



TOWARD AN AGORAPHOBIC TRAVEL NARRATIVE. FRANCE DAIGLE'S *PAS PIRE* (*JUST FINE*)

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Canada is a beautiful country.
All those wide open spaces.¹

Introduction

The present article, which proposes an interpretation of France Daigle's 1998 novel entitled *Pas pire* (translated into English in 1999 as *Just Fine*), is part of a broader project that advances a reading of Canadian literary representations of space through the prism of agoraphobia. Although its main goal is to work out an interpretive tool fitted for Canadian writing specifically, it also offers a critical analysis of eight contemporary Canadian novels — including Daigle's narrative — which feature a character who is either classified as “agoraphobic” or is otherwise “spatially marginalized,”² and which “examine extraordinary emotional experiences in domestic and institutional settings, indoors and out of doors, in places called home and places away from home.”³

In its focus on the disorder — and thus on the apparent link between (open) space and fear — the project appears to be rooted in the unifying images of Canadian wilderness as hostile, snowy void, propagated by the so-called thematic critics of the second half of the 20th century. In other words, in choosing Canadian landscapes as a subject matter for my considerations I step onto a murky ground suffused with the

¹ France Daigle, *Just Fine*, transl. Robert Majzels (Toronto: Anansi, 1999), 133.

² Joyce Davidson, *Phobic Geographies. The Phenomenology and Spatiality of Identity* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003), 6.

³ *Ibid.*, 5.

kind of literary criticism which “is now widely considered to be old-fashioned and — in some ways — misleading or reductive” in that it “is largely aligned with a White, Anglophone perspective.”⁴ For this reason, the project as a whole constitutes an attempt to solve a conundrum which is reminiscent of one Margaret Atwood recalls in *Strange Things. The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature*. “[One of my readers] felt,” the author writes, “that I should not be talking about the North, or the wilderness, or snow, or bears, or cannibalism, or any of that. He felt that these were things of the past, and that I would give [people] the wrong idea about how most Canadians were spending their time these days.”⁵ For Atwood, who proclaimed thematic criticism in her 1972 *Survival. A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, the question of how to talk about Canadian spaces is relevant for her own literary oeuvre. This project, on the other hand, is invested in construing ways of tackling Canadian literary spaces that would transgress, rather than reinforce, the stereotypical notions of Canadian identity, or the infamous lack of it, and accommodate for subversive displacement which permeates modern Canadian letters. Consequently, I have adopted a number of assumptions to follow in my work on this project.

First, far from privileging wilderness, or criticism that privileges wilderness, I see it as a relevant starting point. That being said, I also recognize it as “an imaginative or mythical construct, bearing little relation to the daily experience of ordinary Canadians.”⁶ In most of my analyses, therefore, I make a terminological shift from “wilderness” to “landscape,” a broader term which encompasses cityscapes, too. Second, what I am interested in is the examination of the “complex processes by which meanings are inscribed onto — or emptied out of”⁷ — Canadian literary spaces. I see these as “always represented in relation to cultural codes that are embedded in social power structures,”⁸ and I do not aim to limit them to representations of wilderness. Indeed, in the following analysis I barely mention them. Finally, I believe that agoraphobia — stereotyped as the fear of open spaces — provides a relevant metaphor for the *dynamic* relationship between an individual and the space they inhabit, as manifest in Canadian fiction. I am hence primarily interested in the transgressive potential inscribed within the concept of agoraphobia. In the following interpretation specifically, I concentrate on the intricacies of agoraphobic movement, and point to an experimental, decolonizing, and revisionary reading of the notions of travel, home, displacement, movement, and migration. In the first part of the paper, accordingly, I introduce Daigle’s novel as part of Acadian literature and discuss its subversive characteristics. Next, I propose that the introduction of an agoraphobic character into the novel — and thus the disordering of the notion of movement — complements these characteristics, and makes manifest the narrative’s transgressive power.

Pas pire (Just Fine): An Acadian Novel

Pas Pire, first published in French in 1998, and translated into English in 1999, is the first in a series of four novels (*Pas pire* (1998), *Un fin passage* (2001), *Petites difficultés d’existence* (2002), and *Pour sûr* (2011)), connected to one another through returning characters and geographical places. Whereas the center of francophone

⁴ Faye Hammill, *Canadian Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 62.

⁵ Margaret Atwood qtd. in Hammill, *Canadian Literature*, 61.

⁶ *Ibid*, 65.

⁷ *Ibid*, *Canadian Literature*, 67.

⁸ Brian Jarvis qtd. in Hammill, *Canadian Literature*, 67.

literature in Canada is Quebec, Daigle resides in the Moncton area of New Brunswick, and identifies as an Acadian writer. In Jeanette Den Toonder’s phrasing, “in *Pas Pire*, France Daigle assimilates her personal history with a more general socio-cultural history, in order to create a territory where the domains of the individual, the collective and the artistic intersect.”⁹ As much as it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the history of Acadia in detail, it is, therefore, worth bringing up a number of the historical facts which have contributed to the province’s — and its literary production’s — marginal status both within Canada and elsewhere. The name *L’Acadie* (*Acadia*) was given to the territory (then including Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and part of the state of Maine) by Samuel Champlain (1567–1635) who translated the word *Arcadia* (given to the Atlantic Coast of North America by Giovanni da Verrazzano in the 16th century) into French. Acadia was part of New France, settled by French Catholics, the group stereotyped as “homogenous, hard-working, [...] largely illiterate, deeply conservative, kinship dominated, and dwelling in household units of patriarchal multi-generational families tied closely to the land.”¹⁰ Importantly, the Acadians were geographically and culturally isolated from other settlers, which was instrumental for their sense of identity. They are said to have cooperated with the Mi’kmaq people, the indigenous inhabitants of the land, (“mixed marriages and *métissage* were [reportedly] not uncommon”¹¹ among early settlers), with whom they shared their respect for, and knowledge of, the land. They also remained politically neutral for as long as possible after the Treaty of Utrecht granted control over Acadia to the British in 1713. Their political neutrality, however, did not shield them from forced displacement.

