

### 3. Exiguïté and Narrative Identity in Canadian French-language Literature Outside Quebec: Marguerite A. Primeau, France Daigle and Marc Prescott

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#### Abstract

This article studies samples of French-language texts produced in Canadian provinces outside Quebec, the aim being to elucidate the questions of narrative identity, the relationships with place and with the English and French languages as these evolve in the literary works. Expression of a fragile and exiguous literary condition, the texts are also narrations of a state beyond the question of dominant and dominated linguistic cultures. The following works are studied: *Sauvage-Sauvageon* (1984) by Marguerite A. Primeau; *Pas pire* (1998) by France Daigle; *Sex, Lies et les Franco-Manitobains* (2001) and *Fort Mac* (2004) by Marc Prescott. Different geographical corners of Canada are represented: the West, the Atlantic East and the Prairies. In *Sauvage-Sauvageon*, the spatial insertion is complex. The story moves between a place of the present (the Canadian West coast in British Columbia) and a number of places of the past: Quebec, Alberta and Europe.

#### Keywords

Canadian Francophone literature, exiguity, minority literature, narrative identity, transculture, Americanness, Acadian literature, British Columbia Francophones, Manitoba Francophones.

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## Introduction

The point of departure of this chapter is the presence of French speakers and Francophone culture in predominantly English-speaking provinces in Canada, i.e. in areas outside of Quebec. The focus will be on a sample of French-language texts produced in these provinces, the aim being to elucidate the questions of narrative identity, the relationships with place and with the English and French languages as these evolve in the literary works. Being part of a minority literature, the texts can be seen as the expression of a fragile and exiguous literary condition. However, I will also look upon them as a way of overcoming this state in order to see this writing as narrations of a state beyond the question of dominant and dominated linguistic cultures, and as texts of general/global relevance.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, my study is to be seen in relationship with the notion of *américanité*, a concept launched in the literary discourse in Quebec in the 1980s which will be revisited here. The notions of *exiguïté* (Paré, 1992), *scénographie* (Moura, 1999) and transculturality (Imbert, 2012) will be keywords in the theoretical introduction and in the analyses of the literary texts. The study is a modest attempt at a ‘pan-Canadian’ look at Francophone literary writing and inscribes itself in a context where for example Viau (2000) and Hotte (2010) have contributed with important studies. The chapter also owes a great deal to the perspectives developed in the book *Impenser la francophonie : recherches, renouvellement, diversité, identité...*, edited by Pamela Sing and Estelle Dansereau (2012).

Of the approximately 7 million Francophones in Canada, around 6 million can be found in Quebec, the only French-majority province. Approximately 21% of the Canadian population is French-speaking, according to the 2016 Canadian Census. Approximately 1 million Francophone speakers live outside Quebec, distributed in the following way: 490,715 people in Ontario, 231,110 in New Brunswick, 36,680 in the other

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<sup>1</sup> For further reading on this topic, see for example Thibeault et al. (2016). For Acadian literature, see also Boudreau (2010), who proposes the term *literature of resilience* in order to go beyond the somewhat reductionist ring that exiguous literature has (p. 246).

three Atlantic provinces and 185,195 in the four provinces west of Ontario. French mother-tongue speakers are the majority in Quebec (78% of the provincial population), whereas they are the minority in the other nine provinces (0.50% in Newfoundland, 3.40% in Nova Scotia, 3.60% on Prince Edward Island, 31.90% in New Brunswick, 4.00% in Ontario, 3.40% in Manitoba, 1.50% in Saskatchewan, 2.00% in Alberta and 1.40% in British Columbia).<sup>2</sup> Literary texts in French are nevertheless produced in provinces where French is a minority language, albeit the literary production is sometimes fragile and fragmented. The first example to be studied here is a novel from British Columbia, *Sauvage-Sauvageon* by Marguerite A. Primeau (1984). The second is New Brunswick author France Daigle's *Pas pire* (1998),<sup>3</sup> a novel that deals with the mythical territory of Acadia (*Acadie*), originally located in parts of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. The last samples included are two plays by Manitoba born author Marc Prescott: *Sex, Lies et les Franco-Manitobains* (2001)<sup>4</sup> and *Fort Mac* (2004). The choice of texts is motivated by factors that are partly due to the pedagogical objectives of the present publication. They represent different geographical corners of Canada: the West, the Atlantic East and the Prairies. Secondly, the authors chosen reflect different generations. Primeau was born in 1914, Daigle in 1953 and Prescott in 1971. Finally, the samples studied are examples of prose as well as of drama.

It is well-known that nationalist aspirations and the idea of a national text in French have been crucial to the idea of a French Canada since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the case of Quebec, a similar idea was important in the evolution of this province from the time of the Quiet Revolution<sup>5</sup> and onwards. In the

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<sup>2</sup> The number of French mother-tongue speakers according to the 2016 Canadian Census, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/index-eng.cfm>. Consulted on 25 March 2021.

<sup>3</sup> References to the book in this article will be to the English translation by Robert Majzels, published in 1999 (Daigle, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> The play was published for the first time in 2001, but the 2013 edition will be referred to here.

<sup>5</sup> For more information about this time of socio-political and cultural change in the 1960s, see chapter 6 in this volume.

transition that Quebec has undergone towards becoming a multicultural society, the identity aspect of French still is essential, since it is in this language that the migrant and cross-cultural literatures from the 1980s were written. If Francophone multiculturalism and migration are phenomena that challenge the idea of a monocultural Quebec, the American myth is another such challenge. From the 1980s the *américanité* literary tendency made it clear that Quebec literature had a great deal in common with American English-language literature (cf. Morency, 1994). One example is that in Quebec and American literary studies, the relationship between literature and space is often close. America is space to conquer and from the European point of view it is often seen as a continent 'discovered' by Europeans. America and *américanité* is also, among other things, a certain rhythm, as Yannick Gasquy-Resch (1994) observes, meaning that America and its space provide a certain lyricism. The route to the West is mythical, it is a passage to constantly renewable possibilities. This can be seen in both the English- and French-language literatures of the continent, in Mark Twain and Nathaniel Hawthorne in the case of American literature, but also in Quebec literature in texts by authors such as Jacques Poulin and Victor-Lévy Beaulieu (see Morency, 1994). But in French Canada another interest rivals that of the conquering of the vast continent, the previously mentioned question of the French-speaking nation and the creation of a 'national' text in French. It was during the Romantic era that national patriotism was born in French-speaking Canada (read the present Quebec), especially in the press and in political speeches with the journalist Étienne Parent as the primary name. Newspapers, for instance *Le Canadien*, urged the educated classes to detach themselves from the established power and overcome the memory of the Conquest. Publications of historical texts on the French-Canadian past would follow and soon the literary period in French Canadian literature known as *le roman du terroir* was initiated. However, literary evolution in French Canada will be slow and lag behind French literature in France. It was not until 1945, with Gabrielle Roy's *Bonheur d'occasion*, that the theme of the metropolis (Montreal) appeared as a subject in French-Canadian

literary writing. The manifesto of the *Refus Global* by Paul-Émile Borduas<sup>6</sup> in 1948 was a text that symbolised the Francophone movement that led to the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s. It was also at this time of cultural revival that French Canada was to change names and become Quebec. No longer a 'France in Canada', French speakers prefer to look upon themselves as living in a hybrid French-speaking territory located in North America. This will be followed by referendums on Quebec's independence (in 1980 and 1995) and the transformation of Quebec society into a multicultural society. French becomes the only official language in Quebec in 1974 but the province remains in federal Canada, despite the referendums and in spite of the *Parti Québécois* and its periods in power. But if Quebec has often looked upon itself as French America, how should one look upon the fact that the French language is also used in other provinces in Canada? How does coexistence with the English language create a specific understanding of space and of narrative identity in these literatures? How is this fragmented space seen from the 'inside' in texts and are there traces of a new self-confidence that would make it motivated to talk of a state beyond an exiguous minority condition?

