

Studies in Canadian Literature Études en littérature canadienne

Complicating World Literature in the “Minor” Context: Translation and the Acadian Literary Ecosphere

Matthew Cormier

Volume 45, Number 1, 2020

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1075594ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1075594ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

University of New Brunswick, Dept. of English

ISSN

0380-6995 (print)

1718-7850 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Cormier, M. (2020). Complicating World Literature in the “Minor” Context: Translation and the Acadian Literary Ecosphere. *Studies in Canadian Literature / Études en littérature canadienne*, 45(1), 238–257.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1075594ar>

Complicating World Literature in the “Minor” Context: Translation and the Acadian Literary Ecosphere

MATTHEW CORMIER

THE MAJORITY AND THE MINORITY, the centre and the periphery, globalization and nationalism: these relationships continue to influence scholarship on world literature at present. This scholarship remains preoccupied with the accessibility to and the proliferation of writers, languages, and stories on a global scale and, as such, demands ongoing attention to the issue of translation. From the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari on the concept of a *littérature mineure*, defined by a “deterritorialization of language” (18), to that of Pascale Casanova, who explores the influence of a Parisian literary centre on the literature of peripheral nations (330), the politics of cultural and linguistic academic discourse and intervention within the international study of minor literatures continues to complicate the broader scope of world literature. Francophone writers in Canada, as minorities inside their own nation, have also been subjected to this seemingly critic-centric understanding of their position and status, particularly in the case of Acadian literature. Acadie, the small geographical “space” comprising, at its centre, parts of the Atlantic provinces, has refused to have its literature pinned down by diminutive labels furnished by scholars and critics who, in most cases, occupy privileged, majority positions like Casanova or Deleuze and Guattari. Moreover, though scholars have attempted to construe Acadian literature as a “littérature de l’exiguïté” (Paré), as caught in a “double-bind” position between pressures from Quebec and Paris (Boudreau), or even as an “ultraminority” (Cabajsky), Acadian literature has repeatedly defied definite categorization, especially in terms of genre. World literature has chiefly concerned itself with fiction (or, once upon a time, epic poetry), a genre that developed later in Acadie and is not as practised as poetry and drama. Nonetheless, Acadian literature, in its corpus of fiction, challenges stereotypical understandings of a key tenet of world literature, in that Acadie is without defined geographical borders or official status but has its own national flag and anthem as well as significant cultural and

linguistic denominators.

Even in the face of majorities such as Quebec and Paris, therefore, Acadie's nationalistic attitude is clearly not that of a subdued minority. As David Damrosch argues, "Whereas past eras' works usually spread from imperial centers to peripheral regions . . . , an increasingly multipolar literary landscape allows writers from smaller countries to achieve rapid world-wide fame" (1-2). Acadian literature seems to exemplify this trend, even if Acadie is an "imagined nation," to reference Benedict Anderson's well-known work *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. Not only does Acadian literature challenge traditional ideas of the nation, centre-periphery relationships, and known models of "minor literature," but it also reacts to globalization in compelling ways that destabilize approaches to world literature. Franco Moretti, for instance, discusses the convergence of content and the divergence of style for the novel in a world systems analysis (406), an assessment that holds a certain truth for Acadian literature. The common thematic elements — such as the importance of place, community, and language — yet stark stylistic differences between Acadian novelists such as Antonine Maillet and France Daigle speak to this development; however, these works operate independently from globalization since they evolve within a confined, imaginary nation that often ignores the influence of surrounding majorities. For Moretti, style refers to language (406), and Acadie's Acadian French and Chiac dialects are certainly elements that authors can use to challenge world literature, especially in relation to translation. Emily Apter makes a case similar to Moretti's by turning toward questions of language and translation. She references Creole in particular as a hybrid that "heralds a condition of linguistic postnationalism and denaturalizes monolingualization" (412). Acadian literature in addition to using standard French, features Acadian French, a dialect mostly demarcated by archaic French words, and Chiac, a dialect that blends French and English and uses archaic French words. For Acadie and its literature, Acadian French and Chiac — even Acadjonne, another Acadian dialect mostly spoken in the province of Nova Scotia — are proud cultural and nationalistic identifiers, even amid internal debates on the mixing of French and English (Leclerc, "Ville"). I focus on Acadian writers of fiction from southern New Brunswick as particularly representative of Acadian literature because of their acclaim both locally and internationally, not to mention that some have published outside Acadie.¹

Chiac in particular, which incorporates English, is both unifying and untranslatable for Acadians and Acadian literature, a matter that complicates Apter's views on the effects of globalization and the blurring of national borders. Untranslatability — at least in terms of Acadian identity and its intrinsic link to language — seems to be at the crux of Acadie's distinct character and its resistance to the maw of world literature theory. As Catherine Leclerc has argued, the activism of Acadian writers "conveys the unique linguistic identity of Chiac as a means for Acadians to gain not only self-recognition with regard to language, but also a distinct visibility on a more global scene" ("Between" 166). I argue, therefore, that Acadian literature — fiction in particular — from Daigle especially, given her use of Chiac, complicates world literature's understanding of the nation and globalization because the feasibility of translation does not work with Acadian literature. This makes a case against a total categorization in any known — or proposed — critic-centric model of "minority" literature that shapes the writing itself. Acadian literature instead evolves in accordance with its own intangibility, building its own linguistic ecosphere.

The Road So Far: Approaches to Reading Acadian Literature as Minor

To propose a new model with which to study Acadian literature, first I investigate prior methodologies used in the field and attempt to recognize their shortcomings, if any, namely with respect to key tenets of francophone literature in Canada and of world literature: translation, nationalism, and globalization. In particular, I seek to establish how Acadie's literary identity — especially linked to culture and language — challenges these tenets and how they often define the region's literature, in some form or other, as "minor." Examining the scholarly work of Raoul Boudreau, François Paré, and Andrea Cabajsky, to name but a few, I argue that Acadian literature breaks the critical moulds assigned to it.