The agoraphobic narrator of *Pas pire*, a writer named France Daigle, makes a striking remark that “one would have to be ignorant of Acadian history to claim Acadians are not travelers.”¹² The connection between Acadian identity, movement, and displacement, which the novel revolves around, seems thus to be rooted in the most infamous part of Acadian history, namely, the Great Upheaval (*le Grand Dérangement*), or the mass deportation of the Acadian people — whom the British then “considered allies of the often hostile Mi’kmaq, and future fighters alongside potential French invaders”¹³ — which started in 1755 and ended in 1763. “Of the hundreds of Acadians sent to ports in colonial America, or to British prisons, the largest single group, about 3,500 people, returned to Brittany in France (LeBlanc, 1979),”¹⁴ and about a thousand of them moved to Louisiana; there, they became known as the *Cajuns* (from the *Cadiens* which was the colloquial designation for the *Acadiens*), and were employed to drain Louisiana swamps — the way they used to drain Acadian marshes — using the unique system known as *aboiteau*. After almost thirty years in France, the “French” Acadians succeeded in petitioning the government to let them return to what

⁹ Jeanette Den Toonder, “Dépassement des frontières et ouverture dans *Pas pire*,” *Voix et Images* 29 (2004): 63. [translation mine]

¹⁰ Dorman qtd. in Ginger Jones and Kevin Ells, “Almost Indigenous: Cultural Tourism in Acadia and Acadiana,” in *Journal of Enterprising Communities: People and Places in the Global Economy* 3, no. 2 (2009): 194–195.

¹¹ Katie K. MacLeod, “Emergence and Progression of Acadian Ethnic and Political Identities: Alliance and Land-Based Inter-Peoples Relations in Early Acadia to Today,” in *Totem: The University of Western Ontario Journal of Anthropology* 23, no. 1 (2015): 55.

¹² Daigle, *Just Fine*, 131.

¹³ Ginger Jones and Kevin Ells, “Almost Indigenous,” 195.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 196.

they called the *Old World*. Following their arrival in Louisiana, “for the most part, these Acadians continued life as it had been lived in Acadia, and until the twentieth century, they were generally illiterate, kinship-bound, and closely tied to their land.”¹⁵

As Katie K. MacLeod asserts, “there was no single reason for the initiation of the Acadian deportations;”¹⁶ however, “their Roman Catholic status [...] predisposed the Acadians to discrimination.”¹⁷ Like the Mi’cmaq, the Acadians were perceived as Others by colonial authorities. The Great Upheaval, consequently, likened to “a paradigm example of ethnic cleansing,”¹⁸ “was intended to disperse the Acadians in port cities along the New England coast as far as New Orleans, in order to discourage them from regrouping and forming any sort of legitimate identity. And so they were boarded onto ships and their houses, barns and fields set on fire behind them, so as to dampen their desire to ever return. The Great Upheaval was, to put it mildly, disastrous for the Acadians; their population was decimated and their way of life irreparably damaged through shipwrecks, disease, poverty and displacement.”¹⁹

Two literary texts proved particularly seminal for the safeguarding and revitalizing of Acadian culture, namely Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s *Evangeline. A Tale of Acadie*, published in 1847, and Antonine Maillet’s *La Sagouine (The Charwoman)*, published in 1971. Longfellow’s epic tells a fictional story of two lovers separated in the course of the Great Upheaval, which “for many Acadians [became] the true story of their ancestors, ‘those simple Acadian farmers’ who ‘Dwelt in the love of God and of man. Alike were they free from/Fear, that reigns with the tyrant, and envy, the vice of republics.’”²⁰ Due to its great popularity, several movie adaptations of the story followed, and statues of *Evangeline*, the protagonist of the epic, were erected in Louisiana and Nova Scotia. For the Acadians, *Evangeline* has represented “the essence of the wrong done them.”²¹ *La Sagouine*, on the other hand, a collection of monologues performed as a single play and written by New Brunswick author, “marked a turning point for Acadian French,”²² as *La Sagouine* speaks a rural Acadian dialect. In like manner, the protagonists of Daigle’s latest novel *Pour sûr* speak Chiac - “a *mélange* of old and modern French with a generous proportion of English words and syntax thrown into the mix”²³ — although it is considered “*bad French*, even by [the] Acadians.”²⁴

Both, in her 2004 interview with Monika Boehringer,²⁵ and in her 2017 essay “What Is It that Hurts?” Daigle makes it clear that she has “some resistance to writing in *Chiac*,” the fact, however, that she does make use of it confirms “the recognition, in the literary field, of Acadian speech,” which

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ MacLeod, “Emergence and Progression,” 62.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Faragher qtd. in Jones and Ells “Almost Indigenous,” 199.