As far as the continental dimension of francophone literature is concerned, the notion of *américanité* can deepen our understanding. In *Volkswagen Blues* (1984) Jacques Poulin recounts the American journey of the writer Jack Waterman in search of his brother Theo. The journey will extend from the Gaspé Peninsula in northern Quebec to California and Waterman and his fellow traveller will cross America together, following the itinerary of the first French colonisers. During their American travels, a French palimpsest of geographical names appears. Behind names like Detroit, Louisiana, etc., a French language reality become partly visible. The written data about the French-speaking explorers and knowledge of the itineraries of the so called *coureurs des bois* will serve as their guide, be it in an associative and unpredictable way. Beneath the English language surface, which at first seemed to be an irrevocable

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<sup>6</sup> For an English translation, see: [http://www.conseildesarts.org/documents/Manifeste/manifeste\\_refus-english.htm](http://www.conseildesarts.org/documents/Manifeste/manifeste_refus-english.htm).

nomenclature, French and Amerindian language elements bear witness of other realities. The French language is thus part of the *américanité* both of the literatures of Canada and of the United States.

However, it is not only about language. Jean Morency (1994), who was inspired by the anthropological research of Mircea Éliade and Gilbert Durand, explores the 'mythical background' present in American and Quebec literatures and observes surprising thematic similarities in these literatures:

La littérature québécoise présente des analogies souvent étonnantes avec les autres littératures du Nouveau Monde, particulièrement avec la littérature américaine (entendu ici au sens d'états-unienne [...]): le sentiment de l'espace, la thématique de l'errance, la volonté de rupture avec le groupe, la méfiance à l'égard de la culture, l'attrait ressenti pour la nature, l'entrecroisement des rêves prométhéens et dionysiens contribuent à rapprocher de toute évidence, certains textes québécois des textes fondateurs de la littérature américaine et de l'américanité en général (Morency, 1994, pp. 9–10).<sup>7</sup>

Morency (1994) raises the issue of French as a continental American language and discusses the situation of Francophones in English-speaking provinces as a sort of repressed part of Canadian nationality. Quebec literature as well as French-language literature in Canada's so-called English-speaking provinces would then be part of the same French-language North American literature, a literature with close affinities with the literature of the United States.

## François Paré and exiguous literatures

In his influential books *Les littératures de l'exiguïté* (1992)<sup>8</sup> and *La distance habitée* (2003), François Paré attempted to identify the uniqueness, challenges and possibilities of literatures existing in the cramped and restricted conditions of what he calls *exiguïté*

<sup>7</sup> Québécois literature often has surprising analogies with other New World literature, especially with American literature (understood here as US literature): the feeling of space, the theme of wandering, the desire to break with the group, the distrust in culture, the attraction felt for nature, the intersecting of Promethean and Dionysian dreams. This obviously contributes to the bringing together of some Québécois texts with the founding texts of American literature and with Americanness in general.

<sup>8</sup> The references in this article are to the English translation from 1997.

(exiguity, smallness, crampedness). This applies to French Canada but also to areas elsewhere in the world. Clearly influenced by Deleuze and Guattari's emblematic work *Kafka. Pour une littérature mineure* (1975), Paré (1997) discusses the several meanings of the notion small/minor literatures. It can refer to colonial literatures (Maghreb), island literatures (Iceland), small national literatures (Quebec), etc. According to the author, Québécois literature is in fact a rather atypical case:

Modern-day Quebec provides many of my examples, but it must be remembered that the vast financial resources available to the Quebec literary establishment enable it to rank as a national institution. Most *small* literatures have nowhere near the wherewithal to emerge as an institution on this scale. Most of them, their works dwindling in numbers, remain hidden away in the fabric of dominant national historiographies (Paré, 1997, p. 13).

If one were to choose a regional Canadian literature as an example of a typical 'small' literature, Francophone Ontario would be a more suitable choice, according to François Paré (see for example 1997, p. 15). This Francophone community is looked upon in relation not only to other French-language regions in Canada, but also to other Francophone areas worldwide with which it can be said to exist in a parallel relationship of global virtuality. Paré also discusses the question of transculturality and compares the migration of the French-speaking Canadian subject placed in an English-speaking context with the transcultural condition of Francophones elsewhere in the world (Paré, 2003). One of the chapters deals with the region of Acadia, a vaguely contoured Francophone 'island' in eastern Canada, which is looked upon as a universe characterised by its anti-melancholy making it resemble the Caribbean. Linking Acadia to the philosophical thinking of Édouard Glissant, one can see that it appears as part of a world of islands, the characteristics of which are to be both closed in on itself and constantly open to the world (Paré, 2003).

Lucie Hotte and Guy Poirier (2009, pp. 7–8) note that *Les littératures de l'exigüité* was published at exactly the right time in the evolution of literary theoretical discourse, i.e. the 1990s, and that it is an essential work for the study of minority or marginal literature. They also conclude that the second book provides a

natural continuation of the first: 'Si l'essai *Les littératures de l'exiguïté* a confirmé l'existence du corpus des petites littératures et revendiqué pour elles le droit de devenir objet d'étude, il fallait aussi donner une genèse et une densité à ces récits. C'est ce défi qu'a relevé avec succès *La distance habitée*'<sup>9</sup> (ibid., 2009, p. 9).

According to the authors, Paré was able to isolate some concepts that are operational in order to grasp the identity issue of minority communities, i.e. diaspora, homelessness, accommodation and creolisation. In his second book he focused more precisely on the creation of a corpus of texts written in the minority contexts in question. Since then, attempts have been made to see beyond the condition of the exiguity of small literatures in Canada, since one possible effect of this categorisation could be that these literatures are in fact limited to a mere political role (see for example Thibeault et al., 2016, p. 7).

## Narrative identity and transculture

Narrative identity and transculturality are two other key concepts in this literary context. The notion of narrative identity as described by Paul Ricoeur in *Temps et récit* (1983–1995) and *Soi-même comme un autre* (1990) is useful in order to analyse the identity processes in the literary works, a process which, as Muriel Gilbert points out, differs from that of traditional phenomenologists:

Contrairement aux phénoménologues qui nourrissent l'idée d'un accès direct au temps, le philosophe contemporain [Ricoeur] souligne en effet son caractère indirect. Ainsi est-ce par la médiation des signes, des symboles, des textes et parmi eux des récits que Ricoeur se propose de penser l'inscription temporelle du sujet. C'est en nous racontant que nous aurons accès à la temporalité de notre existence (Gilbert, 2001, p. 17).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> If the essay *Les littératures de l'exiguïté* confirmed the existence of the corpus of small literatures and claimed for them the right to become an object of study, it was also necessary to create a genesis and density to these narratives. It is this challenge that has been successfully met.

