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Nathan Rabalais

Contes rendus :
Sources and Development of Louisiana's French and Creole Oral Tradition

Directeur(s) de Thèse :
Andre Magord, Elizabeth Wilson Poe

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Jury :

Président	**Thomas A. Klingler**	Professeur - Tulane University Louisiane
Rapporteur	**Barry Jean Ancelet**	Professeur - University of Louisiana at Lafayette
Rapporteur	**Dana Kress**	Professeur - Centenary Collège of Louisiana
Membre	**Andre Magord**	Professeur - Université de Poitiers
Membre	**Elizabeth Wilson Poe**	Professeur - Tulane University Louisiane
Membre	**Frank De Caro**	Professeur émérite - Louisiana State University
Membre	**Marlene Belly**	Maître de conférences - Université de Poitiers

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CONTES RENDUS: SOURCES AND DEVELOPMENT OF LOUISIANA'S FRENCH AND CREOLE ORAL TRADITION

AN ABSTRACT

SUBMITTED ON THE TWENTIETH DAY OF JUNE 2015

TO THE DEPARTMENT OF FRENCH AND ITALIAN

IN THE SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS OF TULANE UNIVERSITY

AND THE UFR LETTRES ET LANGUES AT UNIVERSITÉ DE POITIERS

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREES OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY AND DOCTORAT EN LETTRES

BY

_____

Nathan Joseph Rabalais

APPROVED:

_____	_____
Elizabeth Poe, Ph.D., Director	Frank De Caro, Ph.D.
_____	_____
André Magord, Professeur, Director	Thomas Klingler, Ph.D.
_____	_____
Barry Jean Ancelet, Ph.D., Reporter	Marlène Belly, Maître de conférences
_____	
Dana Kress, Ph.D., Reporter	

ABSTRACT

This study presents in-depth analyses of folktales from the oral tradition of French and Creole Louisiana. The region's folklore is a unique tradition formed from the confluence of diverse elements following a number of significant population movements to Louisiana. The French and Spanish colonization, the slave trade, the Acadian deportation, and the Saint-Domingue Revolution are discussed in some detail. Through comparative analyses of a corpus of Louisiana folktales and their analogues from Acadia, France, and West Africa, my research demonstrates how motifs, characters, and moral values have been adapted over time to the sociocultural context of Louisiana. Paul Zumthor's theory of false reiterability is employed to explain these mutations in oral narrative. I suggest that several instances of cultural trauma – slavery, the *Grand dérangement*, and linguistic inferiority resulting from English-only education - resulted in a cultural renegotiation among Louisiana's French and Creole communities that is reflected in the region's oral tradition.

The three principal chapters each examine an important figure of Louisiana's folklore: the animal trickster, the fool (Jean-le-Sot), and the Master Thief. A general tendency of increased prestige associated with the trickster figure can be observed in Louisiana's folklore. Moreover, Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque is used to explain the subversion of established power structure accomplished by the trickster. By framing Louisiana as a space of cultural exchange and creolization, this study places the region in a larger context of the francophone world, including Africa, the Caribbean, and the French Atlantic.

RÉSUMÉ DE THÈSE

Cette étude présente des analyses en profondeur des contes de la tradition orale de la Louisiane française et créole. Le folklore unique de cette région est née de la confluence de divers éléments à la suite d'un nombre de mouvements de populations conséquents vers la Louisiane : les colonisations française et espagnole, la traite des esclaves, le Grand dérangement, et la Révolution Saint-Domingue, entre autres. Des analyses comparatives d'un corpus de contes louisianais et leurs analogues français, acadiens et ouest-africains démontreront comment se sont adaptés des motifs, personnages et valeurs morales au contexte socioculturel de Louisiane. La théorie de la fausse réitérabilité proposée par Paul Zumthor est employée afin d'expliquer ces mutations dans le récit oral. Nous suggérons que plusieurs exemples de traumatisme culturel – l'esclavage, le Grand dérangement, et l'infériorité linguistique causée par l'éducation monolingue anglaise – auraient aboutit à une renégociation culturelle parmi les communautés francophones et créolophones qui se reflète dans la tradition orale de Louisiane.

Les trois chapitres principaux explorent chacun une figure importante du folklore louisianais : l'animal rusé, le fou (Jean-le-Sot) et le Fin voleur. Dans la tradition orale de Louisiane, l'on observe une tendance globale d'une mise en valeur du personnage rusé. Nous nous appuyons également sur la notion du carnavalesque de Mikhaïl Bakhtin pour mieux comprendre le renversement des structures du pouvoir effectué par le rusé. En encadrant la Louisiane comme lieu des échanges culturel et de la créolisation, l'étude place cette région dans le contexte plus large de la francophonie, comprenant l'Afrique, la Caraïbe, et l'Atlantique française.

CONTES RENDUS: SOURCES AND DEVELOPMENT OF LOUISIANA'S FRENCH AND CREOLE ORAL TRADITION

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_____	
Dana Kress, Ph.D., Reporter	

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For sparking within me an early interest in folklore and oral history, as well as for providing the world with a rich collection of the heritage of their respective regions, I thank Barry Ancelet and Michel Valière. I would also like to thank my late father, Joe "Monsieur Formidable" Rabalais, whose many "true" stories of his own life in Avoyelles Parish instilled in me a fascination for storytelling.

Finally, I extend many thanks to Jessica and to my mother for their proofreading skills and for being important sources of support and encouragement.

FOREWORD

The first notions of my dissertation topic began to take form while I was completing my M.A. in French at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. I had recently returned to my native Louisiana from a year abroad in Strasbourg, France, where I began my graduate studies in musicology. It was in Strasbourg that I acquired an appreciation and an awareness of the French and Creole culture of Louisiana. Being immersed in the unique minority culture of Alsace, I gained an understanding of the sociocultural issues facing francophone Louisiana.

Beginning my M.A. in French meant changing fields, from music to literary and cultural studies. This period also represented my first experience of formally studying the French language, with which my only prior contact had been with family, especially my grandmother, and Louisiana French speakers in my community. From the beginning of my M.A. coursework, I was eager to make connections in the topics and geographical regions that I was studying, notably France, Acadia, Louisiana, and Quebec. I was also eager to explore parallels between different time periods that constantly came to my attention. What was it about songs of the troubadours that reminded me of the lyrics of Iry Lejeune and other Cajun songwriters? How to explain the similarities between the folktales that I heard in Louisiana and those that I studied from Acadia and France? In many ways, this is a study about connections.

It was only with much time and numerous forms of support that I was able to concentrate the multitude of connecting points of interest into a more coherent study. The Department of French and Italian at Tulane University showed me immense support,

particularly in funding my first research trip to Poitiers in June 2013. During this stay André Magord and Pierre-Marie Joris offered much on-the-ground support and assisted me in my preliminary research and in meeting with a number of key specialists including Marlène Belly, Liliane Jagueneau, and Michel Valière. The following year, a Summer Merit Award from the School of Liberal Arts at Tulane University funded a month-long research stay in Moncton, New Brunswick, where I conducted research at the Centre d'études acadiennes Anselme Chiasson (CEAAC) and collected materials for the Acadian portion of this study's corpus. The director of the CEAAC, Robert Richard, offered me much assistance before, during, and after my research stay in Moncton.

The following year, I was awarded an 8-month Chateaubriand fellowship from the U.S. Embassy and the Franco-American and Fulbright Commission. This award enabled me to complete the final year of my dissertation research and writing at the Université de Poitiers. More importantly, this enabled me to complete this dissertation in joint-direction under the guidance of André Magord and Elizabeth Poe. The MIMMOC research laboratory generously hosted me and offered me much support in the way of workspace, materials, research support, and invaluable discussions and exchanges with colleagues. There are various archival resources that were indispensable to this project's realization, including the UPCP-Métive/CERDO in Parthenay, the Fonds Michel Valière, and the Salle du Patrimoine at the Médiathèque François Mittérand in Poitiers.

I am very grateful for the opportunities that I have had in completing this dissertation. The many resources discovered and human contacts made during the writing of this dissertation have made it a truly enriching experience.

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Sources and Development of Louisiana's French and Creole Oral Tradition

INTRODUCTION

Tout a pour changer. Quand ça arrête de changer, ça crève.
-Dewey Balfa [1]

1.1. *Le conte*: At the Crossroads of Specificity and Universality

In his preface to the first volume of *Le conte populaire français: Catalogue raisonné des versions de France et des pays de langue française d'outre-mer*, Paul Delarue (1889-1956), renowned French ethnologist and folklorist, poses the following question: "Quand nous parlons de Contes [sic] populaires français, entendons-nous par là des contes qui soient particuliers à la France ou aux pays de langue française ?" (7). Delarue goes on to remark the seeming universality of a tale like *La Cendrillon*:

> On sait que la Cendrillon de Perrault a des sœurs à la peau blanche, brune, jaune ou noire sous les cieux les plus divers, très reconnaissables sous leurs costumes et leurs noms différents ; et les adaptations de l'histoire au milieu géographique et humain, les broderies ajoutées par les conteurs de tous pays, laissent apercevoir le canevas commun ; [...]. C'est que la plupart des contes populaires qui se disent en France appartiennent à cette grande famille de contes qui est le bien commun de toute l'Europe, de l'Asie occidentale jusqu'à l'Inde, et du Nord de l'Afrique ; et ces contes ont suivi dans les siècles passés les colons, les soldats, les marins et les missionnaires d'Europe dans les colonies françaises, anglaises, espagnoles, portugaises fondées par-delà les mers (7).[2]

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[1] 'Everything must change. When things stop changing, they die'. Cited in Barry Ancelet's *Cajun and Creole Music Makers / Musiciens cadiens et créoles*. p. 33. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1999. Print. My translation is slightly modified from Ancelet's.

[2] Throughout the text, English translations will be given in footnotes only where passages in 'non-standard' language varieties (e.g. Louisiana Creole, Poitevin-Saintongeais) could prove difficult for French-speakers, as well as for other languages (i.e. German).

Vladimir Propp embarks on a similar reflection, suggesting a stronger existence of universality, independent from contact between populations and cultures. In his seminal work *Morphologie du conte*,[3] originally published in Russian in 1928, Propp remarks:

> [...] de même que tous les fleuves vont à la mer, tous les problèmes de l'étude des contes doivent finalement aboutir à la solution de ce problème essentiel qui reste toujours posé, celui de la similitude des contes du monde entier. Comment expliquer que l'histoire de la reine-grenouille en Russie, en Allemagne, en France, en Inde, chez les Indiens d'Amérique et en Nouvelle-Zélande se ressemble, alors qu'aucun contact entre les peuples ne peut être prouvé historiquement ? (27).

For Léon Pineau (1861-1965), historian and folklorist from the Poitou region of France, the study of oral tradition, or 'oral literature', represents an integral part of understanding culture. In the preface to his 1892 collection of *Contes populaires du Poitou*, he notes that "le fond de cette littérature [orale] semble commun à la plupart des peuples: mais c'est une fleur dont les nuances varient selon les pays" (Pineau 29).

Arguably, the source of momentum and debate in modern folkloristics is the constant tension between the universal nature of the *conte* that Delarue calls the '*canevas commun*' (7) and the folktale's remarkable capacity to adapt and acclimatize itself to specific sociocultural contexts. In the early twentieth century, an important undertaking of folktale classification, and the creation of a typology of tales began to take place. Finnish scholar Antti Aarne made the first large step in this direction with his collection of five hundred tale types in 1910, later elaborated by American folklorist Stith Thompson, in 1973 (Belmont 15-16). Today the Aarne-Thompson classification is, by and large, the international standard of folktale typology. Thompson is also the author of

[3] I make exclusive reference to Marguerite Derrida's French translation because, contrary to the English translation of 1958 and 1968, it is based on the second and definitive Russian edition. As noted by the editor, "la seconde édition corrige les nombreuses fautes factuelles et techniques de la première et complète l'exposé sur plusieurs points importants" (n.p. "Note de l'éditeur" in Propp).

Motif-Index of Folk-Literature (1955-58), to which I will refer frequently in the subsequent chapters to identify, recognize, and compare recurrent motifs in cross-regional analyses of tale types.

Scholarly interest in the regional and cultural specificity of folktales underlying the apparent homogeneity came in many ways as a logical progression following the creation of a relatively universal typology. In this way, modern folkloristics recognizes within the folktale the existence of what Michèle Simonsen has called, "cette double impression, à la lecture de contes, de quelque chose de toujours très différent mais aussi de très familier" (51). Simonsen's description of the nature of the folktale as being both 'different' and 'familiar' from one context to another makes a strong case for adopting a comparative approach in folktale analysis in order to highlight social, geographical, and cultural particularities in myriad oral traditions. The influential American folklore scholar, Alan Dundes (1934-2005), argues that a comparative perspective constitutes an integral part of modern folkloristics. He observes, "anthropology has tended to turn away from the comparative method, while folklore has steadfastly continued to consider it as its *sine qua non* among competing methodologies" (Dundes 1989 "Anthropologist" 57). The analytical approach taken in the present study is unequivocally comparative in nature. As I will explain in the paragraph below, I aim to apply a comparative approach to a corpus of folktales that reflects Louisiana's history of immigration in order to demonstrate how folklore can reflect cultural contact, adaptation, and collective experience.