Boudreau's assessment of Acadian literature as caught in a "double-bind" between francophone majorities in Quebec and France remains, two decades later, one of the most influential comments on the imagined nation's literature by one of its own scholars. Addressing Acadian authors' relationship with their immediate francophone neighbour in Canada, Quebec, Boudreau remarks that

C'est encore, pour plusieurs, à l'aune de la réussite au Québec que se mesure l'importance de l'écrivain acadien et, devant l'envergure et

les moyens de l'institution littéraire québécois, l'équivalent acadien ne fait pas le poids. Antonine Maillet, Jacques Savoie et Serge Patrice Thibodeau sont autant de preuve que pour dépasser un certain seuil de diffusion et de reconnaissance, l'écrivain acadien doit se faire québécois. Le Québec occupe donc par rapport à l'écrivain acadien une position des plus ambiguë : il est d'un certain côté le terrain sur lequel il aspire se faire reconnaître et d'un autre côté la force dominatrice dans laquelle il doit aliéner une partie de lui-même pour accéder à cette reconnaissance. (8)

Boudreau's point certainly holds some truth: numerous Acadian writers of note have published in Quebec over the years, including Antonine Maillet, Ronald Després, Jacques Savoie, Serge Patrice Thibodeau, Herménégilde Chiasson, and France Daigle. The critic's "first bind" in particular — that Quebec is where Acadian writers aspire to be recognized — makes complete sense, though it seems less groundbreaking and more simple common sense. Obviously, writers who want to increase their readership seek bigger markets, especially in our global age. Boudreau's "second bind," however, seems to be somewhat generalized if not already outdated. The claim that Acadian writers need to alienate themselves partly to gain recognition by this French majority appears to be false, especially considering some of Acadie's best-known writers. Novelists Maillet and Daigle, for instance, prove that alienating themselves from their culture is unnecessary to succeed nationally and internationally. Maillet has been criticized by some writers at home for folklorizing Acadie, and the novelty of these texts might arguably be partly responsible for their international success. Nonetheless, Maillet's winning the coveted Goncourt in France for *Pélagie-la-Charrette* (1979) — which tells of Acadians' return to their land after the deportation — and Daigle's winning the Governor General's Literary Award in Canada for *Pour sûr* (2011) — which showcases the Acadian dialect of Chiac in Moncton, New Brunswick — indicate that these writers do not need to suppress themes of Acadian identity in order to be validated by other francophone majorities in the world. For this reason, I propose instead to consider Acadian literature as the product of an Acadian literary and linguistic ecosphere.

Another popular approach to reading Acadian literature — which falls in line with the idea of an Acadian literary ecosphere yet is applicable to a broader range of minor literatures in Canada — relates to what Paré calls "littératures de l'exiguïté." This approach, which goes beyond that of Deleuze and Guattari on minority literature to valorize the unique aesthet-

ics and otherness of “petites littératures” and to elevate their status in the broader literary world, has been taken up by other critics of French Canadian literature such as Lucie Hotte and François Ouellet. Paré identifies four types of “petites littératures”: “les littératures insulaires,” “les *petites littératures nationales*,” “les littératures coloniales,” and “les littératures minoritaires.” Although Paré certainly acknowledges that these types are not mutually exclusive, he directly names Acadian literature as insular because of its simultaneous self-reliance and isolation, comparing the literature to an island (17). This distinction of “insular” seems to undermine Boudreau’s comments on Acadie’s bound position between Quebec and France. Such isolated and self-reliant fictional universes certainly exist in Acadian literature, particularly for Maillet and Daigle. Maillet has the recurring Île-aux-Puces (*Pointe-aux-Coques*; *La Sagouine*), a fictional island with a recurring cast of characters who interact in various ways and resolve quotidian conflicts (a direct link to Paré’s idea of Acadian literature as an island). Daigle has the fictionalized Moncton (*Petites difficultés d’existence; Pour sûr*), which features a more contemporary set of characters than in Maillet’s world but still engages in similar ways in a dialect that has evolved into Chiac. Yet, if Acadian literature is isolated and self-reliant, it is not closed off from the rest of the literary world. In fact, though Paré makes a case for Acadian literature as insular, it could also fall under any of the three other types that he establishes. Paré himself acknowledges the difficulty of classifying minor literatures, and a broader classification opens up Acadie to other readers.

First, with regard to Acadian national symbols/icons (flag, anthem, and holiday), one could argue that Acadian literature consists of a “*petite littérature nationale*” — understood as having a small presence in terms of writers, publishers, book stores, and prizes and demonstrating a nationalist attitude while not being recognized as a nation — especially when considering the nationalism that defined the poetry of the first and second Acadian renaissances.² Second, Acadian literature is certainly a colonial as well as a postcolonial literature — at its core, it wrestles with unresolved issues stemming from the deportation and beyond, a direct repercussion of both the French and the British colonial enterprises. The question of language and the reason for the untranslatability of the Chiac dialect in particular are distinctly the results of the singular relationship between an “archaic” French, which remained so because of the isolation of Acadie as a French colony, and a cultural and linguistic evolution influenced by the

English linguistic authority and majority. Third, Acadian literature also falls under the rubric of Paré's fourth category, "littérature minoritaire." Critics such as Boudreau have commented on Acadie's minority status vis-à-vis Quebec and France, but the area also remains a minority in its own geographical space, surrounded and infiltrated by the anglophone majority on the East Coast. This anglophone influence has chiefly pervaded language in Acadie, as the current dialect of Chiac in urban areas suggests. Paré's work on "small literatures" is thus foundational and highly insightful, yet even Paré realizes that literatures such as that of Acadie can be difficult to situate in relation to others.