<sup>10</sup> Unlike the phenomenologists, who feed the idea of direct access to time, the contemporary philosopher [Ricoeur] emphasizes its indirect nature. It



In Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity, the pronoun *se* (-self) is crucial. It is by telling and refiguring that one inserts oneself in time, and by means of telling that the two aspects of identity that Ricoeur uses, *mêmeté* (sameness) and *ipséité* (selfness), can manifest themselves. Identity as *mêmeté* ensures permanence over time, while identity as *ipséité* designs changing, dynamic identity (see also Lindberg, 2005, p. 56). This question acquires yet more complexity if seen in connection with the notion of transculturality. In the debate on migrant literature in Quebec, Moïsan and Hildebrand (2001) introduced the terms *multicultural*, *intercultural* and *transcultural*. While the first one merely expresses the coexistence of several cultures in a certain space, the second emphasizes the contact between these cultures. *Transcultural*, however, is used to designate true encounter, fusion, alteration of culture and also the fact that cultures, when they co-exist, tend to develop new narratives. According to Patrick Imbert one important aspect of transculturality is the *desire of the Other*:

Le désir de l'autre dans son entier complexe est plus efficace que l'amalgame ou le composite, comme le souligne la différence entre l'hybridité qui est une combinatoire d'éléments relativement disparats et le métissage qui renvoie à la production d'un élément totalement nouveau dans sa multiplicité (Imbert, 2012, p. 43).<sup>11</sup>

This means that Imbert stresses the influence of the Other rather than the mingling and mixing of two cultures. And in the same way as Paré, Imbert underscores the importance of a global context for the development of knowledge in the minority environment:

Tout va dépendre de la possibilité de sortir de l'exiguïté et d'avoir accès à un extérieur influencé par les reconfigurations mondiales [...].

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is through the mediation of signs, symbols, texts, and, among these latter ones, stories that Ricoeur proposes to think the temporal inscription of the subject. It is by telling [stories] that we will have access to the temporality of our existence.

<sup>11</sup> The desire of the Other in his/her entire complexity is more effective than amalgam or composite. This is underscored by the difference between hybridity, which is a combination of relatively disparate elements, and *métissage*, which refers to the production of a totally new element characterized by its multiplicity.

Il est nécessaire d'avoir accès aux savoirs et au monde pour s'inventer dans le transculturel où les francophones, minoritaires dans un espace local défini, ont l'avantage de parler deux langues importantes dans le contexte des échanges internationaux (ibid., 2012, p. 43).<sup>12</sup>

### **Paratopie and scenography**

As Dominique Maingueneau (2004, p. 191) has stated, the enunciator of literary discourse speaks from a paratopic place, which means that he is at the same time part of society and located outside it. According to the same theorist, the particularity of the communication of the literary work is that of a discourse made 'from the interior'. This idea, alongside the notion of *scénographie*, is particularly helpful when studying postcolonial literary texts. If the *scénographie* in its more linguistic dimension 'fait d'un discours le lieu d'une représentation de sa propre situation d'énonciation', i.e. 'makes a speech the place of a representation of its own situation of enunciation' (Maingueneau, 2004, p. 55), Jean-Marc Moura (1999) provides some clarification regarding the specific usage of *scénographie* when studying the literary text. Moura states about *scénographie* and Francophone literature:

Les littératures francophones s'inscrivent dans une situation d'énonciation (réelle) où coexistent des univers symboliques divers dont l'un a d'abord été imposé et a reçu le statut de modèle (ou contre lequel on réagit : cas du Québec). Dans cette situation de coexistence, la construction de l'œuvre de son propre contexte énonciatif est à la fois plus complexe et plus importante que dans une situation de monolinguisme relative (par exemple, en France) [...]. Pour l'auteur francophone, il s'agit d'établir son texte dans un milieu instable (et d'abord au plan linguistique), où les hiérarchies sont fluctuantes et mal acceptées. [...] (Moura, 1999, p. 110).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> It will all depend on the possibility of getting out of the cramped condition and having access to an exterior influenced by global reconfigurations [...]. It is necessary to have access to knowledge and to the world to reinvent oneself in a transcultural reality where Francophones, who are in minority in a defined local space, have the advantage of speaking two important languages in a context of international exchanges.

<sup>13</sup> Francophone literatures are part of a situation of (real) enunciation where various symbolic universes coexist, one of which was first imposed and

The instability referred to by Moura is of a linguistic and cultural order above all. In the Canadian Francophone context studied in this article it is of importance to link this to Paré's discussion referred to earlier on migration within the language. Paré describes an unstable situation that is applicable both to Francophone writers in Ontario and to French language authors in many other places in the world. Moreover, it is enlightening to relate this to the description of place in Francophone minority texts from different areas of Canada. One example of a study of the instability of place is Raoul Boudreau's 2007 analysis of the role of the city of Moncton in Acadian literature.

### Presentation and analysis of literary samples

In *Impenser la Francophonie: recherches, renouvellement, diversité, identité...* (2012), Pamela Sing and Estelle Dansereau brought together articles dealing with the French-speaking minority context and its identity dynamics in Canada. One key idea behind many of the chapters is the sociological notion of *unthinking* (*impenser*) launched by the historian and sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein in *Impenser la science sociale* (1995). In one of the chapters, Mourad Ali-Khodja (2012, pp. 3–23) focuses on Wallerstein's ideas of world systems and the minority setting. The author starts out by explaining that unthinking is not the same thing as rethinking; it is not a question of adding yet another way of explaining to those that already exist. According to Wallerstein, rethinking is not enough to explain today's social world, simply because this traditional method means continuous practice of the great rationalist models of explanation from the European tradition. According to Ali-Khodja, the idea of unthinking can be fruitful for the minority context, especially if linked to Paré's idea of *exiguïté*. If Paré mainly uses his term to refer to literature

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which received the status of model (or against which one reacts: the case of Quebec). In this situation of coexistence, the construction of the literary work in its own enunciative context is both more complex and more important than in a situation of relative monolingualism (for example, in France). For the French-speaking author, it is a question of establishing his text in an unstable environment (particularly on the linguistic level), where hierarchies are fluctuating and poorly accepted. [...].

being written in an environment of cultural precarity, Ali-Khodja believes that the notion in question can also be used when discussing the state of the humanities and social sciences in the same minority environment. In order to elucidate this question, it is important to remember that the minoritarian French-speaking communities have a common heritage which is composed of two elements: the French language and Catholicism. This combination is actually institutionally used to preserve certain ideas and to strengthen the idea of a certain cultural power, according to Ali-Khodja (2012, p. 14). In the Canadian case, it is primarily a question of the power relationship between the Francophone minority and the English-speaking majority, and secondly about the idea of a marginal Canada (the Prairies, for example) and a central Canada (Ontario and Quebec). To these linguistic, religious and socio-political factors, another one can be added of a spatial nature: distance. The minorities concerned can be found in *distant* positions. Ali-Khodja's point (2012, p. 19) is that these factors can be used in order to contribute to a change of perspectives that he believes must take place. Thus, the 'vision from afar' must be altered in favour of a *micrological* exploration, i.e. a vision from within, in the case of the French-speaking communities. This is to be done in order to identify their ways of *practicing* themselves, a notion that is here to be understood in its most concrete sense.

In his chapter of the same book, Pierre-Yves Mocquais (2012, pp. 125–138) takes the word *unthinkable* as a starting point in order to discuss the reappropriation of self-practices in the minority contexts. The author is inspired both by semantics and philosophy and begins by making an inventory of the meaning of the word *impensé* in French dictionaries. The adjective *impensable* means for example 'what has not been specified', and the noun *impensé* can designate, in a context of jurisprudence, the sum used for the preservation or improvement of something. *Impensé* is also something that benefits the owner, something which is kept at his or her disposal (the opposite of *spending*).<sup>14</sup> The author associates these semantic connotations with the key notions of

<sup>14</sup> See for example the definition of the word *impense* in the *Littre* dictionary online: <https://www.littre.org/definition/impense>.

fragility and *exiguïté* as well as with those of memory, oblivion and imagination in the minority context. The *impensé* is in fact a resource, something unused that is waiting to be made use of. One of the aims of the textual studies here is to show in what way literary expression can show or suggest such cultural resources.

