 1957

Chapter 12 : 1585.144.12 - Page 679, J.M.COETZEE (en entrevue), *Lire*, mai 2007

Appendix 3  
(Back to page 97)

Categories With Fragments Listed in Order of Their Appearance in the Text

- 5. Un film
- 12. Structure
- 14. Zablonki
- 26. Le film
- 28. Une vie de couple
- 29. En route
- 40. Ménage ton ravage
- 48. Inférences
- 53. Consommateurs avertis
- 55. Haïkus
- 62. Sondage/hommes
- 69. Sondage/femmes
- 72. Équations
- 115. Catherine et Chico
- 142. Notes
- 144. Exergues

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