1.1.2 The Folktale as a Barometer for Cultural Contact and Change

The title of this study, "*Contes rendus*: Sources and Development of Louisiana's French and Creole Oral Tradition," is significant beyond the wordplay on the term, *comptes rendus*, meaning 'reviews' or more accurately in this context, 'reports'. The juxtaposition of two French homonyms, *contes* and *comptes*, evokes the multiple functionality of the folktale.[4] *Contes* refers to folktales, the objects of the study's analyses, while *comptes* suggests that folktales can serve as 'accounts' of cultural adaptation and experience. I argue that changes in characterization, narrative structure, and motifs can serve as indicators of geographical adaptation and social change in the larger context of France and the Atlantic world. Hence the title's second element, which conjures the advent of tales in the New World; folktales are '*rendus*' in both the physical sense (i.e. 'arrived') as well as the morphological sense (i.e. 'rendered' or 'changed').

The primary preoccupation of prior research and scholarly work on Louisiana folklore has been that of collection. Moreover, all of the major collections of the French and Creole oral traditions have been organized by genre; these often appear in order of animal tales, magic tales, jokes or numbskull stories, etc.[5] Although such collections have proven to be invaluable in preserving and documenting this oral tradition, I suggest that such a thematic organization of tales can inadvertently offer a monolithic representation of Louisiana's oral tradition. Due in part to the emphasis placed on collection in previous

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[4] It is worth noting that the similarity in pronunciation of these two words is no accident, as they share a common etymological root. The Latin *computare*, which is at the origin of many words related to counting and recounting (i.e. telling), is a testament to the longstanding importance of these two functions in early literate societites.

[5] I am referring here to Ancelet (1977, 1984, and 1994), Brandon (1955), Claudel (1979), Fortier (1895), and Saucier (1972).

work on Louisiana folklore, analysis and observation of interregional differences of tales remained of secondary importance.

Assembling a collection of folktales from storytellers living today would prove far more difficult compared to some decades ago, and it is not my intention here. Rather than attempt to create my own 'collection' of tales, I have chosen to present close readings and analyses of a corpus of French and Creole Louisiana tales with similar variants primarily collected in Acadian communities of Maritime Canada, France, West Africa, and the Caribbean. With relatively few exceptions, these tales cover a time period of roughly a century, beginning in the 1890s and ending in the latter part of the twentieth century. The vastness of the study's temporal and geographical scope is counterbalanced by my choice to limit the corpus of analyzed tales to only three 'genres', a term which I will define here. Harold Neemann comments on the overall lack of "wide consensus" among folklorists regarding the precise definition of 'genre' in folklore studies (Neemann 1999 30). Genres have been loosely conceived and discussed in terms of 'legend', 'myth', or 'fairy tale', each word charged with its own ambiguities and connotations according to disciplinary jargon (Neemann 1999 31). Despite the inherent fluidity of the notion of 'genre' in folklore studies, such a term nevertheless renders analyses less problematic from a methodological perspective. Discussion of only one Aarne-Thompson tale type at a given time can be severely limiting when examining representations of a similar figure appearing in several related tale types. Likewise, a series of analyses organized around a particular character brings forth its own difficulties and limitations. In this study, my conception of genre is more closely tied to several major folklore figures: 1) the animal trickster, 2) Jean-le-Sot (and variations of the name), and 3) the Master

Thief. In the subsequent chapters, it will become evident that these figures are indeed often associated with specific Aarne-Thompson tale types. This is the case of the Master Thief and AaTh 1525; however, analysis of the salient traits of these figures necessitates the consideration of similar tales outside of the strict typological boundaries of the folktale index.

These tales constitute a fertile repertoire for comparative analysis for several reasons. Firstly, they all exhibit a strong presence in Louisiana's oral tradition, in that they can be found in each of the major folktale collections. Secondly, they strongly demonstrate the common traits in the folklore of the regions mentioned above, between which we find cultural ties in other arenas (cuisine, language, surnames, etc.). Thirdly, variants of these tales can be used to highlight culturally significant links between specific sources of narrative (e.g. Jean-le-Sot from Poitou-Charentes, the hyena and hare in West Africa). In this sense, these tales can be more (or less) representative of culture communities, or indicate contact and mixing between them. Comparing tales of French and Creole Louisiana with their counterparts in other regions allows us to inquire about social adaptation and development in the Louisiana context. Finally, the trickster, the fool, and the thief represent three figures that are particularly salient in a moral sense. How and why does the trickster become a hero in folklore? Why do some cultures cast the fool as an example to follow? What social circumstances result in instances of justified theft in tales like the Master Thief? Examining these figures' actions, and more importantly the moral light in which they are cast, can offer insight into possible shifts in moral constructs due to collective experience.

It should also be noted that my corpus is only partially representative of the extraordinary complexity of the cultural makeup of Louisiana. As will be shown below, cultural and ethnic communities claiming some form of French-speaking heritage are many and diverse. Readers familiar with francophone Louisiana will undoubtedly remark the absence of Native American tales from the corpus. For example, the Houma Nation is thought to be the most francophone group in Louisiana today, and the French language "remains the mother tongue of most tribal members" (Brasseaux 2005 117). I have chosen not to include Native American tales for both methodological and purely pragmatic reasons. Firstly, because this study is in essence a comparative one, in which I consider Louisiana tales in relation to exterior variants, the inclusion of more indigenous tales proved to be problematic and detrimental to the coherence of my methodology. Secondly, the (admittedly small) number of transcriptions of French and Creole folktales from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries still vastly outweighs the collected inventory of folklore from Louisiana's Native American communities, thus precluding a balanced comparative study.[6]

In addition to providing a framework based on a comparative approach, my inquiries are guided by the double-assertion that 1) Louisiana's folklore is the product of a convergence of traditions and that 2) traditional narratives are in a constant state of change. The perpetual action of adaptation of oral narrative corresponds to what Paul Zumthor calls continual "re-creation and variation" (15). It is this ceaseless mutation that

[6] For information on the traditions of the Houma Nation, the reader is encouraged to consult Oradel Nolen Morris' *I Hear the Song of the Houmas* and Brasseaux's *French, Cajun, Creole, Houma* (117-130). For a more recent and broader consideration of the Houma experience, see *Istrouma: A Houma Manifesto/Manifeste houma* by T. Mayheart Dardar, translated by Clint Bruce.

assures a narrative's renewed pertinence to its sociocultural environment and consequently its survival. I am primarily interested in how traditional narratives (i.e. folktales) adapt to new sociocultural environments and the experiences of social groups. Although I do believe that there is a case to be made for recognizing a certain degree of continuity of Louisiana's French and Creole folklore with European and African oral traditions, I will focus on sociocultural phenomena that could be responsible for regional differences in otherwise similar narratives.

Recognizing the cultural influence of France, Africa, and the Caribbean does not imply that one must embark on a quest to trace the lineage of oral narratives to an archetypal source. Such a notion would be reminiscent of the historico-geographic school of folklore in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that "intended to trace the transformations of narratives and episodes over different historical periods, and in remote geographical areas, with the intention of ultimately reconstructing the *Urform*, or prototype, of the narrative sequence" (Neemann 31). In the context of Louisiana, Ancelet has noted that an earlier preoccupation with European and African origins "blurred the image" of Louisiana's oral tradition, adding that "Cajuns and black Creoles have less connection to France and Africa and more connection to North America (where they have spent the last three centuries) than 'purists' like to admit" (1994 xxv). By the same token, Louisiana's evolution and differences from the European and African oral traditions does not discount the merit of evaluating these narrative mutations. A counter-argument might be that Ancelet's assertion discounts the kind of transcontinental comparisons that I advocate here; however, I feel that it is precisely this deep-rooted acclimatization of

folktales to Louisiana's socioculturally hybrid context that warrants more thorough analysis.

Because of Louisiana's inherent cultural hybridity and the multiplicity of influences reflected in the region's oral tradition, it is important to briefly examine here some of the major immigration trends of the past three centuries and their contribution to the cultural and ethnic makeup of Louisiana.

1.2 Cultural Specificity within Louisiana's 'Remarkable Diversity'

Louisiana possesses what is arguably one of the most complex histories of the United States' regions, if not the "most complex in rural North America" (Brasseaux 2005, 2). Over the course of several centuries, what began as a French military outpost and place of exile for the French Republic's undesirables became home to settlers, slaves, refugees, religious exiles, and immigrants from throughout Europe and the Atlantic World. In the first chapter of *French, Cajun, Creole, Houma* (2005), Carl Brasseaux, a leading authority in Louisiana history, recognizes at least eighteen distinct groups of French-speaking immigrants that came to Louisiana since its establishment as a French colony in 1699,

> including the *voyageurs*; the 1699 Canadian settlers; voluntary immigrants of the John Law era; forced immigrants of the early eighteenth century; French military personnel (many of whom opted to remain in the colony); Alsatian religious exiles; Acadian exiles; Saint-Domingue refugees; refugees from the French Revolution; Bonapartist exiles; successive waves of nineteenth-century French (known with Louisiana's Francophone community as *les français étrangers*; Belgian, and Swiss immigrants seeking economic opportunity; French Jews fleeing religious persecution in provinces along the German border; French, Belgian, and Canadian Catholic missionaries; Alsatian and Lorrainer refugees from the 1870 Franco-Prussian War; Lebanese Christian immigrants; twentieth-century French and Belgian war brides; European and French-Canadian teachers in the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana's bilingual programs; and Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian refugees fleeing the communist

> takeover in their homelands. Distinctive subgroups exited within each of these immigrant groups (Brasseaux 2005, 2-3).

Admittedly, over time many of these groups have lost much, or even all, sense of francophone identity. The most prominent cultural labels of Louisiana's francophone communities today are Cajun, Creole, and Native American (most notably Houma). Nevertheless, despite the "remarkable diversity" of Louisiana's French-speaking population, the region's history and cultural makeup have repeatedly fallen victim to the popular media's generalizations, inaccuracies, and stereotypes that often depict a "social and cultural, sometimes even a racial, monolith" (Brasseaux 2005, 1). Rendering an already complicated situation even more opaque, the 'Cajun' and 'Creole' labels seem to have evolved independently of a francophone linguistic identity in the past decades.

Because these terms could lead to confusion in the midst of comparative analyses in the following chapters, it is necessary to briefly consider some of the principal issues related to ethnic or cultural labeling in Louisiana as well as the problematic nature of defining cultural identities in this diverse social context.

1.2.1 Cajun and Creole: The Problem of Ethnicity

There is undoubtedly much debate among scholars and individuals from all areas about the definition, and even the validity, of the term 'Cajun' (Henry 1998 29). It is by no means my intention to resolve any part of this issue here; however, I will approach the subject only in order to avoid any methodological ambiguities arising from the varying usage of 'Cajun' and 'Creole'. Scholarly works on the matter of Cajun identity or Cajun ethnicity abound; however, I will be brief in describing the historicity and inherent problems of the term. The sociologist Jacques Henry gives an accurate account of the popular definition of 'Cajun' saying:

> *Cajun/cadien* is now used to designate the group, language and culture of people assumed to descend from the Acadian exiles who settled in Louisiana after their deportation from Canada in 1755. A key word here is 'assumed' because the definition of *Cajun/cadien* is still a knot of confusion despite a long presence in Louisiana and a surge of commercial and scholarly interest in the past two decades. One issue is unanimously agreed upon: there would have been and there would be no Cajuns if Acadians had not settled in Louisiana between 1765 and 1785. The rest is a matter of debate (Henry 1998 30).

The debate has certainly continued, and perhaps much of the reason for this 'knot of confusion' lies in the oversimplification of historical fact. More specifically, the long and complex history of francophone Louisiana including its colonial past, both French and Spanish, is often ignored in popular debate. Moreover, the French language's existence in Louisiana is often all too simply attributed to the arrival of the Acadians following the expulsion from present-day Nova Scotia by the British in 1755. What is often underemphasized is that Louisiana was a French-speaking region before, during, and after the five waves of Acadian migration to Louisiana beginning in 1764 (Brasseaux 2005 18). Moreover, Brasseaux estimates the total number of Acadian immigrants to Louisiana to be roughly 3,000 in number. Merely in comparison with the Saint-Domingue refugees, who numbered around 11,000 (Brasseaux 2005 22), this figure seems disproportionate to the representation of Acadian immigration to Louisiana in popular media accounts.

From a primarily linguistic perspective, Thomas Klingler and others have questioned the legitimacy of Cajun/*cadien* as a qualifier for the French spoken in Louisiana, in light of the relatively few traits linking 'Cajun French' to the French currently spoken in Acadian communities in Maritime Canada (see Klingler 2009 and Thibault 2012). Klingler states:

> Like many myths of origin, that of the Cajuns makes a compelling narrative, beginning with an idyllic life in Acadia that is disrupted by the tragedy of exile but regained through the founding of a new homeland in Louisiana. Also like many myths of origins, that of the Cajuns, though grossly oversimplified, is rooted in historic events. The obvious relatedness of the labels 'Cajun' and 'Acadian' makes it all the easier to equate the two and appears to legitimate an explanation of Cajun origins that, by obscuring their complexity, is clear and easy to understand. It is the apparent clarity and simplicity of the Acadian-to-Cajun narrative that have led to its becoming a kind of schema for understanding the Cajuns, a ready-made package of knowledge that is so widely accepted that it needs no explaining, but can simply be invoked or, at most, retraced in its broad outlines, whenever needed (Klingler 2009: 95).