¹⁹ France Daigle, “What Is It that Hurts?,” *Granta* 141: *Canada. Essays and Memoir* (2017), <https://granta.com/what-is-it-that-hurts/>.

²⁰ N.e.s. Griffiths “*Evangeline. A Tale of Acadie*,” Accessed January 10, 2020, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/evangeline-a-tale-of-acadie>

²¹ Jones and Ells, “Almost Indigenous,” 198.

²² Daigle, “What Is It that Hurts?”.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Monika Boehringer, “Le hasard fait bien les choses: Entretien avec France Daigle,” *Voix et Images* 29 (2004): 13–23 [translation mine].

corresponds to the way in which Daigle represents Acadia in *Pas Pire*: as an entity that can be described, one which no longer needs to be created since it already exists. If the characteristic problems of the first Acadian literary works, such as struggle and suffering, are found in *Pas Pire*, it is to show that they can be overcome. Like the agoraphobe who musters courage ‘with both hands’²⁶ (PP, 108) to go, by car, to the place where she can get pure and clear water — even if the very thought of going scares her — the Acadian people can go back to their source of origin in order to overcome their feeling of inferiority. Such an expedition will lead to self-acceptance and the affirmation of the Acadian voice.²⁷

Maillet’s play was published in the course of the Quiet Revolution in Quebec, which facilitated Acadia’s “Quiet Revival.”²⁸ Although a lot has been done since then to further promote the Acadian culture (in Daigle’s words, it now “thrives. Relatively speaking”²⁹), it is Montréal that has become “a new center of literary influence.”³⁰ For this reason, Andrea Cabajsky sees francophone Acadian literature as doubly marginalized (by both Paris and Montréal).³¹ In a similar vein, Lianne Moyes and Catherine Leclerc use an incident from France Daigle’s professional life, i.e., a rejection of an application to make Daigle a writer in residence at the University of Montréal by the Canada Council for the Arts, to debate the complicated power relations between Anglophone Canada, Quebec, and Acadia,³² in which Acadia appears to be particularly disadvantaged.

In order to emphasize the subversive potential of the (literary) margins, in her discussion of France Daigle’s novels Andrea Cabajsky uses the term “ultraminor” to classify francophone Acadian writing: “As a writing strategy, the ultraminor represents literary attempts, such as those by Daigle, to transcend marginality while establishing new frames of reference defined on local terms. As a dialectical critical method, the ultraminor exposes the binaries that Daigle’s novels seek to transcend — between center and periphery, majority and minority, cultural normativity and emergence — while remaining caught within the terms of the original double-bind. Conceived as both a writing strategy and a method of critical reading, the ultraminor captures the profound aesthetic and ideological challenge that faces writers from doubly marginalized milieus to transcend the conditions of cultural emergence.”³³

Such transgressive potential of *Pas pire* is manifest in postmodern and postcolonial elements introduced into the story. The central narrative thread, for instance, is of the postmodern narrator, Acadian writer — the fictional France Daigle — who travels to Paris to talk about her novel on French television.³⁴ The concept in itself is not only

²⁶ In French, “prendre son courage a deux mains.”

²⁷ Jeanette Den Toonder, “Dépassement des frontières et ouverture dans *Pas pire*,” *Voix et Images* 29 (2004): 64 [translation mine].

²⁸ Jones and Ells, “Almost Indigenous: Cultural Tourism in Acadia and Acadiana,” 200.

²⁹ Daigle, “What Is It that Hurts?”

³⁰ Andrea Cabajsky, “Francophone Canadian Literature as an Ultraminor Literature. The Case of Novelist France Daigle,” in *Journal of World Literature* 2 (2017): 159.

³¹ Cabajsky, “Francophone Canadian Literature as an Ultraminor Literature,” 159.

³² Lianne Moyes and Catherine Leclerc, “Negotiating Literatures in Contiguity: France Daigle in/and Quebec,” in *Trans/Acting Culture, Writing, and Memory. Essays in Honor of Barbara Godard*, eds. Eva C. Karpinski, Jennifer Henderson, Ian Sowton, and Ray Ellenwood (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013), 95–118.

³³ Cabajsky, “Francophone Canadian Literature as an Ultraminor Literature,” 159.

³⁴ Although the fictional novel’s title is ever mentioned directly, the assumption is that readers have been reading the same book as the one which Daigle discusses in Paris.

self-reflexive but also highly ironic, as an Acadian writer has never been invited to appear on the prestigious *Bouillon de culture*. In Paris, Daigle's Acadian accent is repeatedly mistaken for "the stereotypical French accent of American tourists;"³⁵ for this reason, the narrator and her travel companion and friend, Camil Gaudain, speculate that Parisians "don't hear anyone at all."³⁶ "The narrative," as Cabajsky professes, "effectively turns the tables on Parisians, transforming Acadians' invisibility in Parisians' eyes into a collective myopia afflicting the residents of the metropolitan center."³⁷ At the same time, however, when Camil comments on the locals probably not knowing where they are from, Daigle confesses that "there's times [she's] not sure [she does] either."³⁸ Further alluding to the apparent marginality of Acadians, the novel proffers that "they have an instinct for detachment,"³⁹ and "trouble standing out."⁴⁰ It is, in fact, agoraphobia that makes Daigle outstanding in Camil's eyes.⁴¹