### **Marguerite A. Primeau: *Sauvage-Sauvageon***

Although British Columbia is a province with a strong English-speaking presence and a place where Asian influence is getting stronger today, there were nevertheless francophones in the area as early as the 17th century. However, the present-day French speakers are descendants of immigrants from much more recent dates.<sup>15</sup> Marguerite A. Primeau, originally from Alberta, studied at the University of Alberta in Edmonton and at the Sorbonne. Having returned to Canada, she became professor of literature at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. She has published among other things the novel *Dans le muskeg* (1960), the collection of short stories *Le Totem* (1988) and *Sauvage-Sauvageon* (1984), the latter being the object of study here.

The novel moves within vast temporal and spatial entities. Maxine, the female protagonist, whose father is originally from Quebec, but who had chosen to go west, lives first in Alberta with her parents. We are told about her life since her childhood in Alberta, about the early death of her mother and the years spent in Europe, in Paris and on the French Riviera, and the return to Canada and British Columbia. The years in Vancouver are also described and we learn about the last summer of her father's life, which Maxine spends with him in a cottage on one of the islands in the Pacific. Towards the end she tries to commit suicide but eventually refrains from this. The book closes with a passage telling how she falls asleep and is left in a dream-like state, where past and present mix.

After the death of the mother her father initiates a new romantic relationship with a neighbour, and the life of the protagonist will be profoundly changed. Unable to really connect with anyone,

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<sup>15</sup> See Poirier et al. (2012) on francophone writing in British Columbia.

she describes her life as a perpetual quest for a mate, an individual who is associated with the idea of a magician, someone who could recreate the feeling of the childhood she spent in a magical relationship with her father: 'Car, qu'a été ma vie sinon une quête perpétuelle pour l'homme-magicien de mon enfance?'<sup>16</sup> (1984, p. 76). The novel is set in Anglophone Canada (Alberta and British Columbia), Quebec being a place of the past. It is the country of Maxine's father, a place that he had left but which continues to haunt him. Looking for a place to settle in the West, he chose a region in Alberta with forests, since it reminded him of the landscape of his childhood. He also chose this setting in order to regain his dimension as a human being. This landscape is the anti-thesis of the idea of the vast plains of western Canada:

–Et qu'est-ce qui t'a fait choisir l'Alberta ?

–Ses champs de blé, d'avoine et d'orge qui s'étendent de tous côtés. J'ai aussi choisi l'Alberta

parce qu'ici la plaine ondule; il y a des collines et des bouquets d'arbres, et parfois des forêts, qui nous ramènent à notre dimension d'homme. Qui nous sauvent de notre attirance d'un horizon sans limites (1984, pp. 79–80).<sup>17</sup>

Canadian landscape and topography play an important role, as does Canadian history, which is often associated with the protagonist's mythical childhood. History and storytelling intermingle in order to create a transcultural awareness. It is through her father's magical stories that the story of a French-speaking Canada will be passed on to her:

Le soir ! C'était encore l'heure vers laquelle je tendais. Par lassitude ou désir de paix, de quiétude, je me suis laissé reprendre par le charme d'autrefois. [...]

<sup>16</sup> For what has been my life, if not a perpetual quest for the man-magician of my childhood?

<sup>17</sup> – And what made you choose Alberta? – Its fields of wheat, oats and barley that extend on all sides. I also chose Alberta because here the plain ripples; there are hills and clusters of trees, and sometimes forests, which bring us back to our human dimension. That save us from our attraction of a horizon without limits.

Maintenant j'écoutais mon père revivre son enfance au Québec, dans la ferme paternelle, [...]

Dans ses yeux, je voyais se dérouler toute une vie que moi, fille de l'Ouest, je connaissais mal. Et j'ai appris à mieux comprendre une autre histoire du Canada : celle d'avant 1760. Celle de Champlain, de Frontenac, de Montcalm et de Wolfe ; celle de Papineau en 1837 (1984, p. 7).<sup>18</sup>

The topographic theme remains an important one in the part of the novel talking about Maxine's travels in Europe. In Paris she has an affair with Marcel and becomes pregnant, but the child is stillborn, and she finishes by driving him out of her life. Checking out the booksellers along the Seine, she finds a copy of *La Carte du Tendre*. This 17th century map, inspired by the novel *Clélie* by Madame de Scudéry, depicts an imaginary landscape, a topography that represents the different stages of a love relationship. Looked upon by Maxine as a beautiful object of remembrance at first, she will eventually tear it up. The topography of precious lovers is a subject that has nothing to tell her. Her next stop in France is the French Riviera, where she works as an English language assistant. Here she will be witnessing, among other things, the morbid spectacle of the Nice carnival, where the ascension of the Carnival Queen and her killing after the festive period is staged. It is a paradoxical performance which will resonate within the protagonist. She also experiences the death of her friend Angela in a car accident on the curved roads above the city. Eventually, she leaves Nice and France, convinced that she will never return. Back in Canada, she is attracted by nature again: it is mainly the indifference of the wilderness that makes an impression on her. Yet, beneath the surface another view of nature lurks.

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<sup>18</sup> In the evening! That was still the time I was reaching out to. Through weariness or desire for peace, tranquillity, I let myself be taken back by the charm of yesteryear. [...]

Now I was listening to my father relive his childhood in Quebec, on his father's farm, [...].

In his eyes, I could see a lifetime unfolding that I, a girl from the West, knew little about. And I learned to better understand another history of Canada: the one before 1760. Champlain's, Frontenac's, Montcalm's and Wolfe's history; Papineau's history in 1837.

Nature seen through Romantic poetry and the influence of the English Romantic poets never ceases to colour her emotional life. Throughout the story the protagonist remains a solitary being, and the presence of the father remains as important as ever: he is the poet and the teller of the poetic story of Canada. He is also looked upon as the only one who was able to reveal her proper identity and her true nature. And she has remained faithful to this image of herself all her life. Her father used to call her *Sauvageon* rather than Maxine, and when asked why, he replied: 'Un sauvageon, c'est une jeune plante qui a poussé comme ça, sans qu'on se soit occupé d'elle. Contrairement aux fleurs de notre jardin que ta maman et moi, nous cultivons soigneusement, ce sauvageon pousse tout seul et survit tout seul, sans l'aide de personne'<sup>19</sup> (1984, p. 32).

Maxine will remain a *sauvageon*, and after Marcel's departure she concludes: 'Sauvage, je l'étais, sauvage je le resterais. Inutile d'essayer de me domestiquer' (1984, p. 108).<sup>20</sup> How could one describe the transcultural narrative identity expressed through the main character in *Sauvage-Sauvageon*? The protagonist is a girl from the Canadian West, but of 'French origin'. The West is primarily Anglophone territory and the abandoning of the first (Francophone) community is a recurrent theme in the text. Since the immediate topography is an English language one, in order to have access to French toponymy, one has to go beneath this immediate surface. This access is made possible through a sort of magic; the French language topography is transmitted by the magic of the father giving her access to her true selfness (*ipséité*). But the question of language is also seen on other levels in the novel. In France, she will work as an English language assistant in Nice, although her true cultural identity as she understands it herself is primarily 'French'. However, in France, she realises that her spoken French is a language full of Canadianisms; it is barely tolerated on the French Riviera. In real life she also

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<sup>19</sup> A *sauvageon* is a young plant that has grown like this, without anyone caring for it. Unlike the flowers in our garden that your mother and I grow carefully, this *sauvageon* grows on its own and survives on its own, without anyone's help. You're just like it.[...].