Interpretations, of course, vary widely. Cécyle Trépanier distinguishes between four major "French subcultures" that she refers to as "white Creoles," "black Creoles," "French-speaking Indians," and "the descendants of the Acadians" who "integrated into their culture people of such diverse ethnic origins as Italian, Spanish, German and Scots-Irish" (161). According to Trépanier, it is this fourth group that makes up the group presently known as 'Cajuns', although a more accurate representation of contemporary popular opinion would likely show that the 'white Creole' ethnic or cultural identity has largely been absorbed by the 'Cajun' label. Trépanier gives several reasons for what she dubs as the "Cajunization of French Louisiana" including the cultural revival, or Cajun renaissance, beginning in the early 1970s. The period immediately before and following witnessed the founding of the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (1968) and the creation of traditional festivals celebrating the music and culture, and ultimately led to a conflation of francophone identities under the banner of 'Cajun'.

'Cajun' and 'Creole', like the labels of many cultural communities, can be difficult terms to define or justify as race or ethnicity. 'Cajuns' are, as Barry Ancelet states, "strictly speaking, descendants of the Acadians who were exiled from what is now Nova Scotia (formerly Acadie) in 1755" (Ancelet 1977, i). Although the more

conservative definition of 'Cajun' remains important for some, today it is clear that 'Cajun' has taken on a much wider meaning. Brasseaux notes that "French speakers in proximity to the Acadian settlement – even those traditionally hostile to the exiles' descendants – have been lumped together with genuine Acadians under the euphemistic label *Cajun*" (Brasseaux 1987 90). As a result, francophone communities in areas such as Avoyelles and Saint Landry Parishes that may have historically been identified as 'French' or 'Creole' have experienced a shift in cultural identity. Ancelet notes how "families such as the Fuseliers (descendants of Napoleonic troops settled in Evangeline Parish) and the Duplantiers (descendants of aristocratic Creole families) [...] eventually identified with the former exiles from Acadie" (1977, iii). As a consequence of this conflation of identities, 'Cajun' communities have effectively adopted the "compelling narrative" of the *Grand dérangement* as a "myth of origin," to borrow Klingler's terms, forming a new sort of collective history. Cécilia Camoin offers a brief explanation of this complicated and fluctuating status of francophone identity.

> Un amalgame désigne souvent tous les Louisianais francophones sous le nom de *Cadiens*, bien qu'il y ait plusieurs groupes ethniques et linguistiques : les Cadiens, les Créoles noirs, les Créoles blancs, et les Indiens Houmas. Les francophones sont distingués par une généralisation qui veut que tous les Blancs soient des Cadiens et que les Noirs soient des Créoles. [...] Dans ce kaléidoscope francophone, la Louisiane et le français sont les liens géographique et linguistique entre les multiples ethnies, cultures et identités mouvantes (Camoin 2013 12-13)

This evolution in terminology, whereby the use of 'Cajun' as a qualifier for Louisiana's (essentially white) francophone population can be noticed in the titles of the folktale collections used in this corpus. Whereas the early to mid nineteenth-century collections categorically referred to 'Louisiana French' tales, by the 1980s 'Cajun' is more widely used (e.g. Ancelet's 1994 collection, *Cajun and Creole Folktales*). My use of the word

'Cajun' is unavoidably dependent on its use elsewhere in scholarly work. For the purposes of this study, I choose to avoid the term when possible in the interest of clarity and to avoid anachronism. On the occasions where its omission becomes counter-productive, I confine myself to a definition of 'Cajun' whose basic criteria can be described as presumably white Louisiana natives who are French-speaking or are of French-speaking ancestry. This simplistic definition makes no distinction between Acadian and non-Acadian ancestry; however, in the subsequent chapters, I will at times discuss certain regions that were settled predominantly by Acadians, white Creoles, etc.

Not unlike 'Cajun' identity, the precise meaning of 'Creole' remains elusive and highly dependent on temporal, geographical, and disciplinary contexts. "In Louisiana," Gwendolyn Midlo Hall notes, "as well as throughout the Americas, the word *creole* has been redefined over time in response to changes in the social and racial climate" (Hall 1992 157). The word 'Creole' can be quite problematic in that it presents several ambiguities, particularly in the context of South Louisiana. From a historical point of view, the term 'Creole', meaning 'native', was in usage relatively early on in European colonialism to distinguish between the newer immigrants and those of European or African descent who were born in the colony. According to Hall, the origin of the term stems from the Portuguese *crioulo*, referring to a slave of African descent, born in the New World; however, the term's meaning was thereafter extended to include American-born Europeans (Hall 1992 157). Today, the term varies widely in its definition and usage as is noted in the preface of the *Dictionary of Louisiana French, as Spoken in Cajun, Creole, and American Indian Communities* (2010):

> The term [Creole] also came to designate the large mixed-race population of Louisiana, many of whom were Free People of Color (*Gens de couleur libres*);

> the members of this group often owned land and were highly educated and cultured. Although the term was also eventually applied to the Louisiana Creole language, it is important to understand that there is not always clear overlap between those who identify themselves as Creoles ethnically and those who speak Louisiana Creole. While there are whites, blacks, and Creoles of color who self-identify as Creole and who speak that language, there are also many members of each group who call themselves Creole but speak either Louisiana French or no variety of French at all (Valdman et al. xii).

For the purposes of this study, my description of specific tales as 'Louisiana French' or 'Louisiana Creole' tales is primarily a linguistic distinction, depending on the language in which the tale was told or collected. The use of language as a "linking factor" is also suggested by Alan Dundes, who argues that the idea of ethnicity is not always the most accurate or efficient means of recognizing the element of "folk" in "folk narrative." According to Dundes, "'folk' can refer to *any group of people whatsoever* who share at least one common factor," citing language as a possible criterion (Dundes 1989 "Defining" 11).

As mentioned above, part of the present study's contribution to the field of Louisiana folklore lies in the fact that much of the scholarly work on the region's oral tradition has been marked by a preoccupation with collection. Because these collections constitute much of the primary source material for subsequent analysis, a brief overview of some of the major works will be useful at this point.

1.3 Folklore Studies in Louisiana

Alcée Fortier's collections of black Creole tales of New Orleans and the River Parishes represent the beginning of scholarly interest in Louisiana's oral tradition. His *Louisiana Folktales* (1895) includes many animal tales displaying strong African and Caribbean influences, of which he makes mention in this work's introduction (Fortier xvii). Alcée Fortier was a fervent defender of the French language in Louisiana and was

also an active scholar in French and Romance languages, education, linguistics, and folklore as a professor at Tulane University in New Orleans.[7] As a linguist, Fortier was one of the first to take serious interest in the origins and morphology of Louisiana Creole. Alfred Mercier (1816-1894) was also committed to serious study of the Louisiana Creole language and authored *Étude sur la langue créole en Louisiane* (1880). One year later, Mercier published *L'habitation Saint-Ybars; ou, Maîtres et esclaves en Louisiane, récit social* (1881) in which folklife and folktales occupy an important place in the depiction of the complex race and social relations of antebellum Creole Louisiana.

It was not until some three decades later that Corinne Saucier, a native of Avoyelles Parish, wrote her Master's thesis on traditional songs and folktales of French Louisiana.[8] Saucier went on to write her doctoral dissertation directed by Luc Lacourcière at Université Laval, where as Ancelet notes, "there was considerable interest in the Louisiana French situation because of Québec's stake in the survival of the French language and culture in North America" (Ancelet 1994 xxvi). My corpus includes a number of tales from Saucier's *Folk Tales from French Louisiana*, published in 1972. Calvin Claudel, also from Avoyelles Parish, published numerous articles on Louisiana folktales after completing his dissertation in 1948 at the University of North Carolina, as well as a collection entitled *Fools and Rascals: Louisiana Folktales* (1979), from which several tales will be analyzed later. Elizabeth Brandon, another student of Luc

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[7] Fortier also presided over numerous prestigious organizations, including the Athénée Louisianais, the Public School Alliance of New Orleans, the New Orleans Folklore Society (a branch of the American Folklore Society), the Fédération de l'Alliance Française aux États-Unis et Canada, the Louisiana Historical Society, and the Modern Language Association (Desmond vii)

[8] "Contes et chansons louisianais en dialecte français avec notes linguistiques". M.A. Thesis. George Peabody College. 1923.

Lacourcière, also completed a dissertation at Laval on Louisiana folklore, "La Paroisse Vermilion: Mœurs, dictons, contes et légendes" (1955).[9] In more recent years, Barry Ancelet's *Cajun and Creole Folktales: The French Oral Tradition of South Louisiana*, published in 1994, is the result of many years of collecting and includes a number of tales found in his Master's thesis (1977) and doctoral dissertation (1984). Ancelet's 1994 collection is the most extensive of its kind and features brief passages before each tale, discussing tale types, motifs, and relevant variants elsewhere in French and Creole oral traditions. Unlike some of his predecessors who were exclusively interested in folktales, Ancelet proposes a wider definition of oral tradition and includes jokes, oral history, and competitive lying tales.[10] A more recent and larger work title *Swapping Stories: Folktales from Louisiana* directed by Carl Lindahl, Maida Owens, and C. Renée Harvison offers an impressive sampling of folktales from Cajun, Creole, Native American, and other communities.

Most, if not all, scholars who have written on the subject have remarked on French and African influences on the French and Creole folktales of Louisiana. Calvin Claudel, in his collection *Fools and Rascals* published in 1979, made a clear distinction between the folklore of two French groups: the French who immigrated to Louisiana in the early eighteenth century and the Acadians, who arrived later in the same century (1).

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[9] I have chosen to mention particularly the folklorists whose collections have been used in establishing the present corpus. For more information about other ethnologists and activists involved in French and Creole Louisiana in the twentieth-century, see Ancelet 1997 (pp. 351-359).

[10] Ancelet notes that the Americanization of Louisiana's educational system made it difficult to study its French language and heritage; as a result, Saucier, Claudel, Brandon, "were all forced to leave Louisiana to study its French culture" (Ancelet 1994 xxvi). He himself was no exception to this reality, having completed his Master's thesis and doctoral dissertation at Indiana University and Université d'Aix-Marseille respectively.

He remarks that the latter group, although having arrived relatively late, possessed a folklore that "harked back to an earlier French tradition, since they had settled Acadia around the beginning of the seventeenth century" (Claudel 1). Claudel goes on to mention the strong presence of African stories and vestiges of Spanish tales among the *isleño* communities of Louisiana. However, he also mentions towns such as Marksville, Louisiana whose folklore exhibits characters and other elements from all of these sources. Likewise, Alcée Fortier acknowledges the West African roots in much of the folklore and songs in his 1895 collection.

1.3.1 Louisiana in 'American' Folklore

In the 1970s, the field of folklore began to gain impetus as an academic discipline in the United States. American folklorists, such as Richard Dorson and Alan Dundes, began to take the forefront in the field of folklore in the mid- to late-twentieth century; however, French and Creole Louisiana did not seem to occupy an important place in 'American folklore' right away. Aside from regional publications like *Louisiana Folklore Miscellany*, Louisiana's relatively late arrival to scholarly debate in folkloristics was likely due to linguistic barriers rather than genuine academic disinterest. Nonetheless, in Dorson's seminal work, *American Folklore*, there is no mention of the Cajuns or Creoles of Louisiana. His chapter on "Colonial Folklore," acknowledges only the British colonies and his treatment of "Negro" folklore makes no mention of French- or Creole-speaking people of color (Dorson 1959 7-38 and 166-198). Likewise, Lawrence Levine makes only brief mention of Louisiana Creole folklore in his influential chapter on "The Meaning of Slave Tales," in *Black Culture, Black Consciousness* (81-135). Louisiana French folklore was however mentioned in Dorson's later work in 1964, *Buying the Wind: Regional*

Folklore in the United States, perhaps marking a gained interest among folklore scholars outside of the region.

Louisiana folklore studies having been placed within the broader field of American folkloristics, an explanation can now be given of how the corpus of folktales used in this study was constructed before proceeding to a discussion of the methodological approach and the major theoretical underpinnings that have guided me in my interpretations.

1.4 Concerning the Corpus of the Study

The corpus of folktales used in this study was assembled from a variety of sources, both archival and published. As will be explored in more detail below, folktales originating from certain key regions with historical and cultural ties to Louisiana were gathered to form a coherent set of analogues for cross-regional comparison. Many of the sound recordings of French variants were found in the UPCP-Métive/CERDO archives in Parthenay as well as in the Fonds Michel Valière at the Université de Poitiers. A number of Acadian variants were collected in the Centre d'études acadiennes Anselme Chiasson at the Université de Moncton. All of the sound recordings from the Louisiana portion of the corpus were taken from the Center for Cajun and Creole Folklore (Center for Louisiana Studies) at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. In the following three subsections, I will explain the reasoning, method, and limitations of the study's corpus.

1.4.1 Limitations of the Corpus

At this point, it is necessary to more clearly define certain recurring terms that often carry various definitions and connotations. My frequent employment of the term *folklore* in the following chapters is taken to be more or less synonymous with the notion

of *oral tradition* or *oral literature* (see Valière 71-80); however, I am aware that some folklorists envisage a much wider definition of the term, implying a set of folklore knowledge or *Volkskunde* (Dorson 1959 2). According to Alan Dundes, "folklore includes myths, folktales, legends, proverbs, riddles, folk beliefs, costume, folk medicine, traditional foods, folk speech, charms, curses, games, folk music, folk dances, etc." (Dundes 1989 "Defining" 9). This larger sense of the word rings truer to its etymological origins. Paul Zumthor (1915-1995) reminds us that "the term '*folklore*' coined in 1846 by W.J. Thoms from the *folk*, or people, and their *lore*, or knowledge, referred to a set of customs; still it allowed the sense of *Volksgeist, Volkspoesie, Volkslied* (spirit, poetry, folk song) to pass into English and later into French" (Zumthor 1990 13). Although I recognize oral tradition as an integral part of the aforementioned customs and vernacular knowledge, in this study my use of *folklore* does not extend to a wide-ranging understanding of cultural manifestations (i.e. dance, clothing, cuisine), but is restricted to 'oral tradition' or 'traditional narrative'.