More importantly for this reading of the novel, *Pas pire* is an example of what Daigle calls "fragmentary skeletal novel,"⁴² delineating a version of the narrator's emotional geography through the layering of maps (of Dieppe — a suburb of Moncton — of the world's deltas, and of the sky). It is, therefore, a form of *geografictione* which is a term coined by Aritha van Herk to designate "fiction mapped on the lines of geography, geography following the course of fiction."⁴³ Space, accordingly, in Daigle's phrasing, "is not a strictly physical notion. It's not just an expanse, measurable or not, situated somewhere between the chaos of origins and the organized world we know. To exist legitimately, a space requires only one thing: that something moves within it."⁴⁴ In the following part of the paper, therefore, I consider the impact that the specific, disorderly movement of the narrator has on the spaces described, and how the narrator is *moved* by them. One of the fundamental assumptions of this reading is that in its focus on the agoraphobic experience of space — the disorder being markedly *gendered* — the novel can be read as "a representation of the presence and absence of woman."⁴⁵ For this reason, the next section focuses on the cultural interpretation of agoraphobia, indicating the types of space in which women's movement has been limited or prohibited, and from which they have been absented. "The true focus of the novel," after all, "resides in those spaces that the characters are not in."⁴⁶

³⁵ Ibid, 167.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Daigle, *Just Fine*, 120.

³⁹ Ibid, 102.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 138.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Daigle, "What Is It that Hurts?"

⁴³ Crane, Kylie. *Myths of Wilderness in Contemporary Prose Texts. Environmental Postcolonialism in Australia and Canada* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 37.

⁴⁴ Daigle, *Just Fine*, 36.

⁴⁵ Robert Kroetsch, "On the (Information) Highway: So Is This a Journey or What?," in *Cyberidentities. Canadian and European Presence in Cyberspace*, ed. Leen d'Haenens (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2000), 26.

⁴⁶ France Daigle qtd. in Carlo Lavoie, "Just Fine: The Bridge to the Non-Space from the Peticodiac to the Deltas," in *From One Shore to Another. Reflections on the Symbolism of the Bridge*, ed. Sandra Badescu (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2007), 129.

“The Spatially-Mediated Anxiety”⁴⁷

Whereas my use of the term “agoraphobia” might seem uninformed — the established medical label being PDA or panic disorder with agoraphobia — I use it in my project as I am more interested in how it has evolved within the cultural context, rather than its modern medical specification as an avoidance behavior which revolves around the fear of fear epitomized by a panic attack. Correspondingly, in the past three decades, agoraphobia has been of considerable interest to various researchers not only in the fields of psychiatry and psychology, but those invested in the development of Culture and Gender Studies. When the disorder was originally diagnosed — in 1871 by Crump T. Westphal — it was already tied in with the concept of Western culture. First, the word comes from the Greek word *Agora* which refers “both to an assembly of people and to the place of assembly [...]”⁴⁸ What has come to signify the irrational fear of *open* spaces, therefore, has always been inscribed within *public* or *social* spaces. The open space agoraphobics fear, in other words, is always already a cultural construct. Second, when Westphal speculated the origins of the agoraphobic fear, he blamed 19th century urban architecture. Importantly, the first four cases described by him were of male patients who were allowed to roam the streets freely, and yet suffered strange symptoms — *Platzschwindel* or “place dizziness”⁴⁹ — in public squares, empty streets, or on bridges. Since in the 19th century, “phobia’s *belle époque*,”⁵⁰ irrational fear was reserved for women, Westphal’s patients had to be seen as developing a relevant reaction to the ever-changing and ever-growing cityscape.

Concurrently to the expanding cities, agoraphobia has been spreading, too, to become “the most common of phobias [of the 21st century],”⁵¹ the architectural explanations of the disorder, however, have long been proven lacking. In particular, what appears to be striking about agoraphobia is that it is, as I indicated earlier, conspicuously gendered. Although there are some discrepancies concerning the numbers, researchers agree that upwards of 70% of those diagnosed are women (feminist scholars, in fact, typically quote higher numbers — e.g. in studies quoted in Joyce Davidson’s *Phobic Geographies*, 89% of agoraphobes are female⁵²). The first seminal feminist interpretation of the disorder came from Susan Bordo. In her 1995 *Unbearable Weight* she linked agoraphobia to hysteria and anorexia, categorizing the three disorders as *feminine*, i.e. woven into the cultural construct of a woman. Interestingly, Bordo sees an agoraphobic woman not only as a representation of conformity (she is, in a way a paragon of a housewife), but also as one of protest (she is, in fact, too much of a housewife). Nevertheless, the author indicates that the disorder originates in the traditional division of (cultural) spaces into those that are classified as public (masculine) and those that are marked as private (feminine), which has been a starting point for other feminist readings of agoraphobia.

⁴⁷ Davidson, *Phobic Geographies*, 9.

⁴⁸ Paul Carter, *Repressed Spaces. The Poetics of Agoraphobia* (London: Reaktion Books, 2002), 16.

⁴⁹ *Platzschwindel* is a term alternative to *agoraphobia*, coined by Moritz Benedikt in 1870.

⁵⁰ David Trotter, *The Uses of Phobia. Essays on Literature and Film* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 29.

⁵¹ McHugh qtd. in Carter *Repressed Spaces*, 29.