<sup>20</sup> Wild, I was, wild I would remain. No need to try to domesticate me.



has a tendency to associate with things and persons English: her boyfriend in Nice, Johnny, is indeed an English Canadian. Having returned to Canada, she starts a relationship with Shaun, an Irishman who specialises in English Romantic poetry. Maxine's cultural belonging is depicted as paradoxical, a characteristic that is valid in several ways. As has been seen, paradox is also a feature in the passage talking about the Carnival in Nice where the protagonist is both celebrated as a queen and killed by the same spectators. Maxine is a Francophone but at the same time of English culture. She is under the influence of her father, which is an ambiguous relationship. At the same time as she is enriched by the magic contact with the Francophone past through the father, she has not succeeded in freeing herself from the image of her childhood and the search for the lost magic goes on through her life. This state of mind is further emphasised by the references to English Romantic poetry. The poets of the English Romantic era (the literature of the imperial 'mother country') are decisive for her spiritual state of mind. This becomes particularly clear at the end of the novel. When the protagonist discovers that her father in fact loves poetry too, and that he engages in conversation with Shaun on the topic, she runs away while realising that she has a secret: the love of nature as depicted by the Romantics (1984, p. 188). As far as the idea of the *ipséité* of the protagonist is concerned, it is interesting to read Pamela Sing's (2004) observations about the very end of the novel, where the narrator, having given up the idea of suicide, starts dreaming:

Depuis le début du roman, le 'je' narratif, étendu sur une chaise longue dans une des îles de la côte du Pacifique, se remémore son passé vécu dans différents espaces allant de la prairie albertaine jusqu'à la Méditerranée. Le texte opère des va-et-vient entre l'espace de l'énonciation et les espaces énoncés jusqu'au moment où, par la magie des paroles et de la mémoire, l'espace de l'enfance fusionne avec celui de la narration, c'est-à-dire l'île et l'infini sur lequel elle s'ouvre. Du coup, l'ailleurs n'est plus culpabilisant, parce qu'il ne signifie plus l'abandon de la première communauté : le sentiment indestructible de celle-ci, Maxine-Sauvage-Sauvageon le portera en elle où qu'elle aille. Ainsi, à la toute fin du récit, plutôt

que de disparaître dans la mer, la protagoniste “rêve”, mot qui au sens étymologique signifie “vagabonder” (Sing, 2004, pp. 9–10).<sup>21</sup>

What is expressed here is thus her dynamic and hybrid cultural condition. Through the act of ‘dreaming’ the different starting points of her life are allowed to co-exist. The English and French cultural identities are also given space to co-exist and by means of onirism the abandoned French identity regains its importance without being flawed by guilt. Primeau conveys a transcultural, condition defined by the continental (pan-Canadian) historic and cultural belonging of the protagonist. This condition is constantly in motion and allows parallel belongings. Another observation that can be made is the solitude of the main character, a typical feature in American literature according to Jean Morency (see *supra*).

### France Daigle: *Pas pire*

The term Acadian literature refers to the French language literature published in the Maritime provinces of Canada. The history of this territory has known other paths than the history of Quebec. During the conquest in 1759, the French areas in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia were conquered by the English and then there was the deportation of French speakers from Acadia to various US cities or back to France. It was in the English language that the Acadian spirit was captured in literature for the first time. In 1847, the American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow published *Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie*, an epic poem about the

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<sup>21</sup> Already in the beginning of the novel, the narrating ‘I’, lying on a chaise longue in one of the islands of the Pacific coast, recalls her past lived in different spaces ranging from the prairies in Alberta to the Mediterranean. The text moves back and forth between the space of enunciation and the spaces enounced until, through the magic of words and memory, the space of childhood fusions with that of the narration, i.e. the island and the infinity on which they open. As a result, the ‘elsewhere’ no longer is associated with guilt, because it no longer means abandoning the first community: the indestructible feeling of this community, Maxine-Sauvage-Sauvageon will carry it with her wherever she goes. Thus, at the very end of the story, rather than disappearing into the sea, the protagonist ‘dreams’, a word that in the etymological sense means *wandering*.

search for Evangeline, an Acadian girl who disappeared during the great deportation. Although it was in fact in this area that the first literary texts in French had been written in North America, modern French language Acadian literature was slow to evolve. This is due both to political reasons and to the power of assimilation that the French-speaking area called Lower Canada (later Quebec) had on other areas. *Acadian literature* was a term that began to be used following the Quiet Revolution in Quebec in the 1960s and it was not until the success of Antonine Maillet's novel *Pélagie-la-Charette* (1979) and her play *La Sagouine* (1971) that Acadia took place on the literary map. The poets Herménégilde Chiasson and Gérard Leblanc are two key authors in this contemporary literature. Leblanc's semi-autobiographical novel *Moncton Mantra* (1997) tells the story of the coming into being of contemporary Acadian literature in the 1970s. Another key event in the history of Acadian literature was the attributing of the Goncourt prize to *Pélagie-la Charette* in 1979. France Daigle (1953–)<sup>22</sup> is one of the best-known contemporary Acadian authors. Her novel *Pas pire* (1998) is a collage in which the autofictional voice of the author intermingles with other types of story: local episodes from Moncton, descriptions of deltas in the world, the characteristics of diamonds, the evocation of the different houses of the Zodiac (places that affect the fate of a human being), the telling of the love story between Terry – the pilot of a tourist boat in Moncton – and Carmen, who works in a Moncton billiard lounge. The novel also tells the story of the project of writing the novel *Pas pire*. It describes the trip that the fictive narrator ('France Daigle') makes to Paris, in order to participate in the legendary French literary TV show *Bouillon de culture*, hosted by Bernard Pivot. The I narrator is sometimes called France Daigle, sometimes there is a narrator called Steppette and the novel can be said to be partly autofiction – the trip to Bernard Pivot in Paris undertaken by 'France Daigle' never happened.

François Paré (2003) defines Acadian literature as the expression of a space of fragmentation, where the knowledge of the

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<sup>22</sup> For further reading on female voices in Acadian literature, see Thibeault et al. (2020).

islets, which is piece-meal knowledge, is conveyed. The importance of space is clearly indicated in the novel itself, in which the book project described is in fact about seizing and conceptualising a certain space:<sup>23</sup>

The project was to write a book dealing very loosely and freely with the theme of space: physical space, mental space, and our ways of moving in them. Of being moved. For space is not a strictly physical notion. [...] To exist legitimately, a space requires only one thing: that something move within it. It can be a proper physical space, according to the definition of three axes and six directions, or it can be psychic and represent the universe of potentialities. These two dimensions, one internal and the other external to the human being, confer on space a doubly incommensurable expanse. In both dimensions, there is a dilation toward infinity and a problem locating a centre (Daigle, 1999, pp. 35–36).

The uncertain space referred to is Acadia. In order to know oneself and to know one's territory, the model of a hero is needed and for this purpose Daigle chooses Hercules. One of the 12 deeds that he had to undertake took place in a place called Arcadia, 'an idealized place where people lived in harmony with nature and where song and music flourished' (1999, p. 31). Daigle also notes that in psychoanalysis, Hercules' work symbolises the long and painful process of self-education in order to attain wisdom and serenity (*ibid.*). The word Acadia is sometimes believed to be a distortion of Arcadia and from this it follows that the former term has a literary and mythical ring to it, but also that it is connected to identity and self-knowledge. The territory of Acadia is associatively linked to other (Francophone) topographies and other mental forms and structures in *Pas pire*. This is done in order to make Acadian space real. The concrete place spoken about in the novel is the city of Dieppe, a predominantly French-speaking urban agglomeration located just off Moncton. But it is also about a sort of displacement of cultural and linguistic space, a stressing of an atopic space relationship. Through the communication that is done in French right in the middle of shops and urban

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<sup>23</sup> See Doyon-Gosselin (2012) for a comprehensive study on space in France Daigle.