Within this more limited scope of folklore, I have chosen to focus here on the folktale, or *conte populaire*. My conception of *conte* is in line with the definition offered by Michèle Simonsen, who states that "[l]e conte est donc un récit *en prose* d'événements *fictifs* et donnés pour tels, fait dans un but de *divertissement*" (14). In addition, much like Paul Zumthor's vision of "traditional poetry" the *conte populaire* represents a narrative that is "not only received but also digested by a vast public through a continuous and lengthy process of re-creation and variation" (Zumthor 1990 15). Such an understanding of the *conte populaire* would imply various genres of folktales, including animal tales, magic tales, lying tales, among others.

Therefore, I do not consider the term *conte populaire* to embrace only the archetypal genre known as *Märchen*, *contes merveilleux*, fairy tales, or magic tales. On the contrary, the general exclusion of the *contes merveilleux* in this corpus may be surprising as these have arguably been the primary preoccupation of many foundational works on the folktale, particularly those of Vladimir Propp. There are certainly a number of scholars, like Marie-Louise Tenèze, who view these as "les contes par excellence" (Belmont 1966 117). Two reasons have dissuaded me from including *le conte merveilleux* in this corpus. Firstly, fairy tales are not particularly prevalent in the French and Creole folklore of twentieth-century Louisiana, or at least the genre has seen a sharp decline. Ancelet presents several hypotheses to explain the attrition of magic tales, including electronic-based entertainment, failure to transmit French or Creole to children (the principal audience of such tales), and their demanding nature for the storyteller (e.g. memory, time, vocabulary, etc.). Moreover, Ancelet suspects some tales collected by Louisiana folklorists to be "only fragments" of "what were undoubtedly longer tales," adding that these fragments "resurface only with much probing, as storytellers dutifully search through their memories on request to find even a trace of this fading part of the oral tradition" (Ancelet 1994 xxxi). Secondly, among the magic tales collected by Fortier, Brandon, Ancelet, and others, one finds relatively few distinguishing features vis-à-vis their European counterparts, thus making a comparative analysis a less fruitful enterprise.

The wide variety of tale types and differing definitions of what constitutes a *conte* render the construction of a coherent body of tales for comparative analysis more difficult.

1.4.2 Assembling the Corpus

In order to compile a corpus that reflects the demographic, historical, and cultural makeup of French and Creole Louisiana, I have looked toward the oral traditions of several key regions with which I feel comparative analyses prove to be particularly fruitful: Western France (notably the Poitou-Charentes-Vendée region), Acadian communities of Maritime Canada, and West Africa (particularly the Senegambia region). The cultural connections between these regions are evidenced by considerable similarities in their oral traditions.[11]

Ties between Louisiana and Western France are apparent on several levels, and there are historical reasons for this. Brasseaux refers to La Rochelle and Rochefort during the colonial period as "Louisiana's civilian and military lifelines to France" (Brasseaux 2005 17). During the post-proprietary period (1731-63), a considerable number of former soldiers and mercenaries decided to remain in the colony; Brasseaux goes on to note that out of 819 French colonial soldiers whose birthplace is known, "71 percent of these troops were drawn from just nine provinces forming a large crescent from the Italian border through Paris to the English Channel, following the Atlantic Coast to the Bay of Biscay, moving inland in the Bordeaux region, and ending at the western border of Languedoc" and that the majority of military administrators came from this same geographical crescent (2005 16).

The some 3,000 Acadian exiles that arrived in Louisiana between 1764 and 1788 represent an even more homogenous group, with strong ties to Centre-Ouest region France. Brasseaux finds:

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[11] See appendix C for a corpus map and information regarding the archival resources used for the study.

> The exiles shared unusually resilient bonds of language, kinship, and culture, all products of their historical background. Perhaps 70 percent of the original Acadian settlers were drawn in the 1630s from a single estate in northwestern Poitou Province. The Poitou emigrants, who had intermarried for generations before the onset of Acadian colonization, had easily absorbed through intermarriage the French immigrants who trickled into the colony in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By dint of intermarriage the Acadian Community had become, as one observer cogently described it, a single large, highly cohesive clan (Brasseaux 2005 17).

Similarities with the dialects of Western France, notably Poitevin-Sainteongeais, are also present on a lexical level in Louisiana French (Rézeau 1997 315-332) and Maritime Canada (Jagueneau and Péronnet 2010 133-152). The linguistic similarities found in Western France, Acadia, and Louisiana are reflected in their oral traditions, which demonstrate a considerable amount of common repertoire, including the Jean-le-Sot tales analyzed in the second chapter.

Regarding West Africa, Gwendolyn Midlo Hall states "two-thirds of the slaves brought to Louisiana by the French slave trade came from Senegambia" which "remained an important source of the slaves brought to Louisiana throughout the eighteenth century" (Hall 1992 29 and 31). Moreover, Senegambia has been considered to be "a region of homogeneous culture and a common style of history" in part because the Sereer, Wolof, and Pulaar are closely related (Curtin 6, in Hall 1992 29). The formation of Afro-Creole culture in the colony was largely due to the similar proportions of particular African nations and conditions in Africa and Louisiana (Hall 1992 31). The resulting "cultural homogeneity of these Africans" seems to have remained intact for some time, as Brasseaux suggests that it "facilitated the emergence of a black Creole society in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries" (Brasseaux 2005 12). The vestiges of Senegambian and West African culture contributed to the prevalence of the Afro-

Caribbean style animal tales collected by Alcée Fortier, and can be seen more concretely in the survival of the Wolof *bouki*, or 'hyena', in the hyena and hare tales.[12]

1.4.3 The Complexity of Language within the Corpus

Having already briefly mentioned the complexity of Louisiana's francophone immigration over the seventeenth- through twentieth centuries, one can begin to imagine the diversity in origins of Louisiana French, or more commonly called today, 'Cajun French' or '*français cadien*'. The authors of the *Dictionary of Louisiana French* point to three major waves of immigration that have most contributed to the French spoken in Louisiana. Firstly, during the French colonial period (1699–1762) immigrants from various regions in France as well as Quebec contributed a variety of dialectal features to the language. The authors of the *Dictionary of Louisiana French* go on:

> A second significant wave of francophone immigration occurred between 1764 and 1785, when the Spanish authorities, who had assumed control of the colony in 1762, welcomed approximately 3,000 Acadian exiles after their expulsion from their homeland in present-day Nova Scotia by the British in 1755. The Acadians brought with them their own variety of French, which had strong roots in the dialects of western France (Valdman et al. xii).

Finally, as will be discussed more in detail in the next chapter, thousands of francophones from Saint-Domingue and France came to Louisiana in the latter part of the nineteenth century, drawn to the region's growing plantation economy. It is believed that the "Plantation Society" French spoken by these new immigrants would have resembled what one might call Standard French, although this variety is hardly present in Louisiana today (Valdman et al, xii).

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[12] For more information regarding Senegambia's influence on Creole Louisiana, see Matar Gaye's doctoral dissertation *La Sénégambie et son influence sur la Louisiane créole* (2006).

As Michael Picone points out, many scholars today see the danger in attempting to draw clear boundaries between Louisiana French, or Cajun French, and Louisiana Creole, opting instead for a sort of linguistic continuum (Picone 121), wherein Standard French and Louisiana Creole represent "two idealized speech norms" (Klinger and Valdman 1997 109). Louisiana Creole developed in the eighteenth century, and "has ties to the linguistic codes that became prevalent in other plantocratic societies, for example, preposed particles to indicate tense and aspect of verbs and the use of postposed determiners with nouns" (Marshall 333). Furthermore, Louisiana Creole is found in three "relatively isolated areas," including the former Acadian and German Coasts in the east, between New Orleans and Baton Rouge; to the north, in Pointe Coupée Parish; and the Bayou Teche region in Saint Martin Parish (Klingler and Valdman 110).

One salient trait shared by the French and Creole language varieties of Louisiana - with the exception of Standard French taught in formal settings - is that they were largely transmitted orally throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The importance of orality has been taken into account in the methodological approach for this work.

1.5 Methodology

The interdisciplinary nature of the present study requires the implementation of a theoretical framework that takes this aspect into account. In the following subsections, I will discuss the theoretical underpinnings of the method used for this study. This approach places a heavy emphasis on understanding the nature of orality and traditional oral narrative and therefore draws from the writings of Walter Ong, Ruth Finnegan, and Paul Zumthor. I will discuss natural mutations in traditional narrative from a narratological point of view and will argue that the natural tendency of oral narrative to

adapt to its given social context over time can be likened to the property of 'narration' and its influence on the 'story' and 'discourse' of narrative. This assertion has led me to suggest a new term, *prisming*, which I will explain in some detail below.

1.5.1 Orality and Oral Narrative

It is important to remember that the time period during which the present corpus was collected, roughly 1890 to 1980, the French-speaking communities of Louisiana out of which these tales issued were primarily rural areas. More importantly, the varieties of Louisiana French and Creole, like the tales they convey, were transmitted orally. Since much of our discussion of the phenomena related to oral tradition hinges on the nature of oral transmission and its effect on the reproduction and diffusion of folk narratives, it will be useful to reiterate here some foundational theories of orality.

In the schema laid out by Zumthor, oral performance consists of five phases: production, transmission, reception, storage, and repetition. In a written society, each of the five operations (and any combination thereof) can be realized either through what Walter Ong refers to as the *oral-aural path* or through writing. After identifying these five phases, Zumthor is able to differentiate between oral *transmission*, comprised of phases 2 and 3, and oral *tradition*, consisting of operation 1, 4, and 5 (23). Since our corpus is made up of textual transcriptions and sound recordings, we are primarily concerned with adaptations within the oral tradition of Louisiana, resulting in part from variations in the oral transmission of its content (i.e. folktales). In the following paragraphs, I will demonstrate how French and Creole Louisiana constitute an oral culture and what the implications of this assessment are with regard to folklore.

In *Oral Poetry: An Introduction* (1990),[13] Zumthor classifies the myriad levels of written and oral cultures into what he refers to as "four ideal categories" (25). *Primary* or *pure orality* designates a context where no notion of writing exists and, as the author notes, this level of orality is arguably nonexistent today. Orality can coexist with writing, which would either result in *mixed orality*, implying "the influence of the written remains external to it," or as a *secondary orality*, "one that is (re)composed based on writing and that is central to a milieu where writing determines the values of voice both in usage and in the imaginary sphere" (Zumthor 1990 25). Finally, Zumthor recognizes the existence of a *mechanically mediatized orality,* "one that is thereby deferred in time and/or space" (25).

By taking these four degrees of orality as a point of departure, it is clear that French and Creole Louisiana proves to be a complicated case study. For lack of clear census figures or comprehensive linguistic data, it can generally be said that a large majority of native speakers of Louisiana French and Creole have acquired the language orally from members of their family or community; at the same time, most adult native speakers of the twentieth century have also had, to varying degrees, access to elementary and/or secondary education. For the most part, however, French lost its status as a language of instruction in Louisiana following the Civil War. As the twentieth century progressed, Anglicization took a stronger foothold eventually leading to the widespread stigmatization of French in light of the English-only legislation of the 1921 constitution. Michael Picone describes the state constitution of 1921 as the culmination of "a conscious initiative aimed at the Anglicization of Louisiana" forbidding the use of "any

[13] Translation by Kathryn Murphy-Judy of Zumthor's original text. *Introduction à la poésie orale*. Paris: Seuil, 1983.

language other than English for instructional purposes" (Picone 123). This legislation, which passed just five years after public instruction became compulsory, has perhaps had the most devastating effect on Louisiana French and Creole and will be discussed more at length below.

For the above reasons, much of French- and Creole-speaking Louisiana experienced a situation of diglossia throughout the twentieth century. Therefore, I would argue that such a linguistic environment would straddle the categories of mixed and secondary orality. More precisely, it could be said that much of francophone Louisiana could be of mixed (or even pure orality) with regard to French and/or Creole yet closer to secondary orality in English. Nevertheless, the folklore repertoire of French and Creole Louisiana is the result of an oral tradition that has been maintained and adjusted over a much longer period of time. This tradition stands as a vestige of popular culture separate from any formal English-language instruction. According to Zumthor, "it is not productive to think about orality in a negative fashion, by contrasting it with writing. *Orality does not mean illiteracy*, nor should it be perceived as a lack, stripped of the values inherent to voice and of all positive social functions" (Zumthor 1990 17).[14]

1.5.2 False Reiterability

I have argued above for an understanding of French and Creole Louisiana that, according to the criteria of Zumthor, frames the region and culture as a society of *mixed* or *secondary orality*. Consequently, the oral tradition born and perpetuated within this culture is not only subject to change, but is even bound to it, insofar as it survives. Zumthor refers to this phenomenon as *false reiterability* and claims that it "constitutes the

[14] Emphasis my own.

principal feature of oral poetry," and goes so far as to say that it "determines the preservation of oral poetry" (Zumthor 196). This preservation can be effectuated in one of two ways: *archiving* or *memorization.* While archiving (sound, audiovisual recording, etc.) interrupts the currency of orality at a particular presentation of the work that could only inspire others to reproduce others version based on that specific presentation, memorization necessitates an internalizing of the narrative. This latter mode of preservation remained the most practical among oral and graphemic societies before the reign of the written word, as was the case of Europe until the late nineteenth century (Zumthor 1990 197), although one could certainly argue that memorization as a means preservation of traditional narrative persists even to the present day in francophone Louisiana.