Some important work, however, has since built on his essential text to expose its limits and attempt to remedy them. *Au-delà de l'exiguïté: Échos et convergences dans les littératures minoritaires*, a collection of essays edited by Jimmy Thibeault, Daniel Long, Désiré Nyela, and Jean Wilson, makes significant strides in this direction. The most compelling piece in this collection that is relevant here is undoubtedly Lucie Hotte's "Au-delà de l'exiguïté: Les œuvres de France Daigle, d'Andrée Christensen et de Simone Chaput," which argues that, though the work of Deleuze and Guattari, as well as that of Paré, remains fundamental to understanding these literatures, the time has come to move beyond them.³ More significantly, Hotte clearly identifies and articulates the same problem that I do with regard to the critic-centricity of these "minority qualifications":

Aucune des dénominations proposées n'est neutre, car elles mettent toutes en place une conception des "petites" littératures qui impose nécessairement un mode de lecture particulier. En ce sens, elles fondent également un horizon d'attente, selon la terminologie de Hans Robert Jauss. C'est donc dire qu'elles prescrivent une ou des modes de lecture particuliers auxquels la critique va souscrire. Ces conceptions proposent aussi, aux auteurs, des postures scripturaires qui seraient celles propres à l'écrivain en contexte minoritaire. (33)

The process, therefore, becomes cyclically pernicious: not only do these modes of reading predetermine critics' dispositions, but they also influence writers themselves about what is expected from them in terms of literary production. These modes of reading are ever growing as well. As Hotte points out, Lise Gauvin's "littératures de l'intranquillité" and Michel Biron's "littératures liminaires" are two examples of a growing corpus of jargon depicting these literatures (33-34).⁴

Speaking of emerging terms that pertain to "small literatures," An-

drea Cabajsky's perspective on Acadian literature — namely the writing of Daigle — as an “ultraminority,” in her article entitled “Francophone Acadian Literature as an Ultraminor Literature: The Case of Novelist France Daigle,” is the most recent and probably the most nuanced reading of Acadian literature in a current, (post-)minor context. Most important to remember is that Cabajsky works with Acadian literature within theoretical frameworks of world literature on a much larger scale than other scholars mentioned in this article, a difficult undertaking with a case as particular as Acadian literature and even more so with Daigle as her only case study. For Cabajsky, the ultraminor is both “a writing strategy and a critical reading method,” so she acknowledges the literature as well as its critics equally:

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.⁵ (159)

Cabajsky does well to recall the work of theorists such as Paré as well as that of Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shi, among others, to warn readers of the numerous issues surrounding the “minority label” in recent years. In fact, Cabajsky appears to agree with Galin Tihanov's proposition that the dichotomy established between majority and minority is severely problematic (qtd. 163). Yet, though her study is progressive in this sense, and while it moves beyond the historically preferred “minor” critique, Cabajsky still returns to a critic-centric argument that promotes the same binaries within the ultraminor, only with an added attempt at transcendence: “[T]he ultraminor exposes the extent to which Daigle's novels remain caught within the very oppositions they seek to transcend: . . . center versus periphery and tradition versus modernity” (174). In Cabajsky's defence, such a necessity might persist within the broader strokes of world literature; however, Hotte makes a similar argument regarding Daigle's work — an argument that she develops from an initial conceptualization dating as far back as 2002 — on a scale that works best for the Acadian author, substituting “ultraminor” for “individualism.” For Hotte, Daigle and other writers “refusent d'adhérer à l'esthétique de l'exiguïté en écrivant des œuvres qui transcendent les frontières identitaires et les

frontières spatiales de la communauté d'origine et surtout en pratiquant des formes littéraires qui s'écartent du réalisme propre à l'esthétique de l'exiguïté" (38). Although this framework resembles Cabajsky's in some ways, it gives significantly more agency to the writers themselves. The immediate issue does not appear to be Cabajsky's scholarly work, in this case, but the context of world literature as applied to Acadian literature. Acadian literature greatly complicates world literature's understanding of minor literatures particularly because of Acadie's refusal to adhere to the minor label, a fact compounded by its untranslatability.

To be fair, a number of Acadian writers other than Maillet and Daigle and from various backgrounds make aesthetic choices in their work, especially in terms of linguistics, that deserve recognition for their complication of — or at times even adherence to — world literature's understanding of language and the minor, even if in this essay I focus on acclaimed works by these two novelists. For instance, Nova Scotia's Georgette LeBlanc, now Canada's parliamentary poet laureate, produces poetry written in Acadjonne — perhaps another untranslatable dialect — and is one of Acadie's best known writers at present, while Serge Patrice Thibodeau, who writes in standard French, remains one of Acadie's most acclaimed writers; however, their preferred genre of poetry carries less weight than fiction in world literature circles. For his part, Herménégilde Chiasson, a core multidisciplinary artist in Acadian culture, also writes chiefly in standard French with some instances of standard English but without slipping into familiar language; yet he too does not venture into fiction in any sustained way. In terms of fiction, there are some Acadian writers who would certainly be compelling to study in relation to world literature. Jean Babineau, especially, whose corpus of novels includes *Bloupe* (1993), *Gîte* (1998), and *Vortex* (2003), is a crucial figure in disseminating Chiac, while most critics seem to forget or avoid Ronald Després's much earlier novel, *Le scalpel ininterrompu: Journal du docteur Jan von Fries* (1962), which was years ahead of its time in terms of formal experimentation in Acadian fiction. For some reason, however, these writers have not held the same level of attention beyond Acadie as Maillet and Daigle, whether because of Daigle's and Maillet's ability to make Acadie and its linguistic anomalies attractive to other cultures because of their explicit and self-reflexive treatment of language and culture, or because of their publication outside Acadie. So, though much could be written on this topic and with other Acadian writers in mind, I examine Maillet's

and Daigle's best known works because they reach beyond Acadie and because of fiction's importance in world literature studies.