⁵² Clum and Knowles qtd. in Davidson *Phobic Geographies* 12.

Presently, therefore, researchers often describe women's relationship to panic as "geography of fear"⁵³ and look at it as a representation, and a logical consequence, of how space is divided and zoned in the Western culture. By the end of the 19th century, when agoraphobia was first diagnosed, "the presence of women in the public sphere was increasingly seen as unnatural and even dangerous."⁵⁴ This corresponded to the feminization of the domestic sphere, and the subsequent idealization of home as refuge, "that special place to which one withdraws and from which one ventures forth."⁵⁵

Such an "overly benign" concept of home is, as James A. Tyner suggests, "no longer tenable," as home has come to be understood as "an ambivalent place, one that is simultaneously a spatial and social unit of interaction."⁵⁶ Even in the 19th century, though, for women, home was hardly a place one withdrew to and ventured from. The notion of movement and mobility inscribed within this definition was typically reserved for men's experience of the domestic sphere. In her article on agoraphobia entitled "La Donna e Mobile: Constructing the Irrational Woman," Ruth Bankey suggests that the concept of "the woman in motion does not refer to spatial mobility, rather, it is in reference to the instability and disorder of women's bodies and minds."⁵⁷ An agoraphobic woman can, therefore, be construed as a fitting representation of the patriarchal concepts of femininity: passive and immobilized, she is simultaneously irrational and unstable. Her "choice" to see home as "a truly safe place [and] the foundation of an ontologically secure existence,"⁵⁸ may thus, as indicated by Bordo, be interpreted as her adherence to the patriarchal concepts of femininity.

"The agoraphobic experience of home," however, as Joyce Davidson proposes, "can be ambiguous: for some, home becomes so 'secure' that they are rendered incapable of leaving, and it can thus simultaneously be experienced as both prison *and* asylum."⁵⁹ The private sphere of the house, in these cases, "refers to a set of power relations that constitute a specific hierarchy."⁶⁰ Agoraphobia thus communicates a perverse version of domesticity, which urges one to "situate our understanding of home ... within a larger societal setting,"⁶¹ and see it as "a place of patriarchal control and discipline."⁶² Although home is "imagined as a place of domestic order, separate from the outer world of commerce, government, law, and other worldly institutions in which men exercise worldly power,"⁶³ it is, in fact, infused with violence. It is within the domestic sphere that the hierarchical relationship between the master, or host, and the guest, the foreigner, unveils. In my reading, therefore, agoraphobia does not really

⁵³ Valentine qtd. in Riley Olstead and Katherine Bischooping, "Men, Masculinities and Constructions of Self in Panic Discourse," in *The Journal of Men's Studies* 20, no. 3 (2012): 278.

⁵⁴ James A. Tyner, *Space, Place, and Violence. Violence and the Embodied Geographies of Race, Sex, and Gender* (New York and London: Routledge, 2012), 32.

⁵⁵ Tuan qtd. in Tyner, *Space, Place, and Violence*, 28.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Ruth Bankey, "La Donna é Mobile: Constructing the Irrational Woman," *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 8, no. 1 (2001): 37.

⁵⁸ Marilyn K. Silverman in Davidson, *Phobic Geographies*, 24.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶⁰ Pier Vittorio Aureli and Maria Shéhérazade Giudici, "Familiar Horror: Toward a Critique of Domestic Space," in *Log* 38 (2016): 115.

⁶¹ Tyner, *Space, Place, and Violence*, 29.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 32.

⁶³ Moira Casey and Eva Roa White, "Unsettled Homes: Borders and Belonging in Emma Donoghue's 'Astray'," in *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 50, no. 2 (2017): 105.

point to the apparent fixed contrast between the safe space of the house and the hostile outside; indeed, the open space is not merely one of public threat, but also one of freedom and agency, and is thus marked not only by fear, but also by nostalgia for *home outside of home*. Agoraphobia then indicates the blurring of borderlines between the inside and the outside, which is epitomized by a panic attack.

“[The] panic sensations,” as countless researches show, “can be experienced as depersonalization, the feeling that one is being dissociated or detached from one’s body, derealization [...], “slipping away” from one’s environment, and an increased awareness of external and internal sensations where the boundaries between self and the environment are blurred.”⁶⁴ The sensations of panic, in other words, “profoundly blur the relationship between what is “inside” and “outside” of the body,”⁶⁵ as well as between what is real or unreal: while the personal, physical sensations of a panic attack resemble those of a heart attack and are often compared to being *on a brink* of death,⁶⁶ medical authorities construe panic as phantasmagoric, meaningless, as well as feminine. Consequently, a panic attack epitomizes the “existential challenge to what for most of us, most of the time, is a well-defined presumption of our concrete self-identity.”⁶⁷ In Joyce Davidson’s phrasing, “agoraphobic panic can in fact ... induce a crisis in the ‘boundary’ between self and space that throws the existence of both into doubt. The dissembling, dissipative effects of agoraphobia can thus be seen to create a garbled geography, where that closest ‘in’, the body (Rich 1986) is no longer safely delimited from the outside world.”⁶⁸ As such, the disorder should not be interpreted as a mere symptom of vulnerability/weakness, but, in line with Bordo’s reading, as a metaphor of transgression, resistance, and transformation. By way of explanation, although a panic attack, as fear of fear, is non-locatable, it is also “the open landscape against which the self can choose to define its own existence. It is for this reason that Kirkegaard claims, “anxiety is the dizziness of freedom.”⁶⁹