Memorization gives way to variation in a tale's future performances and also brings to traditional narrative an element of timelessness. In other words, a tale may have lived for a very long time before being attested in a written text, thus becoming for a folklorist the oldest attested version of a tale, but by no means the oldest version of the tale (Simonsen 19). The inherent paradox of memory's role in oral culture is that as long as it can offer conservation, it guarantees change along with it. Walter Ong (1921-2003) notes that in primary oral cultures, "narrative serves to bond more massively and more permanently than other genres" (141). Earlier in the same text, Ong draws our attention to the Hebrew term *dabar*, meaning both 'word' and 'event', and mentions this fact's applicability to cultures in or not far removed from a state of pure orality (Ong 32).

Why does memorization and oral transmission leave traditional narrative so susceptible to change and regional variation? Is it the nature of oral performance,

evanescent and resilient, instantaneous yet intangible that is responsible? Or is it perhaps the simple fallibility of the human memory? It is perhaps a combination of these elements, according to Nicole Belmont, who states: “la mémoire défectueuse, lacunaire, parsemée de trous d’ombre, ne fonctionne pas de façon arbitraire. Elle garde et parfois reconstruit les figurations essentielles pour l’auditeur” (Belmont 1999 13). For the present study, the notion that traditional narratives change over time lies at the heart of our justification for comparative analyses between French and Creole Louisiana tales and their source counterparts. The question of transmission becomes, therefore, primordial. Contrary to written literature, which can exist for centuries before being rediscovered by future generations, oral literature must be unfailingly relayed to new listeners and potentially new storytellers. In her influential text *Oral Poetry,* first published in 1977, Ruth Finnegan affirms that

> the question of how oral literature reaches its patrons can never be a mere secondary matter; for its very existence depends on its realisation through verbal delivery. Certain forms can perhaps be said to be retained purely in someone’s mind, through memorisation, but there must be some opportunity for him to pass this on through verbal recitation: otherwise the piece loses its existence and dies with him (Finnegan 1992 134).

If a narrative’s survival can be ensured by the preservation of memory, the same cannot be said of its identical reproduction. Zumthor offers several possibilities for diachronic variation of melody that he argues can also be applied to discourse. Of these, two seem to be particularly pertinent to our study. Variation will occur in order to:

> 1) modify the work to fit the context of a particular performance;
> 2) “level off semantic difficulties brought out by the text, especially for an ancient tradition: archaic words, ambiguities stemming from the disappearance of defunct cultural context, the apparent arbitrariness of proper names” (Zumthor 206).

In the case of narrative, this instability is projected on the structures of the tales and "from this comes the additions, subtractions, displacements of episodes or characters" (207). It is likely these very variations that have prompted diverse angles of analysis of folklore among specialists in various disciplines for over a century.

1.5.3 On Narrative Fiction

Arguably, much of the foundational scholarship on folktales, beginning with Propp and continuing with Aarne and Thompson, has been marked by a preoccupation with form and the ability to categorize and classify genres, narratives, motifs, and functions. In this study, I concentrate less on form in my analyses and focus especially on representations of characters, or figures. Moreover, much of my analytical approach is based on the study of narrative fiction, or narratology. As I feel that the heavy focus on form and classification would be inadequate in my treatment of the trickster, fool, and thief figures, I will focus on what I consider to be semiotic shifts in the representations of these three figures.

Although it is often considered as a separate genre from 'literature', I argue that the folktale – at the crossroads of oral tradition, popular culture, legend, and literature - can more aptly be considered as 'narrative fiction'. The definition offered by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan supports this argument as she describes narrative fiction as "the narration of a succession of fictional events" (2). She goes on:

> To begin with, the term *narration* suggests (1) a *communication* process in which the narrative as message is transmitted by addresser to addressee and (2) the *verbal* nature of the medium used to transmit the message. It is this that distinguishes narrative fiction from narratives in other media, such as film, dance, or pantomime (2).

In this sense, we can approach an analytical interpretation of the folktale following Todorov's basic principal of '*histoire*', '*récit*', and '*narration*', which I translate as 'story', 'discourse', and 'narration'. The 'story' can be described as "the narrated events, abstracted from their disposition in the text and reconstructed in their chronological order, together with the participants in these events" (Rimmon-Kenan 3). Although Rimmon-Kenan and other literary scholars have translated '*récit*' as 'text', I prefer the term 'discourse' or 'narrative' as these terms prove less problematic with regard to the (often unclear) distinction between the oral performance and written renderings of folktales. The passage from orality to written form, as well as the process of adaptation of folktales into an altered 'literary' form is a complex issue that I will not treat here (see Simonsen 19-27, Da Cunha 17-111, Valière 2006 71-79). Moreover, I have made every effort to exclude such transliterations from this study, thereby restricting the corpus to sound recordings and/or their transcriptions taken from archival sources, and other tales collected by folklorists who, more often than not, give credit to the informant. For the purposes of my analyses, 'discourse' could thus apply simultaneously to a sound recording and its accompanying transcription. In this way, my understanding of 'discourse' as '*récit*' is supported by Genette's definition: "*récit* désigne l'énoncé narratif, le discours oral ou écrit qui assume la relation d'un événement ou d'une série d'événements" (Genette 1972 71). The narration of tales can play an important role in distinguishing differing portrayals of characters within the framework of a similar 'discourse' or 'story'. In other words, amid the narrated events, the storyteller can give us insight into how a character should be perceived by the audience. Should he or she be feared, pitied, admired, or emulated?

Rather than attempting to trace the evolution of tales, I focus on the variability of characters' representations and the relationship between characterization and discourse. Many of the discrepancies in how characters are portrayed across regions are directly related to cultural factors near the tale's source. For this reason, it will be useful to discuss early methods in folkloristics while highlighting the differences in the approach that I propose here.

1.5.4 Distribution of Folktales

For the most part, nineteenth-century folklore scholars were preoccupied with the notion of *origins*. Early folklorists, puzzled by the existence of similar narratives found across the globe, began to develop theories in an effort aiming to explain this mystery. While some scholars proposed the idea of a unique source of folktales, or *Urform*, from which they would have traveled progressively to the rest of the world, others suggested the existence of several places that birthed oral narrative independently from one another (Simonsen 44, Neeman 31). Finnegan offers an overview of early approaches to the study of oral poetry and folklore in which she identifies "romantic and evolutionist theories," "the Finnish historical-geographical approach," "controversies in the sociology of literature", and "the relationship between society and mode of communication" (30). The 'romantic' need to establish definitive origins of folktales, be it for nationalistic or mythological reasons, was rooted in the evolutionary movement of which the theories of Charles Darwin acted as catalyst. Propp testifies to this manner of approach by saying that "[l]e folkloriste, tout comme le naturaliste, s'occupe des genres et des espèces de phénomènes identiques par essence. La question de l'origine des espèces posée par Darwin peut être posée aussi dans notre domaine" (Propp 172).

Early folklore theories placed a primary emphasis on the question of origins, although modern folkloristics generally treads very carefully on this slippery issue. For example, the Indo-European or mythic theory, developed by Max Müller and made popular in France by Hyacinthe Husson with *La chaîne traditionnelle*, was later debunked and even ridiculed by subsequent scholars (Simonsen 44-45, Dorson "Eclipse" 57). Scholarly interest in the folktale and its distribution across the continents continued to lead to the distinction between *tale type* and *variant*, or *version* made by the Finnish school, spearheaded by Kaarle Krohn and Annti Aarne. Michèle Simonsen notes that one of the main goals of the Finnish school,[15] was the reconstitution of a given tale's *archetype*, or the original form of the tale (Simonsen 41). Moreover, Simonsen describes the Finnish school as "partisans convaincus de la *monogenèse* des contes," implying that, for them, each tale was created in a specific place and spread out from there (42). The existence or utility of such an archetypal form is questionable at best in modern folkloristics and is not the subject of the present study. Folklorists and ethnologists have since recognized abundant commonalities of motifs and narrative structures found in practically every oral tradition, like Paul Delarue's notion of a certain *fonds universel*, elaborated in the preface to *Le conte populaire français* (Delarue 7). Although few modern scholars of folklore support the notion of monogenesis today, Krohn's notion of adaptation of tales introduced into other regions is nevertheless in line with our analytical approach. Simonsen summarizes this notion:

> Ils [folklorists] estimaient que les contes peuvent se transmettre de façon stable, sans transformations importantes, pendant des durées même très longues, tant qu'ils passent de génération en génération *dans la même région.* Dès qu'ils

[15] Simonsen refers to Annti Aarne's *Leitfaden der vergleichenden Märchenforschung*, Helsinki, 1913, and Kaarle Krohn's *Die folkloristische Arbeitsmetode*, Helsinki, 1926.

> émigrent vers d'autres régions, ils se tranforment [sic] pour s'adapter au nouveau contexte culturel (42).

The idea that such transformations occur is certainly shared and explored by many ethnologists (Delarue 44-46, Valière 2006 7-21). In order to understand differing moral implications by narratives that are otherwise similar on a structural level, I prefer to think of narrative as passing through a cultural filter, of sorts. At least on some level, however, 'filtering' implies reduction or omission, which is not always the case in oral narrative. For this reason, I would propose a new term, *prisming*, which I feel is more accurate.

1.5.5 Prisming and Localization

Because my primary goal here is to carry out close readings and comparative analyses of Louisiana and source variants of folktales that are very similar with regard to narrative structure and characterization, I refer to instances of adaptation to fit a given sociocultural context as examples of prisming. As will become clearer by way of example in the subsequent chapters, prisming is a property of narration, or the act of telling. Prisming applies particularly to the moral perspective, heavily influenced by culture, from which characters and actions are portrayed. Just as in real life, actions can be perceived as moral or immoral, depending on one's perspective.

Physics tells us that light slows down while passing from the air through the glass of a dispersive prism only to regain speed upon exiting the glass. If the light enters the glass at an angle, the light is bent as it travels through the prism to the opposite side of the glass, where it is bent once more before exiting the prism (Twyman 122). Snell's Law and the optical principles governing this physical phenomenon can be likened to the narrative mechanisms at work during oral performance of traditional narrative.

Just as a dispersive prism redirects light, breaking it up into its spectral components, the performative space created by the storyteller and influenced by his or her own cultural experience, creates a temporal and discursive window through which the narrative passes. I suggest that it is precisely for this reason that, despite similar plot-structures, characters can be cast as heroic or diabolic. This phenomenon will be demonstrated in the following chapter, wherein the reader will see how the trickster figure is portrayed as one to be feared or avoided in the African tradition, yet admired and emulated in French and Creole Louisiana.

On a different level, but still in relation to narrative adaptation, I propose the term *localization* to qualify elements considered to be mutations of a smaller, non-structural, order. An example of localization can be found in certain North American variants of Jean l'Ours, where one finds a rich man instead of a king, as would be typical in most European versions. Another illustration of this concept, to be analyzed more in depth in the second chapter, can be found in two nearly identical tales, "Le rata," found in Eric Nowak's collection of tales from Poitou, and "Jean Sot à l'école" collected in Carencro, Louisiana by Barry Ancelet (Nowak 2011 60-61, Ancelet 1994 82). In each tale, a young boy seems to have forgotten his mother tongue after being away at school, until he steps on a rake causing him to instinctively let out a burst of expletives in his vernacular language. Whereas the boy in the Poitou variant pretends to forget his patois while studying in Paris, the child in the Louisiana variant has studied English at school. The presence of the rake and the narrative structure can be considered as stable elements although the language (English) and the place (a nearby school) have been *localized* to reflect the reality of Louisiana. In this sense, localization is akin to Zumthor's second

point regarding variation in that it serves to "level off semantic difficulties" in the narrative and compensates for the "disappearance of defunct cultural context" (Zumthor 206). Therefore, whereas localization applies to the substitution of objects or spaces to correspond with a given context, prisming manifests itself, through narration, as an over-arching, moral coloring of the narrative.

Although my analyses are not primarily concerned with form or identifying structural elements of folktales, I do refer to some of the foundational theories of morphological folktale analysis, and it will be useful to review them briefly here.

1.5.6 Approaches in Morphological Folktale Analysis

Vladimir Propp has been considered a "pioneer" in folklore analysis (Da Cunha 2004 137). From the preface of his *Morphology of the Folktale*, it is apparent that Propp views the folktale as a living entity capable of variation. Propp clearly states his intentions of analyzing Russian folklore in saying, "le mot *morphologie* signifie l'étude des formes. En botanique, la morphologie comprend l'étude des parties constitutives d'une plante, de leur rapport les unes aux autres et à l'ensemble; autrement dit, l'étude de la structure d'une plante" (6).

Vladimir Propp's analyses of Russian folktales presented in his *Morphologie du conte*, although much contested since, have arguably laid much of the groundwork for folktale analysis in modern folklore studies. Although Propp was later criticized by Todorov for stopping short in his analyses, other scholars, notably Claude Bremond and Alan Dundes, tested and built upon the groundwork created by Propp (Todorov 1971 and 1978). One the principal tenets of *Morphologie du conte* is that there are various *functions*, of which Propp identifies thirty-one. By function, Propp means "l'action d'un

personnage, définie du point de vue de sa signification dans le déroulement de l'intrigue" (31). According to Propp, although each function may not occur in a given narrative, those functions that do occur will take place in a certain order. What is more pertinent in this study's analyses is Propp's interpretation of character and action.