The Untranslatable Ecosphere

Language is at the core of most iterations of "minor" literature because world-renowned theorists such as Deleuze and Guattari as well as Casanova have argued for its significance. Acadian literature is no stranger to these scholars since they inspire many of the works undertaken on its various dialects. The Acadian dialect of Chiac, however, best described as a combination of English words and current as well as archaic French, and which often conjugates English verbs according to French grammar, complicates these critically popular conceptions as well as those of translation theorists. Even for some Acadians, internally, Chiac is an uneasy and difficult dialect to reconcile themselves to because, as Leclerc rightly notes, "si l'Acadie se créolise par le chiac . . . elle lutte aussi contre sa dispersion et ajoute à sa porosité une dose aussi grande d'étanchéité" (157). In fact, this unease or difficulty is evident in Daigle's work over the course of her Monctonian Quartet, which includes *Pas pire* (1998), *Un fin passage* (2001), *Petites difficultés d'existence*, and, lastly, *Pour sûr*. Although Chiac is used more and more with every book, the recurring characters, particularly Terry and Carmen, continue to struggle with questions of its usage in their growing family. Meanwhile, as much as Apter challenges globalization and the nation in world literature studies pertaining to minor literatures by turning toward questions of language and translation in "A New Comparative Literature," Chiac in turn complicates several cornerstones of Apter's approach.

Apter argues for a new model of comparative literature based on the intellectual labour of translation, one that would break "the isomorphic fit between the name of a nation and the name of a language" (410). For Apter, this new model "seeks to be the name of language worlds characterized by linguistic multiplicity and phantom inter-nations" (411), a fine idea in light of Acadie's unofficial status as a nation and in building on Édouard Glissant's scholarship on a "world system" of "interlocking small worlds" (411).⁶ Apter herself goes on to champion Creole as key evidence for her argument: "Insofar as Creole heralds a condition of linguistic postnationalism and denaturalizes monolingualization (showing it to be an artificial arrest of language transit and exchange), it may be said to emblemize a new comparative literature based on translation" (412).

As the example of Creole shows, destabilizing long-upheld linguistic hierarchies is necessary in order to overcome them. Referencing Jacques Derrida's work on aporia and Kenneth Reinhard's on new grounds for comparison, Apter undertakes the labour of undoing the dichotomies of "inside/outside, guest/host, [and] owner/tenant" (413), among others. She concludes her thoughts by drawing upon the works of Edward Said and Leo Spitzer, both of whom practise secular criticism by attempting to separate Arabic words such as *al-qua'ida* and *jihad* from nation and religion, suggesting that these critics "push the limits of how language thinks of itself, thereby regrounding the prospects for a new comparative literature in the problem of translation" (417-18). Apter's theoretical approach to language, literature, and translation certainly holds true for a significant number of cases; however, the "problem of translation" is especially apt when considering Acadian literature, in particular its dialect of Chiac and Acadie's status as a kind of "phantom inter-nation." As such a nation, Acadie holds no official status in any capacity, though it has appeared to demonstrate aspirations to a certain degree of sovereignty with its national symbols and conventions since the nineteenth century. Add to this political disposition four centuries of colonial history, as well as conflict with and socio-cultural and linguistic proximity to anglophones, and there emerges an integrally complex and potent literary ecosphere, one that produces voices that do not need validation from Quebec or France and that complicate contemporary ideas of globalization and nationhood.

First, however, one must take into account the tradition of Acadian orality in order to understand the area as a literary ecosphere. Although written in Acadian French — which does not feature English words but comprises a higher concentration of archaic French and oral characteristics — rather than Chiac, Mailliet's work deserves to be addressed in relation to Acadie's linguistics. Mailliet is most popular for her numerous, prize-winning works of fiction; however, her published doctoral dissertation, *Rabelais et les traditions populaires en Acadie* (1971), is also a highly important — if at times overlooked — text in Acadie, especially because of its attention to orality. In her foreword, Mailliet states that "l'Acadie nous a révélé le premier les trésors du monde oral, par ce petit accident de notre histoire qui nous a fait naître dans ce milieu-là" (ix). In comparing Acadian orality with that of Rabelais's works — the basis of her doctoral project — Mailliet borrows indirectly from comparative and world literature approaches and goes on to claim that "nous croyons à l'urgence de

traiter de cette question [de l'oralité] parce que si Rabelais, lui, ne risque pas de disparaître, il n'en va pas ainsi de la littérature orale acadienne, qui, par son caractère oral, sûrement, et peut-être par son caractère acadien, repose sur un sable mouvant" (ix). Recognizing the significance of her critical work, Maillet compares Acadian traditions in folklore with the work of Rabelais, demonstrating how Acadian storytelling and its oral practices evolved within their own ecosphere with influences ranging in proximity: archaic French words that remained in Acadian vocabulary, often distorted over time because of Acadie's isolation from France; the progressive and sometimes subtle alterations in proverbs and colloquialisms; and the pronunciation of English words in an Acadian accent. Although in a number of instances Maillet legitimizes oral, Acadian linguistics, she also showcases a unique development in the literary ecosphere that is Acadie. In fact, her own well-known literary universe, which takes place in part on Île-aux-Puces and features a recurring cast of characters such as the ever-popular la Sagouine, is an ideal model for such an ecosphere. This universe seeks no validation from either Quebec or France but simply breathes the life and orality of a burgeoning, self-sustained ecosphere into literary form.