“Phobia is never all there to be said and shown. But it’s a subtle and provocative something, full of consequence, which we ignore, if not exactly at our peril, then at a loss of a great deal of pleasure and instruction.”⁷⁰ The otherwise inexpressible “things” David Trotter mentions revolve around the peculiar “dispossession of the capacity to comprehend and adapt to a particular environment.”⁷¹ Since agoraphobia problematizes one’s relationship with space and place, it also “destabilizes the concept of belonging.”⁷² Correspondingly, *Pas pire*, like much of present-day Canadian literature, unsettles the notion of home, and defamiliarizes the domestic. Consequently, the goal of the following section of this paper is to use agoraphobia as an aesthetic resource or “a platform, structure of signification, or metaphor from which to [...] examine”⁷³ Daigle’s novel, in order to ponder the nature of agoraphobic movement and to read the novel as an agoraphobic travel narrative.

⁶⁴ Bankey, “La Donna é Mobile: Constructing the Irrational Woman,” 45.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 38.

⁶⁶ Davidson, *Phobic Geographies*, 58.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 23.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 60.

⁷⁰ David Trotter, *The Uses of Phobia*, 1.

⁷¹ Ibid, 2.

⁷² Casey and White, “Unsettled Homes,” 104.

⁷³ Ruth Bankey, “Review: The Agoraphobic Condition,” in *Cultural Geographies* 11, No. 3 (2004): 347.

Agoraphobic Travel/Agoraphobic Transgression

As indicated earlier, *Pas pire* revolves around the narrator's movement through (real and imaginary) spaces which are "tied to the memory of Acadia"⁷⁴ but whose dimensions are determined by the narrator's agoraphobia. Even before the disorder is mentioned in the narrative, however, movement — and limitations on movement — are integral to the narrator's experience. For instance, when recalling her childhood, she remembers watching planes fly by and imagining being the pilot. It is the ability she has lost; "I no longer know how to fly. I unlearned it,"⁷⁵ she bemoans. On the one hand, what is lost is the youthful ability to "defy gravity"⁷⁶ through imagination; on the other, it is a reference to the narrator's literal inability to fly due to her agoraphobia, which is revealed later on in the novel. On a similar note, in Daigle's dream of being an infant, the first realization of being alive comes with a certainty that "one day, [she] will walk."⁷⁷ The competence to walk freely, however, this apparent prerequisite to being alive, is problematized by yet another dream, one that she has recurrently: "In this dream, I feel a pain spreading in my legs until they can barely support me or carry me forward. The pain intensifies whenever I have to cover any given distance, to cross a street, for example. then, because of the pain, I am unable to walk quickly, and I'm afraid I'll be hit by a car that is inevitably coming straight at me."⁷⁸ Her "happiness of being alive, the promise of being able to move one day, are [thus] thwarted by this reduced mobility."⁷⁹ The narrator, therefore, is individualized through her (in)ability to move; the Tentative Eventual Person, or TEP, that, in Daigle's phrasing, any character in postmodern fiction is, becomes *Tepette* first (is marked feminine), and *Steppette* second, "meaning in French, little hop, little step dance, little demonstration of agility, generally executed in space."⁸⁰

In *Pas pire*, emotion is incorporated within movement, and movement is incorporated within emotion: "Emotion is not easily analyzed but, as its etymological root indicates, the term implies a movement, a displacement."⁸¹ For an agoraphobe, motion is never innocent or transparent or lineal. "[W]hen you're agoraphobic, you often turn back [...],"⁸² reveals the narrator, and although she "[passes] for normal,"⁸³ the passing — similarly to racial passing — "must necessarily include marginalized subjects as well as hegemonic ones" and thus, in fact, indicates "the long-term fragility of passing subjects."⁸⁴ For an agoraphobic "passing subject," movement, or even a mere dream of movement, is accompanied with fear of "losing it," going crazy, making a scene ("I'm afraid I'll start yelling or talking crazy and no one will understand"⁸⁵). This, the narrator confesses, can happen any time ("Trouble is, I can

⁷⁴ Lavoie, "Just Fine: The Bridge to the Non-Space from the Peticodiac to the Deltas," 133.

⁷⁵ Daigle, *Just Fine*, 32.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 34.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Jeanette Den Toonder, "Dépassement des frontières et ouverture dans *Pas pire*," *Voix et Images* 29 (2004): 60 [translation mine].

⁸⁰ Ibid, 36.

⁸¹ Ibid, 55.

⁸² Ibid, 40.

⁸³ Ibid, 72.

⁸⁴ Barbara Fuchs, *Passing for Spain. Cervantes and the Fictions of Identity* (Illinois: The Board of Trustees at the University of Illinois, 2003), 9.

⁸⁵ Daigle, *Just Fine*, 46.

have an attack pretty much anytime, whenever I have some distance to travel”⁸⁶). The immobilizing fear, consequently, looms as a regulatory mechanism, keeping the agoraphobe in her place, making sure she would not venture into spaces where she does not belong.