structures that are mainly English-speaking, and through communication between social classes done in Acadian French, sometimes in *chiac* (the hybrid French-English language used in the area), a virtual space is created. This is both paratopic and trans-cultural, since it functions as a parallel space that is coloured by the two official languages in Canada. The city of Moncton is interesting here both in the context of Acadian literature and in Daigle's literary production. Raoul Boudreau, discussing Gérard Leblanc's importance in order to convey Moncton as paratopic space in Acadian literature, states about France Daigle's relationship to the city:

cette écrivaine a plutôt commencé par ignorer Moncton. [...] Il a fallu attendre le septième roman de France Daigle, *La vraie vie*, publié dix ans après son entrée en littérature, pour trouver une simple mention de Moncton. Néanmoins, dans ce dernier roman publié en 2002, la consécration fictionnelle de Moncton comme centre culturel acadien doté de pouvoirs d'attraction sur un grand artiste étranger occupe une place centrale (Boudreau, 2007, p. 49).<sup>24</sup>

Acadian territory is also referred to as being part of a delta. It is described as one of the small streams forming the delta, a recurrent theme in the novel. Comparing the Rhône delta and the Ganges delta, Daigle gives the following explanation of the phenomenon:

A delta generally forms when the sea fails to redistribute over a wide area the sediment and particles transported by a large river. This transported material is gradually deposited at the mouth of the river, eventually creating small islands or accumulations that impede the water's free flow. To attain the sea, the river breaks up into several smaller rivers, the main branches of which appear to form the sides of an isosceles triangle when seen from the air (1999, p. 12).

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<sup>24</sup> [...] this writer began by rather ignoring Moncton. [...] It wasn't until France Daigle's seventh novel, *La vraie vie*, published ten years after entering literature, that a simple mention of Moncton was found. Nevertheless, in this most recent novel published in 2002, Moncton's fictional consecration as an Acadian cultural centre with powers of attraction over a great foreign artist occupies a central place.

If one looks upon Acadia from a distance, i.e., if one performs what Franco Moretti (2005) calls a distant reading of the space in question, Acadia is one of those small, irregular and unpredictable streams in a delta in a Francophone river system. But this is just one of the possible perspectives on Acadia, since the other obvious reading is one done from the inside, on the local level. In the Acadian microcosm there is in fact a single river (not a delta) in the centre of Moncton. The Petitcodiac, which flows through the city, is the opposite of a delta, if looked upon from a close distance. And if we consider this microcosmic perspective, a space that is completely different from the great North American spaces appears: a small, local space. This idea of smallness and of close readings of space becomes even more tangible when regarded in connection with the idea of agoraphobia, another key notion of the novel. In fact, 'France Daigle' claims to be agoraphobic, something she states when interviewed by Bernard Pivot in Paris. Not being able to tolerate open spaces means that one prefers the small and the local and it is in this light, among others, that one should look upon the spatial dimension expressed in *Pas pire*. But agoraphobia is not just about preferring spatial limitation.<sup>25</sup> The confrontation with open space also causes a sort of delirium and a free floating of the spirit. And this dizziness and instability stimulate poetic creation, which is a positive dimension of agoraphobia. According to 'France Daigle', the disorder in question should in fact be democratised, since generally women suffer from it (1999, p. 108). Agoraphobia is thus a spatial attitude that can have effects on creativity. It is also the opposite of spatial expansion towards the West; it strengthens the wish to stay in the local surroundings, in the village, which is the opposite of the traditional American dream about going West.

As has been said, the setting of the novel is bilingual, with the Francophone narrator moving for example between Anglophone restaurants such as the Palm Lunch and the Marsh Canteen while

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<sup>25</sup> This can be compared with Primeau's novel in which Maxine's father had chosen a forestry area in Alberta, and not the vast prairies, in order to keep his 'humanity'.

keeping her 'French' identity. One characteristic of this identity is its dual relationship to space. On the one hand this space does not have a precise cartography, but on the other hand there is a subjective mapping going on. When 'France Daigle' makes her trip to Paris, she and her companion are often mistaken for Americans and people address them in English (1999, p. 106). But the Anglophone influence is also seen on a deeper level, for example when 'France Daigle' talks about Doris Lessing and about her desire to read more of this author. Just as Maxine in *Sauvage-Sauvageon* is fascinated by English Romantic poetry certain ways of life English are attractive for the protagonist in Daigle's novel. This could be seen as an example of desire for the other as developed by Patrick Imbert (see *supra*):

Recently, for example, I thought of London. I often think of London since I read Doris Lessing's collection of short stories *The Real Thing*. It's not a genre I care for but I truly enjoyed the atmosphere, what's said and left unsaid, everything surrounding English teatime. And I, whom subways turn to jelly, enjoyed touring London via the Underground with her. I enjoyed seeing through her eyes the many neighbourhoods we crisscrossed above ground. The book survived a recent housecleaning of our bookshelves. It's a book I'd like to read again if I don't take that trip, if ever I don't make it to London, or if ever I do (Daigle, 1999, p. 121).

France Daigle's novel paints a subjective cultural geography, an Acadian space with blurred contours. France Daigle knows how to 'traiter des sujets complexes avec subtilités, humour et une bonne dose d'autodérision' (Boudreau, 2009, p. 27) and the novel offers a constant sliding between perspectives.

The space described is in many ways a *loca* space, although emerging in many versions at the same time as it has numerous connections with a wider, global, Francophone context. But it is also to an extent a hybrid space, the English element being present on several levels, mixing with the French. The novel is also an example of what Jeanette den Toonder (2010, p. 77) points out, namely that Acadian literature expresses a condition which is amorphous, i.e. characterised by a lack of, or changing, form.

### **Marc Prescott: *Sex, Lies et les Franco-Manitobains & Fort Mac***

According to Pierre-Yves Mocquais (2012), utopian memory and utopian projections are important both in the first European colonisation of Canada and in the subsequent colonisation of the West. If the decision of the European explorers and colonisers to leave for Canada was based on utopia (the dream of a new world), a new collective discourse will appear after their settlement on the new continent, life there having proved to be hard and demanding and not the lost paradise sought for. Other myths will rise: that of the dispossessed French Canadian and another one underscoring the idea of a new start from nothing on the new continent. French Canadians will for example look upon themselves as actors in a story that begins with the idea that in the beginning there is 'nothing'. Towards the end of the 19th century, yet another utopian discourse appears, this time concerning western Canada, a place that will be described as a new Eden, thus replacing the previous utopian idea of North America seen from a European perspective. In eastern Canada an idealising narrative about the West, supported and encouraged by the Canadian government and the Catholic Church as well as by the major railway companies will appear and a narrative of a beginning in a 'nowhere' will be reinforced (2012, pp. 135–136). Moreover, the myth of a recreated individual, a new man who remains to be created in the West, arises. Yet another manipulation of self-perception will occur; the change from devaluation to valuation. According to Mocquais, this change of self-image embodies the refusal to admit that the settlement in Canada to a large extent was an error. But the new story replaces the idea of failure with the idea of the settlement in Canada seen as an act of voluntarism. A new way of conceiving the idea of a path to happiness is also conceived. This path is found, not in a utopian future, but in the enhancement of the present, of the here and now.

It is partly in this light that it is suitable to look upon the two western Canadian plays by Marc Prescott.<sup>26</sup> About Francophone

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<sup>26</sup> Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Alberta. The most important cities are Regina, Winnipeg, Calgary and Edmonton.



communities in the Prairies, it can be said that the Saint-Boniface area of Winnipeg plays the role of a Francophone centre, and in Edmonton there is a Francophone campus within the university of Alberta, the *Campus Saint-Jean*. Marc Prescott was born in Manitoba in 1971. Apart from the two plays briefly examined here, he has published for example *L'année du Big Mac* in 2005, and has collaborated with the *Théâtre du Cercle Molière* in Winnipeg and with the theatre company *Les Chiens du Soleil*. Marc Prescott's theatrical works should be seen in the context of a tradition of Francophone theatre in western Canada (see for example the essential study on this topic by Godbout, L. et al., 2012).