By moving from the oral into the "written oral" as the Acadian ecosphere develops, the work of Daigle becomes more significant because it deals with the dialect of Chiac, which throughout her works has evolved to include much more English than Acadian French. In their consideration of language in Acadie, critics (Boudreau; Viau) argue that this phantom inter-nation, in its literary production, often feels the need to legitimize its unique linguistics vis-à-vis francophone majorities. Even Daigle claims in *Pour sûr* that Acadie must always "défendre son village, son bétail, ses terres, son église, et ultimement sa langue. Depuis toujours, et probablement pour toujours" (714). The hiccup, however, is that her critical passage in this case seems simply to take up the blanketing, critic-centric comment that dominates the discourse on Acadian linguistics. Yet — and more importantly — one of the chief contributions of her novel completely undermines this ideology as Daigle constructs spelling and grammatical rules for the Chiac dialect, even offering pragmatic interventions for ambiguous phrases. Although the verbs *to legitimize* and *to defend* have negative connotations, her novel is a creative and outpouring work of literary and linguistic progression, not regression. For instance, Daigle explains the remnants of archaic French in Chiac: "[L]'usage du pronom y est encore fortement répandu. Son féminin, *alle*, vieille forme française

du *elle*, devient *a* en devant un mot débutant par une consonne” (*Pour sûr* 13). She also points out the anglophone influence on Chiac: “Un Français peut bien dire ‘parquigne,’ l’Acadien, lui, aura l’impression de faire du théâtre s’il doit en dire autant. Il prononcera donc tout naturellement ‘parking,’ comme il l’entend de la bouche des milliers d’anglophones qui l’entourent” (44). Finally, she demonstrates the unabashed presence of English in Chiac, as in this passage: “*Si que je switch la light bâck ôn pis que la maison explose, expect pas d’aouère ever âgain d’autres outils pour Father’s Day*” (44). So, Daigle shows readers the complex linguistics at work in Chiac and, inadvertently, how they evolved within Acadie’s particular ecosphere. Moreover, she builds on work done by Maillet on orality in order to put in writing — to *create* — a stand-alone grammar for the Acadian dialect. This act is not so much a defence against pressing outside forces as it is a unique, circumstantial production.

Returning to the work of Apter on translation, how does one translate such a rare concoction of linguistics, as is the case with Chiac, to dispel borders? The simple answer could be that one does not translate such texts, though numerous attempts have been made with varying degrees of success. Maillet, of course, has had her Goncourt-winning *Pélagie-la-Charrette* (1979) translated by Philip Stratford (*Pélagie: The Return to Acadie*, 2004)⁷ and *Le huitième jour* (1986) translated by Wayne Grady (*On the Eighth Day*, 1989), winning him a Governor General’s Literary Award. Daigle has seen *Pas pire* and *Pour sûr*, among others, translated by Robert Majzels, with the former winning its own Governor General’s Literary Award and the latter named as a finalist for the prize (*Just Fine*, 2000; *For Sure*, 2013). These works in translation have thus been successful when considered as side-by-side translations of narrative; however, they do not and cannot convey the progression of orality and the complex, linguistic intricacies of the original texts. How could they possibly do so? How does a non-Acadian translator convey the subtleties of Acadian oral tradition, refined by Maillet, a native speaker, in a text written in English, especially when this orality is in constant flux? How does a non-Acadian translator negotiate the effects of anglophone proximity on Chiac by translating Daigle’s work from “French” to “English” when both languages are fused together to such a degree? If not a narrative impossibility, the task remains a cultural one: translation cannot come close to transmitting fruitfully and accurately the evolution of Acadie’s literary ecosphere. The labour of translation itself, in this case, as Apter phrases it, is nearly

limitless since it cannot ever be fully completed (409-10). In that sense, translation is powerful in relation to Chiac; however, translation is not a tool for easing the transit between languages and their associated peoples or nations but rather a means of alienating Chiac speakers by creating a linguistic system so complex that it cannot apply multidirectionally to either French or English. One could easily argue, then, that Chiac is not about bridging gaps between languages but about attempting to transcend these languages altogether, giving Acadie a heightened status beyond the label of “phantom inter-nation.” So, though it does not completely contradict Apter’s theory, the Acadian literary ecosphere considerably challenges such ideas of globalization and nationhood because of its untranslatability, especially in the contexts of Atlantic Canada and of Canada more broadly.

From Translatable to Untranslatable: Or, from Antonine Maillet to France Daigle

Although the linguistic evolution that takes place within the Acadian literary ecosphere is compelling for how it complicates Apter’s theory of translation and its application to comparative literature in the age of globalization, scholars of Acadian literature — in particular its fiction — can appreciate it beyond language in terms of the development of its form and content. Building on the work of Russian formalists, Moretti establishes that “the novel is a composite form, made of two distinct layers of ‘story’ and ‘discourse’ — or, in [his] slight simplification, of plot and style: plot residing over the internal concatenation of the events, and style over their verbal representation” (405). On this basis, he goes on to make a strong case for the convergence of plot and the divergence of style in fiction in the world:

Analytically, the distinction is clear; textually, a little less so, because plot and style are usually so tightly interwoven that their separation is hard to imagine. *And yet, if diffusion intervenes, “moving” novels across the literary system*, they do indeed separate: plot travels well, remaining fairly stable from context to context, whereas style disappears, or changes. (405)

Moretti bases this observation — spread across the global literary system — on two key principles: the first, that plot is at the core of the novel, and so is less likely to change (405-06); the second, that style is dependent less on structure than on linguistics, so translation most often

either changes or erases style (406). His argument is certainly logical and applicable to the majority of fiction across a scope as wide as that of the global literary system; however, in the spirit of breaking away from these major/minor dichotomies yet again, one could easily argue that Acadian fiction, as it has evolved within its own literary ecosphere, complicates Moretti's claims. When considering the linguistic evolution from Maillet to Daigle, namely in relation to untranslatability, one understands Moretti's point that "translation . . . is almost always an act of betrayal: the more complex a style is, in fact, the greater the chance that its traits will be lost within the process"; therefore, as "novelistic forms travel through the literary system, their plots are (largely) preserved, while their styles are (partly) lost — and are replaced by 'local' ones" (406).