In this sense, the act of passing the threshold and stepping outside the confines of one’s safe space is one of deliberate transgression, and decolonization, which the narrator recognizes (“I like people who transgress, who commit their mistakes consciously,”⁸⁷ “I knew I had to decolonize myself, to free myself [...]”⁸⁸). In their self-conscious travel, agoraphobes feel like tourists, “individuals at once complex and suffering from complexes.”⁸⁹ Such self-consciousness, on the one hand, presupposes observance and vigilance, which, in itself, is not disadvantageous: “I expected to feel the first paradoxical effect of my agoraphobia just after takeoff, in full flight, when all possibility of retreat would be cut off. It’s always at such times that I’m overcome and submerged by a wave of unpleasant thoughts and sensations, a wave I fear will be fatal. This engulfing invasion has always abated, but not without leaving me shaken, weakened, vulnerable. And so, feverish and confused, clinging to everything and nothing, I am obliged to see life in all its facets, which, I suppose, is not such a bad thing.”⁹⁰

On the other hand, as a form of transgression, the self-conscious agoraphobic travel has, the narrator professes, some revolutionary potential. The edginess and inconstancy she feels once she “[passes] the first point of no return [at the airport], where security agents X-rayed the contents of [her] bag,” make her “feel like a Christmas tree loaded down with more or less reliable lights, uncertain whether they would glow... or explode.”⁹¹ It is in this volatile state that the narrator affirms she is feeling “just fine.”⁹²

Correspondingly, during her interview by Bernard Pivot on *Bouillon de culture*, Daigle advances that “[...] every nervous disease is a revolution.”⁹³ Agoraphobia, this apparent resistance to movement, turns into a “movement of resistance.”⁹⁴ When asked whether she “wouldn’t prefer to be cured of the illness rather than cling to it and brandish it like some revolutionary banner,” therefore, she argues, somewhat ironically, for “a democratization of agoraphobia,” in order to “share [it] equally among men and women.”⁹⁵ In this fashion, she diverts from answering Pivot’s question.

The final and somewhat puzzling inquiry Pivot makes is about what the narrator would want God say to her when she dies. “I’d like Him to say,” Daigle replies, “[that] for an agoraphobe, you managed fine. I kept a place for you near the door, so you can feel free to leave anytime, just in case.”⁹⁶ The narrator thus positions an agoraphobe on the threshold between the inside and the outside, poised in between in and out, the embodiment of the hesitation of passing. In fact, such “thresholds that emerge from the narrator’s self-reading” through agoraphobia, seem to “envisage alterity as a dynamic

⁸⁶ Ibid, 47.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 40.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 70.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 60.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 121.

⁹¹ Ibid, 120.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid, 129.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 129–130.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 130.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 142.

possibility”⁹⁷ and thus revolutionize the very concept of movement and travel. Notably, in the last paragraph of the novel, the narrator comments on the urge she sometimes feels “to take a trip. Alone. A trip for its own sake, for the sheer pleasure of travelling. And nothing more.”⁹⁸ Occasionally, however, she makes a decision to visit literary spaces, rather than real ones. For example, she visited London via Doris Lessing collection of short stories, and “enjoyed seeing through her eyes the many neighborhoods [they] crisscrossed above ground.”⁹⁹ “It’s a book,” she says, “[she’d] like to read again if [she doesn’t] take that trip, if ever [she doesn’t] make it to London, or if ever [she does].

Conclusion

Whereas it is not the goal of this projects to add “agoraphobia” to a long list of disorders which have so far been attributed to Canadians,¹⁰⁰ it is worth noting that, in Jeanette Den Toonder’s phrasing, “the fear of spaces from which the agoraphobic protagonist suffers in *Pas Pire* corresponds in a way to the discomfort of Acadia when it comes into contact with the outside world.”¹⁰¹

This fear of the environment is characteristic of Acadian history, marked by the diaspora and the lack of a geographically defined territory. Following the “Grand Dérangement,” the Acadian people were long cut off from their past and their ancestral territory. This dispersion gave rise to a deep need to find roots, to name itself, to name the territory. According to Alain Masson, “the event which dissociates the nation becomes the history which founds the people,” giving rise to a kind of writing which explores a primordial and painful question: how to tame his environment? It is not surprising that the search for geographic belonging and “self-conquest” inspired an attitude of mistrust towards the outside world, which could indeed threaten *l’acadianité*.¹⁰²

That being said, nothing in the narrative suggests that this “outside world” indicates “Canadian wilderness,” the infamous snowy void which appears to be the epitome of “open space,” and which was theorized as hostile and threatening by such thematic critics as Margaret Atwood and Northrop Frye. Daigle’s novel, in other words, is not responding to the same sets of critical concerns that Atwood and Frye respond to. In fact, in *Pas pire* which, in Benoit Doyon-Gosselin and Jean Morency’s terms “stands in opposition to the traditional Acadian discourse, there is no nagging nostalgia for the origin”¹⁰³ that supposedly characterizes Canadian letters. Conversely, Doyon-

⁹⁷ Charlotte Sturgess, *Redefining the Subject. Sites of Play in Canadian Women’s Writing* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2003), 108.

⁹⁸ Daigle, *Just Fine*, 147.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 148.

¹⁰⁰ Atwood, for instance, in her “Afterword” to her 1970 collection of poems entitled *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, suggests Canadians suffer from paranoid schizophrenia. Frye, on the other hand, in his 1965 “Conclusion” to *Literary History of Canada* proposes that Canadians develop “garrison mentality” when they brace themselves against the dangers of overwhelming Canadian wilderness. France Daigle, in turn, in “What Is It that Hurts,” discusses the kind of linguistic neurosis which is, possibly, characteristic for Canadian bilingual communities.