In *Sex, Lies et les Franco-Manitobains*, the three characters are *Elle*, *Lui* and *Him*. A burglary occurs on Christmas Eve at Nicole's home in Saint-Boniface in Winnipeg. The *Lui* character has tried to rob her house, but *Elle* (Nicole) manages to hit him and tie him to a chair. *Elle* goes to call the police but before doing so, she engages in a conversation with her prisoner. He is bilingual but speaks a French that is full of English words. *Elle*, on the contrary, represents linguistic purism. A teacher of French, she speaks the language correctly (even hypercorrectly). Nicole calls the police, an action that takes some time, since she insists on talking to a Francophone officer. In the second act *Lui* and *Elle* are both tied by ropes. A new burglar has arrived, this time an English-speaking person: it is the *Him* character. Although a unilingual English speaker, he uses a language which is full of grammatical errors. But somehow the language barrier is broken between *Lui* and *Him*, since they are colleagues in the field of burglary. When starting to remove everything that has value from the house, *Him* finds a book that proves to be Nicole's diary in which she has written in French about her difficulties with her ex-partner Paul. The text contains some rather daring parts and although he is not really able to read the book, *Him* becomes interested and makes an effort to translate it into English. *Him* wants to know the story, and *Lui* will read it to Him. However, in order to preserve *Elle*'s intimacy, *Lui* translates wrongly. The (sexual) fantasy story in French becomes a gambling story in English. *Him* strips the house of everything valuable and leaves. The two Francophone prisoners are left alone. They are then able to talk about Nicole's emotional worries and lack of happiness. The

image of the Francophone fact in Winnipeg given in the play had emerged, until now, as a closed and narcissistic environment (and associated with a puristic nostalgia for something that had never existed in western Canada). It resembles the situation discussed by Nicole Côté (2010, p. 2016) in which the French fact is caught in the oscillation between cultural hyperconscience and forgetting. However, when *Elle* and *Lui* are left alone, the mode of the play changes. It is in the ensuing dialogue between the two (who have now got rid of their ropes) that the peripeteia of the play occurs and an act of liberation takes place.

In two tirades they now manage to express their own cultural ethos, with the language in which they do so being French. But it is a language which is conditioned by the bicultural environment, a natural setting for the two protagonists. The *ipséité* expressed is not about abandoning one language for another but about a greater freedom to choose languages according to the situation and to move between them. The communication that happens can be understood in the light of Yasemin Yildiz's discussion about the postmonolingual situation. Yildiz states, about a condition beyond the first language: 'The postmonolingual condition [...] is not resolved by a one-time move beyond the mother-tongue, but requires constant reinvention and questioning of the underlying concepts of language and identity. It requires constant exit strategies' (2013, p. 142).

One of the exit strategies depicted in Prescott's play is about moving beyond linguistic normativity. *Elle*'s voice is freed both of the provincial, folkloristic constraints symbolised by the local *francophonie*, and of purism. The play also takes into account the natural hybridity of the cultural setting. From now on *Elle* expresses herself in a language in which not only the presence of the English language is felt but also the local (Canadian) variety of French. In addition, her status as a woman is also at stake. The lines pronounced by *Elle* now tell about her wish to get out of the well brought-up Catholic school-girl role that had been hers so that she can start doing 'ce qu'il lui tente de faire' (what I feel like doing). As for *Lui*, his bilingualism is expressed by the phrase 'Prenez-moi comme je suis'. The result is that *Lui* decides to stay at Nicole's house in order to spend Christmas's Eve with her. The linguistic liberation staged opens up to a here and now in which

transculture is important, and which has psychological and emotional resonances, also as far as personal evolution is concerned. It can also be seen as an illustration of a condition ‘beyond’ exiguity, which was referred to earlier. It is a state that can be said to be one example of what Thibeault et al. (2016, p. 7) set out to investigate in their study of possible ways of moving beyond the exiguous condition. These authors set out to look into

la possibilité d’aborder les [petites] littératures en sortant d’[une] lecture légitimante, politique, d’une collectivité en mal de reconnaissance et en ouvrant les réseaux de communication avec les autres communautés, minoritaires et majoritaires, en tentant de se débarrasser de [l’] angoisse du minoritaire qui a peur de se voir disparaître aux confins de la marge.<sup>27</sup>

In other words, it is a question, once again, about the link between, and interdependence of, the (politicised) minority condition and its global implications.

*Fort Mac* tells about Mimi, Kiki, and Jaypee, three Quebeckers who have come to work at Fort McMurray in the Athabasca region of northern Alberta, and about Maurice, a Francophone from the local area. The Athabasca oil sands are important deposits of bitumen or crude oil and the largest deposit is the one at Fort McMurray. The play opens with a scene in which Kiki, dressed in her mother’s wedding dress, is standing on a bridge determined to commit suicide. The lines herald the end of everything and declare that the things happening at Fort Mac are a crime against nature. Kiki’s meditation is interrupted by Maurice, who talks her into interrupting the act she is about to commit, thus saving her life. The story continues in a wasteland, where Jaypee, Mimi and her sister Kiki have parked their camper van. Maurice arrives and a conversation about Francophones in Quebec and those in the West ensues. The utopian myth of a new life in the west mentioned before proves to be still alive today, since the three Quebeckers have been tempted

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<sup>27</sup> [...] the possibility of addressing the [small] literatures by moving away from [a] legitimate, political reading of a community in need of recognition and by opening communication networks with other communities, minority and majority, by trying to get rid of the anguish of the minority who is afraid of disappearing at the edge of the margins.

by rumours and publicity announcing that happiness is to be found in the West and that there is money to be made at Fort Mac.

However, the three travellers are ill-prepared: their papers are not in order and they lack training. What is more, they have parked on land that belongs to a private owner and risk fines. Jaypee is under the influence of drugs and soon sees himself in debt without being able to repay the money. Kiki finally finds a job as a waitress at Tim Horton's coffee shop and Mimi becomes a dancer in bars and takes up prostitution. Kiki, who wants to help her sister pay off her husband's drug debts, ends up as a prostitute as well. Towards the end, Maurice finds Kiki outside the camp, dressed anew in the wedding dress. But this time she is severely mutilated, having gone to the camp to sell her body. The wedding dress is stained and when Maurice speaks to her she says she wishes to die. Maurice returns to the camp and announces Kiki's death to Mimi and Jaypee. In the penultimate scene Kiki reappears with a long cut on her neck, dressed again in the wedding dress which is immaculate this time. She speaks to Maurice, whom she calls her angel and who has come to deliver her. In the last scene the theme of nature's sadness returns and there is a parallelism between sadness, the rape of nature and the death of Kiki. Kiki's death is the expression of sadness, but it is also an act of sacrifice. After her death the sun rises, which indicates a possibility of hope somewhere. Did Kiki's death have a meaning? Could it be used for something? The mode of the play being one of inhumanity both in interpersonal relationships and in the behaviour towards nature, a glimpse of hope or of transcendence may be perceived in Maurice's gesture at the end, when he takes a handful of rose petals and launches them to Kiki's memory.

If one major topic in *Sex, Lies et les Franco-Manitobains* is the question of bilingualism and the acceptance of a transcultural 'hybrid' condition, this is something that remains in the background in the second play studied. Nevertheless, language continues to play an important role. At Fort Mac, English is the sole valid language, which is made clear in some passages. Maurice states for example that speaking English is above all a question of personal safety:

Maurice : Pis tu parles l'anglais ?

Jaypee : Shit. Ben sûr que je parle anglais ! Toaster, Big-Mac, hot-dog, hamburger !

Maurice : Parce que c'est très important.

Jaypee : Shit ! Le Canada, c'est pas un pays bilingue dans les deux langues ?