For Propp, the true semiotic value of character is found in their *actions*: "Dans l'étude du conte, la question de savoir *ce que* font les personnages est seule importante; *qui* fait quelque chose et *comment* il le fait, sont des questions qui ne se posent qu'accessoirement" (29). Moreover, rather than full semiological roles according to characters, Propp conceives seven possible roles: the villain, the donor, the helper, the sought-for-person and her father, the dispatcher, the hero and the false hero (Propp 102-105, Rimmon-Kenan 34). According to Propp's vision of characterization, there is a distinction between character and role. Therefore, a single character or *personnage* can fulfill one or multiple roles in a given narrative. It is interesting to note that despite Propp's specific focus on Russian folktales, his work does seem to highlight, even if inadvertently so, broader commonalities across cultures. The notion of universality of narrative structure, or narratological grammar as Todorov will later argue, was continued by A.-J. Greimas, but only after Propp's notion of *function* was questioned and elaborated by Alan Dundes. Although fundamental elements of Propp's theories were soon thereafter denied by his successors, he affirms the existence of thirty-one *functions* that appear always in a certain order in the Russian folklore tradition (Simonsen 52).[16]

The American folklorist Alan Dundes did agree with Propp on a fundamental level, but nuanced the notion of *function* in his morphological study of American Indian

[16] Simonsen notes Claude Bremond in particular who challenges Propp's notion of *function* in *Logique du récit.* Paris: Seuil, 1973.

folktales. Dundes re-designates the basic concept of Propp's function as *motifeme*, while the various forms in which they manifest themselves are called *allomotifs*. In the fourth chapter of *Morphology of Folktales*, Dundes recognizes eight motifemes, which we will discuss in more detail in the subsequent chapters, divided into four pairs: 1) lack and lack liquidated, 2) interdiction and violation, 3) task and task accomplished, and 4) deceit and deception (75). While motifemes are morphological elements, allomotifs are of a thematic nature and of less interest in our analyses (Dundes 1964 61-84, Simonsen 55).

In addition to analyses of structural aspects of folktales, a number of historical events and their effects on cultural identity and collective experience are taken into account in my interpretations of Louisiana folklore.

1.6 Laisser les bons temps se dérouler: 'Unraveling' History

Frequently heard, even cliché, expressions such "*Laissez les bons temps rouler*" and the notion of *joie de vivre* associated with South Louisiana in popular media and tourism offer an image of South Louisiana as laid back, pleasant, and perhaps bordering on the exotic. With regard to the popularization of Cajun culture, Jacques Henry goes so far as to speak of the acceptance and promotion of an "ethnic lifestyle" that has "largely been limited to music, foodways, and the overriding concept of *joie de vivre*" (1997 205). Such a representation, however near or far from reality it may be, is in stark contrast to the tumultuous history of Louisiana, a region that became the destination of numerous groups of forced immigrants, slaves, exiles, and refugees.

As Marshall notes, the early colonization of Louisiana was troubled from the very start. "The early explorers had to deal with disease, famine, Indians, pirates, hurricanes, floods, extreme heat and cold, and the difficulties of navigating through the mouth of the

Mississippi and the swamps" (334). So difficult were the conditions in Louisiana that it was nearly impossible for France to find volunteers to settle the colony. The French government resorted to deporting Parisian "riffraff" – criminals, prostitutes, vagrants, etc. – to Louisiana (Marshall 334). Hall states that in 1720, "a special police force received a head tax for each person apprehended for possible deportation. Members of the force roamed around Paris and the provinces grabbing people for profit, their actions often based upon false accusation" ("Africans" 6).[17] Carl Brasseaux goes into detail in his description of the various instances of forced immigration, deportation, and slavery in the seventeenth through twentieth centuries (Brasseaux 2005 1-35).

I argue that traumatic events endured as collective experiences (i.e. slavery and deportation) have affected the way in which certain figures of the oral tradition are represented. In the following paragraphs, I will explore the notion of *cultural trauma* and folklore's potential role as trauma narrative. My hypothesis, as I will explain further below and in the subsequent chapters, is that certain key historical events have resulted in manifestations of *cultural trauma* in folk narratives, and have likely affected the notion of collective identity in French and Creole Louisiana.

Before considering several key examples of where trauma has taken place in Louisiana's history, it will be useful to situate the notion of cultural trauma within the field of trauma studies and provide a working definition.

1.7 Cultural Trauma and Collective Experience

It is important to note that cultural trauma is quite different from individual trauma, both in its symptoms and development. Cathy Caruth has published extensively

[17] Carl Brasseaux writes more in depth about forced immigration to the Louisiana colony in *French, Cajun, Creole, Houma*, p. 7-11.

on the manifestation of trauma in literary and historical narrative, most notably in her edited collection of essays *Trauma: Explorations of Memory* (1995) and *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996). Although the notion of cultural trauma was first proposed in the foundational collection of texts, *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (2004) by Jeffrey C. Alexander, Ron Eyerman, Bernhard Giesen, Neil J. Smelser and Piotr Sztomkpa, other forms of 'national trauma' or 'collective trauma' were explored as early as the 1990s by Arthur Neal in *National Trauma and Collective Memory*. It should be noted that the concept of cultural trauma is relatively new, and its application to interpreting folktales has not yet been attempted. Nevertheless, I feel that these theories provide an analytical framework that can potentially enlighten the understanding of traditional narrative in French and Creole Louisiana.

Wider public awareness of trauma theory most notably occurred in the wake of World War I when many soldiers returning home were afflicted with 'shell shock' and this version of 'lay trauma theory' was "expanded and elaborated in relation to other wars that followed in the course of the twentieth century" (Alexander "Toward" 4). Although she admits to the lack of a precise definition of post-traumatic stress disorder, Caruth asserts that most descriptions generally agree that:

> [t]here is a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event (Caruth 1995, 4).[18]

[18] Caruth cites the DSM III-R. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.* 3rd edition. Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association, 1987.

In recent years, trauma studies have advanced considerably, giving way to the exploration of collective trauma, the result of shared experience and collective memory. Jeffrey Alexander explains:

> "*Individual* victims react to traumatic injury with repression and denial, gaining relief when these psychological defenses are overcome, bringing pain into consciousness so they are able to mourn. For *collectivities*, it is different. Rather than denial, repression, and 'working through', it is a matter of symbolic construction and framing, of creating stories and characters, and moving along from there. A 'we' must be constructed via narrative and coding, and it is this collective identity that experiences and confronts the danger" (Alexander "Social Theory" 3).

1.7.1 *Le grand dérangement* and the Acadian Diaspora

The deportation of the Acadians by the British from their native land of *Acadie*, now Nova Scotia, stands out as one of the greatest acts of violence in North American history. The Acadians' removal occurred following their refusal to partake in the long-going Anglo-French imperial wars during the eighteenth century (Brasseaux "Scattered" 1). Brasseaux describes the plan executed by British Brigadier-General Charles Lawrence according Charles Morris' memorandum on Acadian deportation:

> Charles Lawrence directed the English commandants located at Beaubassin, Pisiquid, and Annapolis-Royal to lure the local Acadian males into their respective ports. There, the unsuspecting victims would be arrested and detained until the arrival of transports which would carry them into exile. The detention of male hostages would ensure that the local women and children would remain home with their possessions and livestock, thus expediting their removal from the colony. Finally, all Acadian property would be confiscated to reimburse the English government for the cost of their removal, while all Acadian homes and boats would be destroyed" (Brasseaux "Scattered" 6).

Thus the Acadians who survived the *Grand dérangement* were systematically separated from their families and were imprisoned or deported elsewhere. Thomas Fiehrer calls the *Grand dérangement* "one of the largest human displacements to that time," responsible for sending "many thousands of French colonial people out of Nova Scotia and back to

maritime France, to the eastern seaboard, the Gulf Coast and as far south as Haiti and Guiana" (1). Brasseaux uses the word "trauma" to describe the expulsion of the Acadians in 1755 (2005 66).[19] In addition, the Spanish colonial government of Louisiana insisted on placing each wave of Acadian immigrants at various locations along the Mississippi River in order to populate the most land as possible and create a strategic buffer zone. This practice also subjected the Acadians to what Brasseaux refers to as a "second diaspora" (2005 18). The 'indelible mark' left on Acadian identity can be likened to Alexander's notion of cultural trauma, which "occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (Alexander "Toward a Theory" 1). The *Grand dérangement* has obviously had a profound and long-lasting impact on Acadian identity and social cohesion that continues to manifest itself abundantly in Acadian literature, music, and scholarly work.

1.7.2 Slavery and Trauma

The fact that slavery is traumatic borders on the obvious (Eyerman 61); with regard to trauma narrative, the focus is necessarily on slavery's impact on collective identity and culture in retrospect. In this sense, my aim is not unlike Eyerman's in his text, "Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity," where he states, "[t]he trauma in question is slavery, not as institution or even experience, but as collective memory, a form of remembrance that grounded the identity-formation of a people" (60). The effect of slavery in the folklore and customs of slaves, former slaves,

[19] "The unshakable unity and basic cultural homogeneity of the Acadians permitted them to endure the trauma of the terrible diaspora of 1755" (Brasseaux 2005, 66).

and their descendants has been explored by numerous twentieth-century folklorists, perhaps most notably Richard Dorson, and historian Lawrence Levine in *Black Culture, Black Consciousness* (1977).

In the context of South Louisiana the cultural memory of slavery has also had a more direct impact on Creole identity, even on the linguistic level. Albert Valdman states that the devalorization of Louisiana Creole, "reflected by the pejorative terms that even some of the its speaker [sic] use to refer to it – *nèg, français nèg, Nigger French, couri vini,* etc. – stems in large part from its association with slavery" (Valdman "Place" 145).

1.7.3 Education and Linguistic Discrimination

Carl Blyth observes that the state constitution of 1921 is often considered by historians to be a defining moment at which "the balance of power tipped in favor of the English language" (31). As mandatory English-only education was imposed on rural francophone children throughout the state, French was effectively excluded from education. Ancelet remarks that

> in the twentieth century the legal status of the French language changed. While earlier constitutions had recognized French as an official language of the state, the constitution of 1921 established English as the sole language of instruction. Several generations of Cajuns and Creoles were eventually convinced that speaking French was a sign of cultural illegitimacy. Even the Catholic Church, which had previously sent French and French Canadian missionaries to south Louisiana, quickly moved toward the exclusive use of English in religious services (Ancelet "Problem Language" 345).

Infraction of the English-only rule in Louisiana schools resulted in the physical abuse and humiliation of the schoolchildren in front of their classmates (Blyth 31). Such cruel practices solidified Louisiana in a state of diglossia, with English acting as the language of prestige. French's perceived inferiority as well as social and political pressures resulted in a need to assimilate into Anglo-American culture. Not unlike the Louisiana

Creole language's association with slavery, the French language took on pejorative connotations linked to humiliation and shame for an entire generation of Louisiana francophones. Perhaps just as remarkable as the extent to which corporal punishment was carried out, is how thoroughly the abuse occurred practically throughout the region. Picone observes that

> Virtually every elderly French speaker in rural and semirural Louisiana can recite the cruel and humiliating details of the continued implementation of this policy. Partly to spare their children similar humiliation, partly through self-stigmatization and the desire to assimilate in order to gain social and economic advantage, parents stopped speaking French to their children. Widespread failure to transmit the language was the obvious outcome (Picone 123).

Sociologist Rocky Sexton who relates some of the testimonies he collected from francophones submitted to this abuse, remarks that "corporal punishment, scoldings, and less virulent sanctions for speaking French continued well into the 1950s," therefore "entry into school and learning to function in English was often a *traumatic* experience" (Sexton 37).[20] In her recent dissertation on the experiences of French-speakers who entered English-only schools in Lower Lafourche Parish, Jo-Lynda Strandberg repeatedly uses 'trauma' and 'traumatic' to describe what her subjects went through. Although the experiences of the Louisiana francophones with the American education system were not on the same scale as slavery or deportation, the oppressive imposition of Anglo-American society on French Louisiana culture was systematic and well defined. The fact that Louisiana francophones seem to have universally experienced such trauma in the early- to mid- twentieth century clearly answers the question, asked by Alexander in defining cultural trauma, of, "not who did this to me, but what group did this to us?" (Alexander "Social Theory" 2). Moreover, it should be noted that the magnitude of

[20] Emphasis is my own.

trauma, or its potential effect on collectivities is not directly related to the degree of violence or injustice endured by its victims. Alexander explains:

> Hundreds and thousands of individuals may have lost their lives, and many more might experience grievous pain. Still, the construction of a shared cultural trauma is not automatically guaranteed. The lives lost and pains experienced are individual facts; shared trauma depends on collective processes of cultural interpretation (Alexander "Social Theory" 3).

In other words, a cultural trauma is not created when a socially or physically violent event has taken place, but when the group recognizes the injustice and the suffering of others in order to participate in 'trauma creation'.

1.7.4 Trauma and Narrative

Cultural trauma is not a necessary outcome of social injustice or violence; rather, its existence is dependent on the creation of trauma narrative by the group.[21] How are trauma narratives created and how can they be recognized?

According to Alexander, "trauma scripts are performed in the theatres of everyday collective life"; moreover, "to transform individual suffering into collective trauma is cultural work. It depends upon speeches, rituals, marches, meetings, plays, movies, and storytelling of all kinds" (Alexander "Trauma" 4). I argue that folktales can certainly be considered to be among these 'stories', although trauma narratives need not be limited to folklore. For example, the trauma inflicted on Louisiana French-speaking school children beginning in the 1920s is evoked not only in oral history, but also appears in Jean Arceneaux's poem, "Schizophrénie linguistique," and Hadley Castille's song, "200 lignes" (Arceneaux 1980, Castille).