¹⁰¹ Jeanette Den Toonder, “Dépassement des frontières et ouverture dans *Pas pire*,” *Voix et Images* 29 (2004): 63.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Doyon-Gosselin, Benoit and Jean Morency, “Le monde de Moncton, Moncton ville du monde L’inscription de la ville dans les romans récents de France Daigle,” *Voix et Images* 29 (2004): 72.

Gosselin and Morency propose that it is “the image of Moncton,” rather than one of “wilderness,” that “came to be one of the foundations of modern Acadian identity.”¹⁰⁴ The novel deals with “the need to move, whether to Moncton or away from Moncton,” which transforms the city into one that “transcends its own limits, one that is centered and decentered at the same time, one that is self-sufficient while still being connected to other cities, other spaces, and other places, one which leads to a radical upheaval of the traditional concepts of the center and the periphery.”¹⁰⁵

My interpretation, however, is based on a more general assumption that “our ontological and embodied security is constituted by, and in, place,”¹⁰⁶ which both, agoraphobia and Daigle’s novel problematize. Agoraphobia, in fact, has been likened to a “boundary crisis” (“a crisis in the boundary between self and space,”¹⁰⁷ which leads to a “crisis of location”¹⁰⁸). Both, agoraphobia and the narrative deconstruct “home” as an ambivalent place. In other words, I believe that applying theories of agoraphobia to literary interpretations “provides additional insights into the ways in which [literary] spaces and places are feared, imagined, and experienced.”¹⁰⁹ Agoraphobia, therefore, appears to be a useful tool in reading Canadian literature which seems to be particularly focused on the problematic concepts of space, place, and home. I also believe that my reading complements postmodern, postcolonial, feminist, and queer interpretations of Canadian letters which have long outplaced thematic criticism. The main goal of this project, therefore, is to further upend older thematic studies, and to make space in Canadian Literature (and how it sees itself) for a vulnerability which is also a form of resistance.

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¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 71 [translation mine].

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 76 [translation mine].

¹⁰⁶ Bankey, “Review: The Agoraphobic Condition,” 353.

¹⁰⁷ Davidson, *Phobic Geographies*, 23.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 24.

¹⁰⁹ Bankey, “La Donna é Mobile: Constructing the Irrational Woman,” 40.

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TOWARD AN AGORAPHOBIC TRAVEL NARRATIVE. FRANCE DAIGLE'S (*PAS PIRE*) *JUST FINE*

The narrator of France Daigle's 1998 novel entitled *Just Fine* is an agoraphobic woman named France Daigle who, like the author, is an Acadian writer. The narrative revolves around the theme of movement – walking, driving, and flying — the most transgressive of which being Daigle's journey to Paris, where she is invited to appear on a renowned TV show *Bouillon de culture*. Although the "imaginary space out of a space" that Daigle creates in her novel is unmistakably "tied to the memory of Acadia and one which Acadian history penetrates," as Carlo Lavoie puts it, its dimensions are determined, first and foremost, by the narrator's agoraphobia, which is understood as a gendered disorder. "Alongside those who travel unselfconsciously," proposes the narrator, "there are all those, mostly women, who struggle to understand their behavior and wonder why they feel like tourists — individuals at once complex and suffering from complexes — five kilometers from home." The main goal of this paper, therefore, is to advance a reading of agoraphobic movement as transgressive. The agoraphobic

perspective, in other words, enables an experimental, decolonizing, and revisionary reading of the notions of travel, movement, and migration.

KEY WORDS: Acadian literature, France Daigle, agoraphobia, transgression

NARRACJA O AGORAFOBICZNEJ PODRÓŻY. INTERPRETACJA POWIEŚCI FRANCE DAIGLE *PAS PIRE*

Narratorką powieści France Daigle z 1998 roku zatytułowanej *Pas pire* jest cierpiąca na agorafobię kobieta, która nazywa się tak jak autorka powieści i podobnie jak ona jest pisarką akadyjską. Narracja koncentruje się na temacie ruchu i przemieszczania się — chodzenia, jazdy samochodem i latania samolotem. Centralna jest tu podróż Daigle do Paryża, gdzie bierze ona udział w prestiżowym programie literackim we francuskiej telewizji. Chociaż „wymyślona przestrzeń poza przestrzenią”, którą Daigle tworzy w swojej powieści, jest niewątpliwie „związana z pamięcią o Akadii i przenika ją historia Akadian”, o jej wymiarach decyduje przede wszystkim agorafobia narratorki. „Obok tych, którzy podróżują nieświadomie”, proponuje Daigle, „są wszyscy ci, głównie kobiety, którzy mają trudności ze zrozumieniem swojego zachowania i zastanawiają się, dlaczego czują się jak turyści — osoby jednocześnie skomplikowane i z kompleksami — pięć kilometrów od domu”. Głównym celem niniejszego artykułu jest więc zbadanie natury agorafobicznej podróży, która okazuje się transgresywna i, jak sugeruje Daigle, rewolucyjna. Koncepcja agorafobicznej podróży, innymi słowy, podważa utarte definicje wędrówki, wyprawy, czy migracji.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: literatura akadyjska, France Daigle, agorafobia, transgresja.