Maurice : C't'une question de sécurité.

Jaypee : Qu'ils viennent pas me dire que je peux pas parler en québécois.

Maurice : C'est pas une question de droits, c't'une question de sécurité.<sup>28</sup> (2013, p. 24)

Using the English language is above all a pragmatic choice. It is the lingua franca of the vast North American territory in focus in the play, the question of the French language as a reflection of nation is no longer at the very centre. In this play the characters are confronted with one continental (and global) language, the question of cultural identity has become a question of cultural dominance and adaptation. As far as place is concerned, it is neither monolingual Quebec, nor transcultural Manitoba that are in focus, but a culturally rather anonymous, geographical and ecologically disturbed northern Canadian territory. What is really at stake here is the question of nature and so the play fits well into the ecocritical literary strain and to recent postcolonial theory. The abuse of nature is a sort of continued colonial activity, which is a theme analysed in contemporary postcolonial studies.<sup>29</sup> *Fort Mac* opens up reflections of a moral/ethic nature about the relationship between Man and his natural environment. It is the lack of respect for nature and the consequences of this attitude, both in the

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<sup>28</sup> Maurice: So, you speak English?

Jaypee: Shit. Well, I'm sure I speak English! Toaster, Big-Mac, hot dog, hamburger!

Maurice: Because it's very important.

Jaypee: Shit! Is Canada not a bilingual country in both languages.

Maurice: It's a question of security.

Jaypee: Don't let them tell me I can't speak in Québécois.

Maurice: It's not about rights, it's about security.

<sup>29</sup> See for example Tiffin's (2014) article on animals and environment in present and future postcolonial studies.

long- and short-term, that are dealt with. The question of dominance is central; dominance over nature but also linguistic dominance. One of the aims of the play is to show the immediate effects that an attitude of greed has on people: moral corruption, humiliation, prostitution, self-annihilation. It also raises the question of the long-term wounds that are inflicted on nature by referring several times to the *illness* of nature. Kiki's death at the end functions as a way of transcending a higher form of truth; in order for people to sense nature's suffering, it is necessary for a human being to die. The address to the spectator at the end of the play underscores the responsibility of the viewer. From now on it is up to him or her to commemorate and honour Kiki's death in the appropriate way, to ponder on its deeper meaning and to formulate a conclusion. Seen in the context of the discussion about exiguity and Francophone Canadian, it can be said that the play raises questions that go far beyond those of the exiguous community, since part of the central question at stake is of a global nature.

The two plays by Prescott demonstrate at least two ways of looking upon the question of cultural space. In *Sex, Lies et les Franco-Manitobains*, the narrative identity expressed towards the end of the play bears witness of a Francophone hybrid condition in which the English language has its natural place. In *Fort Mac*, the global aspect is at the forefront. The issues raised concern the lack of ecological balance and eco-colonialism. The question of power is crucial and the English language is closely connected to (national and global) dominance.

## Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to provide a sociocultural context in order to elucidate some major themes related to language, space and narrative identity in a selection of Francophone literary writing in Canada's predominantly English-speaking provinces. A choice of theoretical approach was presented: *exiguité*, narrative identity, transculturality, scenes of enunciation, *paratopie* and *scénographie*. Moreover, the aim was to find out whether the texts could also be seen as examples of a moving beyond a politicised, exiguous condition and, if so, whether their interest was to be

found in their global address. The question of the 'Americanity' of the texts was also to be reflected upon. The studied works show different approaches to cultural, topographic and linguistic space. They also express different *paratopic* relationships. Literature being a constituting discourse, it is relevant to consider Dominique Maingueneau's (2004, pp. 52–53) statement about the *paratopic* position of an enunciator in such discourses. The theorist stresses the importance of the oscillation between physical place and non-place in these texts: 'Localité paradoxale, paratopie, qui n'est pas l'absence de tout lieu, mais une difficile négociation entre le lieu et le non-lieu, une localisation parasitaire qui vit de l'impossibilité même de se stabiliser'.<sup>30</sup>

In the four samples examined this paradoxical position could be summarised as follows. In *Sauvage Sauvageon*, Marguerite Primeau tells a story that moves between a place of the present (the Canadian West coast in British Columbia) and a number of places of the past: Quebec, Alberta and Europe. The style is subjective and resembles a sort of intimate diary. The landscape described is often depicted in a 'romantic' way: idyllic at times, savage and threatening at other times. The lyricism of English Romantic poetry functions as a sort of background and provides a filter through which the narrator understands parts of her space relationship. Narrative identity is closely connected to lyricism and onirism. The protagonist formulates her *ipséité*, or authentic self, in a dream-like state where Romantic vision, the realistic savageness of the Canadian landscape and forgetting intermingle. Her singularity is underscored, according to Jean Morency: a typical feature in 'American' literature. In *Pas pire*, France Daigle sets out to define the amorphous place named Acadia in a personal and associative writing style. The logical links in the plot are conveyed by means of associations operating on several levels: historical, geographical, cultural and linguistic in order to visualise a certain Acadia. The space dealt with is partly an imagined territory that is set both in history and in the present.

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<sup>30</sup> *Paratopie* equals a paradoxical location. It is not the absence of place, but a difficult negotiation between place and non-place, a parasitic location that lives from the impossibility even to stabilise.

It is also about a place that constantly escapes fixing in writing, but at the same time it is the territory of a Francophone minority community and as such it shares common ground with other Francophone (unstable) minority areas of the world. This fact, along with the literary 'naming' of Acadia in the novel, contributes to transforming this region into a 'real' space, where the local dimension is emphasised. The importance of the local partly functions as a resistance towards the expansive American dream of vast spaces. The action of Marc Prescott's two plays *Sex, Lies et les Franco-Manitobains* and *Fort Mac* takes place in the Prairies. The thematic presence of the English language is much stronger here than in the two other texts studied. Another important theme is the difference between Francophones from different parts of Canada (Quebeckers and western Canadian Francophones), and the presence of a Canadian Francophone perspective originating from a position outside Quebec. The question is no longer about the famous Francophone 'we' in Canada. An important theme in the play is the reaching of a certain authenticity of the self, i.e. a transcultural and bilingual condition, and also a post-monolingual state. One of the facts that strengthens the American dimension is the presence of the English language. The question of Canadian identity operates in a different way in *Fort Mac*. The protagonists have transgressed linguistic and federal borders and by dramatising their experiences in the wilderness, the author brings out questions about our moral behaviour in relation to nature. If one looks upon how the Francophones 'practice' themselves in this play, the Québécois characters still appear as 'subordinates'. The English language and capitalistic interests emerge as symbols of power, in particular over nature, the unequal power relationship between English and French is still there.

As for the question of the widening of the exiguous condition, the texts express different ways of moving beyond the purely local. In Primeau's novel, narrative identity is constituted by the coexistence of different Canadian historic, cultural and linguistic realities. France Daigle stresses among other things the link between Acadia and other Francophone communities in the world, which makes the content relevant on a more global scale. One of the characteristics in Marc Prescott's two plays is the importance of



the partly atopic and global condition of the French language in Canada: the appearance of a transcultural, post-monolingual mode as in *Sex, Lies et les Franco-Manitobains*, or, as in *Fort Mac*, the addressing (by means of the French language) of ecological issues.

The analyses presented here open up for several important ways of continued study. They could be inserted in a context of pan-Canadian literary study, where linguistic, geographical, and historical diversity are seen as an organic, however diversified, whole. Another possible way of shedding more light on the works studied is to look upon them in a global francophone context and compare them with French language literature written in other countries outside France. A third area where they fit in is the recent field of translingual literature, where the focus is on translation, the juxtaposition of languages and a post-monolingual perspective.

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