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[21] "For trauma is not something naturally existing; it is something constructed by society" (Alexander "Toward a Theory 2).

As Alexander quips, humans are "storytelling animals" (Alexander 2012 96). Traditional narrative, be it the result of cultural trauma or not, has long been a way in which groups continuously reaffirm their identity. On this notion, Zumthor states that "vocal communication fulfills an exteriorizing function within the social group. It assures that a society's discourse about itself, be it serious or futile, is heard for the sake of its own perpetuation" (Zumthor 23). In the chapters to come, I intend to demonstrate through close-readings and comparative analysis how folktales serve as reflections of both collective experience and sociocultural adaptation.

In the first main chapter, I will present analyses of animal trickster tales from Louisiana's French and Creole oral tradition. Comparative analyses will allow the reader to compare animal trickster tales from the West African oral tradition to black Creole tales of Louisiana in order to understand changes in how the trickster is portrayed as well as how some trickster tales can be interpreted as slave narratives. The following chapter will then shed light on the opposite side of the trickster-dupe dynamic by examining differing representations of the fool, exemplified by Jean-le-Sot, and the social significance of this figure in the Louisiana context. In the third and final chapter, the discussion will return to the trickster figure, although the focus will be turned to a kind of human trickster, the Master Thief. These tales feature an amoral hero in an otherwise moral tale wherein the hero repeatedly steals from an authoritative figure, often revealing class tensions. Finally, the rapidly changing role of the folktale in today's society will be examined in relation to the notion of creolization and the implications of modern archival resources.

Chapter One: The Animal Trickster and Slave Narratives: A Rebellion through Discourse

> *[A culture's] toughness and resiliency are determined not by [its] ability to withstand change, which indeed may be a sign of stagnation not life, but by its ability to react creatively and responsively to the realities of a new situation.*[22]
> Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*

1.1 *Contes d'animaux* in Louisiana

Among all of the folktale genres in existence, animal tales are arguably the most pervasive, considered to be integral components of the oral traditions of most, if not all, cultures. While the *contes d'animaux* of French and Creole Louisiana contain traces and borrowings from European, Native American and African traditions, they are concurrently rooted in the social reality of Louisiana. As Barry Ancelet observes, the characterization, or cast of characters, of animal tales in Louisiana is "based on a confluence of French and African traditions" as evidenced by the existence of what he considers to be two categories of animal tales (Ancelet 1994, xxix). In the first of these two categories, characters are often similar to those found in the French tradition in La Fontaine's *Fables* as evidenced by representations of the fox, the wolf, the bear, and the crane (xxix). Conversely, the second category exhibits influences of African and Caribbean folklore traditions that are apparent with regard to characterization of the animal tales (including the elephant, hyena, tiger) and the character traits associated with them. The most prominent characters based in this second category are undoubtedly Compère Bouki and Compère Lapin, or the hyena and the hare. These two characters are emblematic of Louisiana's folklore and are known well beyond the relatively limited

[22] Levine, Lawrence. *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*. New York: Oxford UP, 1977 and 2007. Print. p. 5.

circle of folklorists and storytellers. The influence of African and West Caribbean oral traditions is seen clearly in tales that include the elephant, the monkey, the turtle, and the serpent, of which one finds the highest concentration in Fortier's 1895 collection. The convergence of these two major and opposing traditions, African and European, along with Native American and Spanish elements (albeit to a much lesser extent) has resulted in a body of animal tales unique to French and Creole Louisiana.

Although the animal tale genre, if it can be qualified as such, is practically universal among the world's cultures, it is in African folklore that one finds the largest and most diverse group of animal tales. Displaying a formidable cast of characters, the indelible mark of the African oral tradition is left not only in the Creole tales of Louisiana, but on all of African-American folklore. Lawrence Levine remarks on the relative scarcity of *Märchen*, or 'fairy tales', at least compared to European oral traditions, and the influence that this abundance of animal tales has had on black folklore throughout the United States (Levine 98, 102). Also of a great importance in the African tradition are the uses of animal tales, serving both as entertainment and as vehicles for conveying moral and social examples. The characterization of West African folklore and its contribution to the folklore of Louisiana will be our primary objects of study in the present chapter.

1.1.1 Slavery and the African Diaspora

The magnitude of the African diaspora and the multiple points of origin, transfer, and arrival of Africans displaced during the slave trade have caused some scholars to question the possibility of examining with any real accuracy the influence of African tales on the black folklore of the New World. Even in our own time, we must recognize

that Africa is comprised of a multitude of nations, cultures, and ethnicities, the separations between which are often difficult to discern and independent of geo-political boundaries. Referring more specifically to the former British colonies of America, Levine reminds us that the African slaves who arrived during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries "did not carry with them a network of beliefs, customs, institutions, and practices constituting what might be called with accuracy a unified 'African' culture. No such monolithic cultural entity existed" (3). Richard Dorson has also questioned the legitimacy of certain folklorists' efforts to trace the origins of 'American Negro' tales to African folklore, arguing that 'Negro' folklore is above all an American phenomenon.[23]

This does not, however, imply that the historical and cultural connections between West Africa and Louisiana are indiscernible or irrelevant. Alan Dundes argues that "while it is true that few if any items of folklore can be shown to be universal in the sense of existing among *all* peoples, past and present, on the face of the earth, it is also the case that the areal or temporal distribution of a particular item of folklore can be ascertained through rigorous and meticulous scholarship" (Dundes 1971 vii). I would argue that vis-à-vis the connection between West Africa and Louisiana the attempt to identify such 'areal and temporal distribution' of popular customs, including folklore, is particularly warranted. As will be demonstrated in the corpus of tales in the present chapter, there exist inherent similarities with regard to both the structure and characterization of West African and Louisiana Creole animal tales, notably in the hyena and hare tales.

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[23] It should be noted, however, that Dorson's research did not invest heavily in the folklore of French and Creole Louisiana. The majority of this early field research was collected in Michigan, in which some references to Fortier's collection were made (see Dorson 1956). In the first chapter of his seminal work *American Negro Folktales* (1967), he refers to the "Negro" as "a distinct element of the *English-speaking* population" (Dorson 1967, 12). Italics are my own.

Firstly, it should be noted that elements of African and Caribbean folklore were introduced into the sociocultural context of Louisiana in a more direct fashion compared to other parts of North America, namely the British colonies. Although some historians and ethnologists, like Levine and Dorson, have emphasized the utter loss of regional African identities during the slave trade, more recent research forces us to reexamine the unique nature of the slave trade to Louisiana and consequently the ethnic makeup of Louisiana's antebellum slave communities. According to Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, "the pattern of introduction of black slaves into French Louisiana contrasts sharply with that of the English colonies that became part of the United States" (161). Hall explains in further detail:

> "The fragmentation of language and culture communities associated with the African slave trade and slavery in the Americas was limited among slaves in Louisiana. It appears that throughout the eighteenth century, under Spanish rule as well as French, Senegambia remained a more important source of slaves in Louisiana than did Central Africa" (Hall 1992 159).

Considering the lesser degree of linguistic and cultural fragmentation of the slave and former slave communities of French Louisiana, at least compared to their British counterparts, it follows that a substantial degree of cultural continuity would have pervaded in the New Orleans area, extending into the plantation country of present day St. James, St. John and Pointe Coupée Parishes.

Carl Brasseaux's account of the importance of the West African slave trade and the subsequent cultural cohesion in the future 'Creole' community is congruent with Hall's findings:

> As with French immigration, African immigration into Louisiana peaked in the early 1720s and then declined drastically. Of the 5,951 West African slaves known to have been introduced into Louisiana between 1719 and 1763, 5,470 (92 percent) arrived before 1730. Two-thirds of these slaves were drawn from

> Senegambia, where the Company of the Indies owned the slave concession. Louisiana documentation indicates that the vast majority of the slaves introduced during the French period were Bambara people from present-day Mali. The cultural homogeneity of these Africans facilitated the emergence of a black Creole society in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when white planters manumitted significant numbers of their slave mistresses and natural children, thereby creating explosive growth in Louisiana's formerly small free black community (Brasseaux 2005 12-13).

It is the demographic and cultural contribution of Western Africa, particularly the Senegambia region, that has played the largest role in the delimitation of this chapter's corpus. This is not to say that Louisiana was devoid of slaves from other parts of the African continent or other immigrant groups altogether (see Brasseaux 2005 12-13, 24); however, for the purposes of this study, examples from the West African oral traditions have been considered to be the most significant.

Although, one must be cautious when attempting to trace uninterrupted transmissions between American and African folktales or identify definitive analogs with their supposed origins, a general assessment can nevertheless be made of the connection between Louisiana and West Africa. In addition to demographic evidence of West Africa's contribution to the slave population of Louisiana and the subsequent Afro-Creole society, similarities within the characterization of the folktales strengthen the argument for a Louisiana-West African connection.

1.1.2 Bouki, the Dupe of Louisiana Folklore

Nowhere is this connection with West Africa more apparent than in the Wolof name, Bouki, the foil of the animal trickster. In addition to Bouki's analogous casting as the dupe to the clever rabbit in West African and Louisiana Creole tales, the fact that the

Wolof word for 'hyena' has persisted in Louisiana renders the character's West African origin undeniable.[24]

The tales of Bouki and Lapin are among the most prevalent of the animal tales of French and Creole Louisiana. It is important to understand that the genre consists of many different tales, and not merely variations of the same tale type. In this way, the hare of Louisiana's Bouki and Lapin tales differs greatly from the cyclic or mythological tricksters of West Africa genres such as Anansi, Legba, Eshu, and Ogo-Yurugu (see Pelton 1980). Nevertheless, there are many similarities between Lapin and the trickster figures of other oral traditions, notably those of Africa. William Bascom, one of the foundational scholars of African and African-American folklore and art has studied extensively the trickster figure of African folklore and argued for the recognition of the African roots of many African-American folktales (Bascom 1992 40-70).[25] [26]

In perusing Louisiana tales from the collections of Ancelet, Claudel or Fortier, one quickly realizes that the pairing of the dupe and the trickster is by far the most important and unifying element of the genre. I posit that it is precisely because of this paradigmatic simplicity that the Bouki and Lapin tales have known such a wide popularity in Louisiana. Furthermore, as will be demonstrated below, the traits of Bouki and Lapin are essentially analogous to those of *le loup et le renard*, (the wolf and the fox) respectively, in the European tradition.

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[24] "Wolof is spoken on the coast of Senegal and in Gambia"; Peter Austin estimates the number of Wolof speakers today to be around four million (Austin 78).

[25] The book *African Folktales in the New World* (1992) is a collection of essays from 1976 to 1982.

[26] Bascom maintained a long-standing debate with fellow American folklorist, Richard Dorson. While Dorson believed that African-American folktales were largely of European origin, Bascom reoriented the study of these tales, insisting that many of them originated in Africa (Alan Dundes, Foreword in Bascom 1992).

The linguistic origin of the Bouki character shows the derivation of at least the hyena and hare tales; however, the genre's exact passage into Louisiana's oral tradition cannot be known for sure. This is because similar tales are found elsewhere in the Caribbean, namely in modern day Haiti. No early written evidence exists of the name 'Leuk/Lëk' (Wolof for 'rabbit') in Louisiana, although it certainly persists in West African folklore today. Curiously, the character has retained its animal identity in Louisiana folklore as his French appellation of 'Lapin' indicates. In modern day Haiti, the tales of *Bouki ak Malis* (Bouki and Malice) are still well-known among children. As is the case in Louisiana, the original meaning of *bouki* is mostly unknown, even among Haitians who are very familiar with the tales, suggesting that the association with its Wolof origin was lost before the characters arrival in Louisiana. In Haiti, the animality of the rabbit has also been either lost or morphed in favor of a personification of the hare's deceitful nature. In place of 'Lapin' or 'Lëk', Bouki's counterpart is known simply as 'Malice'. Marcia Gaudet proposes that the "African term *bouki* was obviously maintained in the Louisiana tales because there were, of course, no hyenas in Louisiana, and thus Louisianians had no way of attaching the English or French (*l'hyene*) to the animal they knew as *bouki* (Gaudet 68). Unfortunately, without any attestation of the tales in Louisiana prior to the Saint Domingue Revolution, it is impossible to say with any certainty whether the character was imported directly from the West African tradition or by way of Saint-Domingue. A third and more likely explanation would be that the influx of Saint-Domingue refugees into Louisiana reinforced a very recent, but already present repertoire of Bouki and Lapin tales from prior slave trade.

It could be said that the magnitude of the Saint-Domingue Revolution's impact on the population of Louisiana, particularly on New Orleans, is often neglected in scholarly work on French and Creole Louisiana. Carl Brasseaux and Glenn Conrad have called the French-Antillean migration in the lower Mississippi Valley "one of the most enduring lacunae in Louisiana historiography" (Brasseaux, Conrad vii). Furthermore, Carl Brasseaux states that "at least 11,000 refugees from the servile insurrection in Saint-Domingue made their way to Louisiana between early 1792 and late 1809" (Brasseaux 2005 22). Although this figure may seem modest by today's standards, in comparison with other groups of immigrants (including the Acadians who numbered approximately 3,000 in total), it is quite significant (Brasseaux 1-35). Gwendolyn Midlo Hall notes that of this "late contingent" of 1809 and 1810 refugees "about one-third of them were white elite, another one-third free colored elite, and the other one-third slaves who were the property of either elite group" (Hall 2006 43). In a moment of tremendous upheaval in history, not long after the American Revolution, "the French Revolution shook the foundations of Western Europe and reverberated to the West Indies, whence the inhabitants of Saint-Domingue, France's colonial jewel, got themselves to Cuba, Jamaica, the United States and Europe. Eventually Cuba and Louisiana wound up with the lion's share of Saint-Domingue's dispossessed" (Fiehrer 2).