Since Maillet's Acadian French dialect in *Pélagie-la-Charrette* does not include as much English or English influence as Daigle's preferred dialect of Chiac in *Pour sûr*, it is easier to translate; the plot remains the same in translation, and the "stylistic loss" of language is minimized. For example, the important preservationist nature of storytelling is laid out clearly in Maillet's original prologue in reference to the tale in question: "On la raconterait encore, et encore, car sans ces conteux et défricheteux de Bélonie, fils de Bélonie, fils de Bélonie, l'Histoire aurait trépassé à chaque tournant de siècle" (13). In Stratford's English translation, the same passage reads "Yes, still, and again, and again. For without these storytellers and root-delvers of Bélonies, sons of Bélonies, and the sons of sons of Bélonies, History would have rolled over and died at the end of every century" (3). The content of the translation is thus almost identical, and, aside from a slight Acadian accent, "eux" on words ending in "eur," omitted from Stratford's work, no substantial style is lost. The fact that the plot is mostly retained is significant because, unlike with Daigle, Maillet's novel adheres to Moretti's principle that novels are usually "plot-first," so the translation succeeds to a respectable extent.

In considering Daigle's work with Moretti's linguistic definition in mind, one must consider the work of translation in changing or erasing style. I have already mentioned the problem of translation with respect to *Pour sûr* when considering Apter's theory. Daigle also adheres closely to Moretti's principle on style since hers, in my opinion, is untranslatable. Apter speaks of the *work* of translation, but Daigle *works to create* a language in Chiac, giving it a written status — in Moretti's terms, then, one could argue that she is *creating style with style*. Because of the complexities

of Chiac, the translation becomes an entirely new work as Daigle's style is abandoned for that of the translator, Majzels, in *For Sure*. Of the novel's translation, Daigle herself claims in an interview with Andrea Cabajsky that, "with *Pour sûr*, there was too much [Chiac]. English readers can only tolerate so much," but "that was [Majzels's] own challenge, to create an English that wasn't ordinary" (266). The back cover of Majzels's translation, *For Sure*, includes a quotation from the Governor General Literary Award jury: "Chiac (Acadian French), the star of this monumental novel, opens the door that is essential to understanding the Acadian identity." Ignoring the fact that Chiac is decidedly *not* Acadian French, the jury had no idea what Chiac is unless they were referring to Daigle's *Pour sûr*. Although Majzels creates his own unique dialect in *For Sure* that is interesting for its own reasons, it is certainly not Chiac and does not necessarily open the door to Acadian identity.

Since Daigle creates style *with* style in *Pour sûr*, readers of the translation will evidently see the realization of her style with Majzels's different style because Chiac is untranslatable. Even Majzels acknowledges the difficulty of his project at times, especially in the novel's self-reflexive comments on language. For instance, Daigle dissects a turn of phrase that she writes for one of her characters in *Pour sûr*: "Au sujet de la question *D'yòusqu'a d'vient?* de Zed. Puisque la conversation se déroulait en temps réel, l'auteure n'a pu déterminer si Zed demandait *D'où vient-elle*, *D'où devient-elle* ou *D'où advient-elle*, toutes des nuances possibles. L'auteure s'excuse de ce bref manque de vigilance" (429). Daigle's interrogation is compelling in this case since it highlights the ambiguity of some Chiac phrases; however, in *For Sure*, Majzels adds to this passage the following declaration on his translation of "*D'yòusqu'a d'vient?*": "The translator, who has fallen back on the Newfoundlandese expression 'Where she longs at?,' has no excuse" (425). Majzels has "no excuse" — or, better yet, no response — because, precisely, Chiac and Newfoundlandese are *not* translations of each other. Each language has its own complex philology, Chiac even more so because it combines French and English, whereas Newfoundlandese features no French. How can the Majzels translation be considered a doorway to understanding "Acadian identity" if its very constitution, at the most basic of linguistic levels, is not Acadian at all but Newfoundlandese? Simply put, Chiac — as Daigle has come to employ it in her work — has been untranslatable thus far.

At least, in these self-reflexive instances, Majzels can defend his choices

or the impossibility of finding a suitable translation; however, as in the case of Stratford's translation of Maillet, the dialogue in *Pour sûr* is more evidently untranslatable than the narration and even more so in Daigle's work. Moreover, since style — not plot — is the point of Daigle's novel, it is difficult for translation to salvage the plot in any meaningful way. Here is an excerpt from an unidentified monologue in *Pour sûr* that demonstrates the complexity of Chiac: “Y avait tous les mêmes sîde êffects que yelle: les wôrries, les crampes, la rage de voulouère défendre son enfant, yôu name ït. Pis là le docteur y a demandé si` y avait engraissé darnièrement pis, comme de fait, y avait pris cinq livres. Ça, c'était la final proof que'y était comme enceinte lui-même. Y engraissait comme sa femme, bût y mangeait pas plusse qu'avant. Wëird ein ?” (45). The passage shows the Acadian accent and pronunciation of certain French words, such as *voulouère* for *vouloir*, as well as the presence of English words and expressions with the particular Acadian pronunciation of them marked by the tilde, as in “yôu name it.” In this excerpt, one can notice how English vocabulary often replaces French words for the sake of convenience, for example with “sîde êffects” replacing the bulkier “effets secondaires”; the Chiac is effortless, a back-and-forth transition between words from two different languages to make communication seamless. Majzels's translation cannot do justice to the complexities of Chiac and how its characteristics are meant to facilitate communication:

“The boy 'ad all de same side effects: worrying, belly ache, a burnin' rage to defend 'is kind, de whole kid an' kaboodle. Well, de doc asks 'im, did ee gain weight lately, and sure enuf, ee'd took on five pounds. Dat was it den, ee had to be preggies, too. Ee was gettin' bigger jus' like 'is wife, even doh ee wasn't eatin' no more dan before. Pretty warped, eh?” (37)

Aside from the fact that the translation erases all traces of the linguistic complexities of having English surround and infiltrate Acadian French, the entire premise of the conversation is nonsensical, a fact that also dismisses Chiac's practicality. Why would two Acadian francophones be having a conversation in broken English? How does “wëird” translate into “warped”? Relatedly, why are expressions that are not Acadian in the slightest, such as “pretty warped” and “whole kid an' kaboodle” (kit and caboodle?), brought into this space if the purpose of the text is to provide a doorway into Acadian identity? If anything, the translation is mislead-

ing and in fact a false representation; therefore, to consider Majzels's work as his own creation may be critically acceptable, but *For Sure* cannot be called a translation of Daigle's *Pour sûr* and its Chiac. To attempt such a translation would be to completely undermine the core of the Acadian identity at the crux of the novel.

Maillet, then, as the first prominent writer of fiction in Acadie, follows Moretti's two observations on literature in a world systems analysis: first, that plot converges; second, that style diverges. Daigle, for her part, coming onto the literary scene alongside and after Maillet, does not follow these observations, for both plot and style diverge in her latest work. Even in comparing Maillet and Daigle with respect to Moretti's proposition — and within the framework of an Acadian literary ecosphere — the evolution in form and content is intriguing: whereas Maillet adheres to highly traditional plot structures and uses oral devices in her storytelling, Daigle subverts the importance of plot in her work by prioritizing structure. Moreover, whereas the writers' styles — speaking linguistically — are changed or lost in translation, they even vary greatly from one author to the other. With the component of English added to Daigle's version of Acadian dialect — Chiac — *Pour sûr* takes on the challenge of creating an entirely new grammar, syntax, and spelling for a language, building on some work already done by Maillet. Furthermore, Daigle departs from Maillet's more traditional treatment of Acadian identity through plot to interrogate it instead through her use of formal experimentation, providing an innovative means to explore questions of identity and self-expression. These variations show a significant development within an Acadian literary ecosphere that is less about major/minor dichotomies and more about a divergence from broader theories of world literature, such as those of Apter and Moretti. Thus, one could argue that Daigle is a stand-alone author, as the only author in Acadie writing in this particular style. Alternatively, one could argue instead that she is simply the first Acadian writer to do so, acting as a herald for Acadian postmodern literature; future literary developments in this specific ecosphere will inform her own place and role within it.

Conclusion: Tending to the Acadian Literary Ecosphere

I have not sought, in this essay, to undo all of the significant work that world literature theory has accomplished in highlighting lesser-known literatures and conceptualizing new understandings of how these literatures

engage with each other. Rather, I have pointed out that Acadian literature complicates some of world literature's most influential approaches, specifically those of the nation, globalization, and translation. In its short developmental span of just over fifty years, Acadian fiction has evolved in tremendous ways within its own ecosphere. With respect to Moretti's work on plot and style, and Apter's on translation, Acadian fiction has seen an evolution over time—from Antonine Maillet to France Daigle—that shows gaps in these theorists' conjectures. Whereas Maillet adheres somewhat to their propositions, Daigle, with her disregard for a "plot-first" novel and her use of the untranslatable Chiac dialect, complicates taken-for-granted tenets of world literature.

The idea of a literary ecosphere, in discussions of world literature and its comparative nature, is certainly not new. Taking up Voltaire's popular maxim that "we must cultivate our own gardens," Françoise Lionnet uses the term "garden" instead of ecosphere to claim that she is "not convinced that we need prescriptions—just encouragement to keep on doing what we collectively do in our respective gardens" (102). She goes on to argue that "A transversal comparative approach that allows us to link . . . cultures . . . within a conceptual framework that seeks common denominators—while remaining suspicious of simplistic generalizations—can help us go a long way toward a rethinking of the place and nature of theoretical investigation within our discipline" (105). Lionnet's argument is sound here; however, the problem when considering Acadian literature is that its critics have not tended enough to their own garden—they have not attempted to understand its evolution within its own literary ecosphere. Instead, they have often sought comparative modes—whether in terms of a cultural or linguistic reverence for Quebec or France—that inevitably call on the power dynamics of major/minor or centre/periphery, blanketing all literary growth. If they are not careful, these critics will stunt germination, and Daigle, the brilliant author and champion of formal and stylistic innovation, will simply be a cultural anomaly rather than a herald for future Acadian writers.

This essay, like numerous others, is guilty of what it professes in significant ways, taking primarily Acadian fiction—and only two key writers, at that—as representative of Acadian literature as a whole even though poetry provides the most abundant literary currency in Acadie. Moreover, it does not tend carefully enough to its own garden, proposing a study of Acadian literature within its own ecosphere while arguing

that it complicates merely two approaches to world literature theory, Moretti's and Apter's, in terms of nation, globalization, and translation. Nonetheless, this essay attempts to act as part of a larger dam that will block the flow of major/minor or centre/periphery theoretical views of Acadian literature. These are outdated models because, precisely, we are all peripheral to someone.

NOTES

¹ Although I acknowledge that Acadie's differences could be argued to stretch from the Acadjonne speakers of Nova Scotia to the Cajuns of Louisiana.

² Two major Acadian renaissances are generally credited with having influenced Acadian literature and culture, the first occurring around the mid-nineteenth century (see Bourque and Richard) and the second shortly after the mid-twentieth century (see Belliveau).

³ For earlier works on the subject, see Gauvin; and Klinkenberg.

⁴ For more information on their respective treatments of "small literatures," see Biron; and Gauvin.

⁵ See Boudreau in reference to this "double-bind."

⁶ Apter is drawing here from Glissant's *Poétique de la relation* (1990), in which Glissant sought to dismantle the popular centre/periphery model by using Creole as a case study.

⁷ Stratford's translation of *Pélagie-la-Charrette* was originally published in 1982 under the title *Pélagie: The Return to a Homeland*.

WORKS CITED

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso, 1983.
- Apter, Emily. "A New Comparative Literature." *The Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative Literature: From the European Enlightenment to the Global Present*. 2006. Edited by David Damrosch et al., Princeton UP, 2009, pp. 409-19.
- Belliveau, Joel. *Le "moment 68" et la réinvention de l'Acadie*. U of Ottawa P, 2014.
- Biron, Michel. "L'écrivain liminaire." *Littératures mineures en langue majeure: Québec/Wallonie-Bruxelles*, edited by Jean-Pierre Bertrand and Lise Gauvin, Peter Lang and Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2003, pp. 57-67.
- Boudreau, Raoul. "L'actualité de la littérature acadienne." *Le postmoderne acadien*, edited by Raoul Boudreau and Jean Morency, special issue of *Tangence*, no. 58, 1998, pp. 8-18.
- Bourque, Denis, and Chantal Richard. *Les conventions nationales acadiennes*. Institut d'études acadiennes, 2013.
- Cabajsky, Andrea. "Francophone Acadian Literature as an Ultraminor Literature: The Case of Novelist France Daigle." *Ultraminor Literature*, edited by Bergur Moberg and David Damrosch, special issue of *Journal of World Literature*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2017, pp. 158-77.
- Casanova, Pascale. "Literature, Nation, and Politics." *The Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative Literature: From the European Enlightenment to the Global Present*. 1999. Edited by David Damrosch et al., Princeton UP, 2009, pp. 329-40.

- Daigle, France. *For Sure*. Translated by Robert Majzels, House of Anansi Press, 2012.
- . *Petites difficultés d'existence*. Éditions du Boréal, 2002.
- . *Pour sûr*. Éditions du Boréal, 2011.
- . "The Vivid Feeling of Creating': An Interview with France Daigle." With Andrea Cabajsky. *Studies in Canadian Literature*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2014, pp. 259-69.
- Damrosch, David, editor. *World Literature in Theory*. John Wiley and Sons, 2014.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. 1975. Translated by Dana Polan, U of Minnesota P, 2003.
- Gauvin, Lise. "Autour du concept de littérature mineure: Variations sur un thème majeur." *Littératures mineures en langue majeure: Québec/Wallonie-Bruxelles*, edited by Lise Gauvin and Jean-Pierre Bertrand, Peter Lang and Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2003, pp. 19-40.
- Glissant, Édouard. *Poétique de la relation*. Gallimard, 1990.
- Hotte, Lucie. "Au-delà de l'exiguïté: Les œuvres de France Daigle, d'Andrée Christensen et de Simone Chaput." *Au-delà de l'exiguïté: Échos et convergences dans les littératures minoritaires*, edited by Jimmy Thibeault et al., Perce-Neige, 2016, pp. 31-52.
- Klinkenberg, Jean-Marie. "Autour du concept de langue majeure: Variations sur un thème mineur." *Littératures mineures en langue majeure: Québec/Wallonie-Bruxelles*, edited by Lise Gauvin and Jean-Pierre Bertrand, Peter Lang and Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2003, pp. 41-56.
- Leclerc, Catherine. "Between French and English, between Ethnography and Assimilation: Strategies for Translating Moncton's Acadian Vernacular." *TTR: Traduction, terminologie, redaction*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2005, pp. 161-92.
- . "Ville hybride ou ville divisée: À propos du chiac et d'une ambivalence productive." *Francophonies d'Amérique*, no. 22, 2006, pp. 153-65.
- Lionnet, Françoise. "Cultivating Mere Gardens? Comparative Francophonies, Postcolonial Studies, and Transnational Feminisms." *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization*, edited by Haun Saussy, Johns Hopkins UP, 2006, pp. 100-13.
- Maillet, Antonine. *Pélagie-la-Charrette*. Éditions Grasset, 1979.
- . *Pélagie: The Return to Acadie*. Translated by Philip Stratford, Goose Lane Editions, 2004.
- . *Pointe-aux-Coques*. 1958. Leméac, 1972.
- . *Rabelais et les traditions populaires en Acadie*. Presses de l'Université Laval, 1971.
- . *La Sagouine*. Leméac, 1971.
- Moretti, Franco. "Evolution, World-Systems, and Weltliteratur." *The Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative Literature: From the European Enlightenment to the Global Present*. 2006. Edited by David Damrosch et al., Princeton UP, 2009, pp. 399-408.
- Paré, François. *Les littératures de l'exiguïté*. 1992. Éditions du Nordir, 2001.
- Thibeault, Jimmy, et al., editors. *Au-delà de l'exiguïté: Échos et convergences dans les littératures minoritaires*. Perce-Neige, 2016.
- Viau, Robert, editor. *La création littéraire dans le contexte de l'exiguïté*. Publications MNH, 2000.