The number of refugees from Saint-Domingue was great enough to permanently alter the Creole identity of New Orleans (Hall 2006 45). Brasseaux and Conrad state that "the 1809 immigrants literally doubled the size of New Orleans within a three-month period, absorbing in the process the native Creole population" (viii).

Since even the earliest Louisiana Creole tales in this study's corpus were collected in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the reader must bear in mind that the cultural *brassage* of the Saint-Domingue refugees, African-born slaves and free peoples of color had been in effect for some time. That being said, one must not overlook the common point of origin of a large part of all of these groups, the Senegambia and present-day Mali. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall even suggests that, "the cultural influence of these Haitian refugees in Louisiana has been exaggerated. They arrived long after the Louisiana Creole language, folklore, cuisine, and music had been created by enslaved peoples brought directly to Louisiana from Africa and by the Louisiana Creole descendants" (Hall 2006 45). Regardless of the exact measure of cultural influence of each Creole community, it can be said that a fairly cohesive social and cultural identity developed among the black Creole population that is evident in their rich oral tradition.

As stated in the previous chapter, the earliest examples of this Creole culture's oral tradition date from the period of Alcée Fortier, Alfred Mercier, and several other early scholars who took serious interest in the language and culture of Louisiana's black Creole population.[27] Although it is difficult to determine Fortier's precise interest in the Creole language, at times expressed in a condescending tone as he marvels at "how the ignorant African slave transformed his master's language into a speech concise and simple, and at the same time soft and musical," he was nevertheless one of the first to argue that Louisiana Creole was "not a corruption of French," but rather "a real idiom with a morphology and grammar of its own" (Fortier xviii). In the introduction to the 1895 edition of his collection of folktales, Fortier asserts that some of the tales are

[27] Levine confirms that even in the rest of the (largely English-speaking) United States, "few black tales were collected until the decades following the Civil War" (Levine 81).

"without doubt, of African origin" (Fortier xvii). At the same time, Fortier admits that he has made little or no attempt at cataloguing or comparing these tales to those found elsewhere in other oral traditions. He was nonetheless aware of the tales' diverse origins (African or other) and their adaptation to the Louisiana reality in stating that, "the plot of a popular tale seems to be the common heritage of a number of countries which may have derived it from the same source, but the motives are often inspired by local customs" (Fortier xvii).

1.1.3 The Uses of Animal Tales

More significant than mere vestiges of African tradition, animal tales remained popular and socially relevant in the New World for a number of reasons, particularly during slavery, and coexisted alongside their counterparts of European and Native American origin. According to Levine, "the animals inhabiting these tales, though retaining enough of their natural characteristics to be recognizable, were almost thoroughly humanized" (103). Animals typically had assigned characteristics (cleverness, strength, or stupidity) or roles (the trickster, the dupe, the glutton) making the morals easily understandable and transmittable to others in the community.

For the black Creoles of Louisiana, animal tales had several uses, both during and after the period of slavery. The lack of proper names, or even human beings, made it easier to implicitly criticize the power structure without the knowledge of outsiders. According to Levine, "because of their overwhelmingly paradigmatic character, animal tales were, of all the narratives of social protest or psychological release, among the easiest to relate both within and especially outside the group" (102). In other words, the animal characterization of the tales, even those who may have been critical of those in

power, allowed animal tales to appear innocuous to outsiders. Furthermore, the action of using animals for critiquing those in power may be a practice that has roots in African tradition predating slavery. Levine describes sessions wherein tribesmen were made to regularly criticize their leaders before the council (Levine 8).

1.2. Animal Tales as Slave Narratives

Much has been written regarding the folktale's capacity to serve as a vehicle for slave narrative, beyond the form of entertainment as a distraction from the hardship of day-to-day plantation life. Alan Dundes (1971), Lawrence Levine (1977), and Richard Dorson (1956 and 1967), to name but a few, have written extensively on the subject. Levine devotes a fascinating chapter to such tales in *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, titled "The Meaning of Slave Tales," although it mostly pertains to the English-speaking colonies of the south (Levine 81-135).

The narrative structure and characterization of many animal tales are of African origin, at least on a fundamental level, although certain changes in the narration or interpretation of these tales would have occurred in their transition into what one might call a 'slave narrative'. Levine says to this effect: "Regardless of where slave tales came from, the essential point is that, with respect to language, delivery, details of characterization, and plot, slaves quickly made them their own and through them revealed much about themselves and their world" (Levine 82).

1.2.1 "Chien avec Tigue," from Fortier's *Louisiana Folktales*

One such tale - presumably of African origin, as evidenced by its casting of the tiger, the dog and the deer - that lends itself easily to interpretation as a slave narrative is "Chien avec Tigue," or "The Dog and the Tiger," from Fortier's collection, *Louisiana*

Folktales (32-33). Not surprisingly, the tiger's principal trait is normally that of physical strength. The dog is more seldom seen in the folktales of Louisiana and generally does not exhibit the qualities of cleverness or trickery.

One day, the dog purchases one hundred hens and one rooster, while the tiger bought one hundred roosters and one hen. It is not long before the dog has a basketful of eggs from his chicken-house every evening, while the tiger only finds one every so often. Instead of realizing his own foolish error, the tiger grows angry with the dog: "Tigue dit chien volé li, et li taché li, li metté li dans in brouette et li parti pour vende li" / "The tiger accused the dog of robbing him, and, tying him up, he put him in a wheelbarrow and took him along to sell him" (Fortier 32-33).[28] On the road, the tiger meets a deer, and asked him if he is correct in selling the dog. The deer argues with the tiger claiming that he has no right to sell another animal, and the tiger immediately becomes enraged and kills the deer. Soon thereafter, the tiger comes across a lion, an animal typically associated with brute strength (Ancelet xxix), who also states that the tiger is wrong to sell the captive dog. The tiger replies, "Vous parlé comme ça pasqué vous connin vous plis fort qué moin" / "You speak that way because you know that you are stronger than I" (Fortier 32-33). The tiger continues on his way to sell the dog, until he makes the mistake of leaving his wheelbarrow unguarded. Soon thereafter, a few hunters pass by and ask the dog what he is doing there. After the dog relates his story to the hunters, they pursue the tiger (presumably killing him) and the dog is never bothered again.

When examined from the perspective of a slave narrative, the moral of the tale is clearly one of impending liberation: "Tigue la té pair comme djabe, et dépi temps la chien

[28] For all citations taken from Fortier's collections, I use his own English translations.

jamin pair béte sauvage" / "The tiger was terribly frightened, and from that time dogs have never been afraid of wild beasts" (Fortier 32-33). Although Fortier makes no mention of any possible symbolism or allusion to slavery, from a present-day perspective, such analogies seem difficult to ignore. Already in the casting of the dog as the victimized protagonist, there is an implication of domestication or servitude. Despite his logical choice to purchase more hens than roosters, the dog, much like the slave, is not compensated for his labor. He is then sold by the tiger, who is less intelligent but physically stronger. One can imagine that the deer and the lion might represent other factions opposed to slavery during the rise of the abolitionist movement leading up to the Civil War. As in many tales considered to be slave narratives, there is a marked absence of physical violence committed by the characterized slave. Patience is often more highly valued than physical strength and cleverness perhaps even more so.

It can be presumed that Fortier, as both a linguist and folklorist, took care to accurately transcribe the tales that he collected. That being said, it is likely that on a more personal level, Fortier would have been unready or unwilling to interpret such tales as slave narratives. Fortier's political views were often slanted with the preservation of the elite Creole society in mind; however, he was at times an outspoken critic of the abolitionist movement. In the third appendix of his *Louisiana Folktales,* Fortier describes plantation life before the Civil War saying that slaves "were, as a rule, well treated by their masters, and, in spite of their slavery, they were contented and happy. Not having any of the responsibilities of life, they were less serious than the present freedmen, and more inclined to take advantage of all opportunities to amuse themselves" (Fortier 175).

1.2.2 "Tortie," from Fortier's *Louisiana Folktales*

A number animal tales from the black Creole oral tradition of Louisiana featuring captured or abused animal characters lend themselves to interpretation as slave narratives. One tale featuring a clever tortoise offers such an example (Fortier 28-29). "Tortie," was recounted to Fortier by a storyteller noted only as "Julia, 7 Prytania Street, New Orleans" (188). In this tale, a *michié* ('*monsieur'* or 'gentleman') finds a tortoise on the banks of a bayou one day and proceeds to invite some of his friends to dinner. The gentleman's son, in his father's absence, goes to the cage where his father put him. The tortoise begins to whistle to the astonishment of the boy, who says, "Comme to sifflé bien!" / How well you whistle!" (28-29). The tortoise assures the boy that he could whistle even better if the cage were open. After proving his point with a second round of whistling, the tortoise convinces the boy that if he were to set him on the floor, he could dance and sing. Finally, the boy, marveling at the tortoise's ability to dance and sing, is persuaded to set him back on the banks of the bayou so that he can continue to impress the boy. The duped child then watches the tortoise disappear into the water. It is the tortoise that pokes his head above the water to deliver the first moral of the short tale: "Apprende pas fié moune to pas connin" / "Learn not to trust, hereafter, people whom you do not know" (28-29).

Structurally, the tale offers a mirror image of the AaTh 6, *Animal Captor Persuaded to Talk*, whereby a human protagonist tricks his animal captor into opening his mouth by speaking, allowing the trapped human a chance to escape. The moral, which appears at the very end of the first and penultimate paragraph of the tale, is similar in form and nature to others found in the folklore of Africa, where animal tales are told, not

only for entertainment, but also especially for didactic purposes. The use of animal tales to convey moral teachings to children continues in the New World even though some animals cast in the stories have been adapted to the geography of the American South. Levine notes:

> Slaves told some explanatory tales – why the rabbit has a short tail, why the buzzard eats carrion, why the alligator lives in the river, why the tiger has a striped back, why the frog lives in water, why the dog cannot talk, why the clay is red – but these details never constituted a central part of the black folktales; they were always peripheral and incidental (Levine 90).

Levine goes on to reproduce an anecdote delivered to Melville and Frances Herskovits by a Dahomean who said, "While you whites have schools and books for teaching your children, we tell them stories, for our stories are our books" (Levine 90).[29] Similarly, Isidore Okpewho observes that in African culture it is precisely through songs, narratives, proverbs, and riddles that young members of society "absorb the ideas that will guide them through life and the older ones are constantly reminded of the rules and ideals that must be kept alive for the benefit of those coming behind them" (Okpewho 115).

It is ironic that the recipient of the moral in a black Creole tale is the young, white child. One wonders if the tale would have been presented as such to a white audience, in a situation like Fortier describes: "it is a strange fact that the old negroes do not like to relate those tales with which they enchanted their little masters before the war" (Fortier xvii). What is more intriguing than the moral itself is the manner in which it is woven into a larger narrative with quite a different message, becoming apparent at the story's

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[29] Bascom, William. "Folklore and Literature," in R.A. Lystad, *The African World,* 482; Melville J. and Frances S. Herskovits, *Suriname Folk-Lore* (New York, 1936), 141.

end. The first half of the tale easily lends itself to a metaphor wherein the soon-to-be slave is taken from its place of origin, the bayou, here representing Africa. Removed from his home and placed in a foreign land, the slave is literally domesticated by the European colonial system, much like the tortoise in its cage on a figurative level. In "Tortie," being trapped in a cage on the white man's estate serves as a clear analogy for slavery.

If the first half of the tale provides us with a representation of slavery, the second half leaves itself open to its audience's interpretation. It cannot be known if this latter part is tacked on to another tale from the African tradition or if the entirety has been adapted to the Louisiana experience.[30] This sort of sequencing in which two different tales about the same animal are juxtaposed and made to function as a single narrative is common in Creole tales. In a way, the addendum offers a glimpse of what happened after the tortoise's escape.

For fear of his father, the boy places a stone in the cage where the turtle had been. Thinking it was the tortoise, the cook began to cook the stone and was astonished to see that it remained hard for so long. The master then ordered the cook to put it upon the table where he attempted to cut it. The storyteller recounts the narrative's curious ending: "Li prend couteau découpé, pas la peine. Li prend casse téte, pas la peine. Li prend lahache; li cassé lassiette, la tabe, mais tortie la resté telle. Li oua alorse c'était ein

[30] There are a number of non-African elements of localization: the bayou, the upper-class household structure of the gentleman, the cook, etc.

lapierre, et jisqua asteur li pas comprende comment so tortie té changé en lapierre" (Fortier 29).[31]

There is an inherent structural symmetry within the narrative. Intensification and repetition are tools for the storyteller to give balance and interest to the content. The three physical spaces representing the path to freedom (the cage, the floor, and the bayou) are mirrored in the second part by the three tools used by the master in his attempt to break the stone (knife, hatchet, axe).

The master does not realize that the turtle (or slave) is missing until it affects his own wellbeing, as symbolized by the dishes and the dinner table. As in many animal tales from the African tradition, food, as sustenance, can be equated with physical survival and thus plays an important role in the black Creole trickster tales.

In addition to what we might consider a commentary on the detriment to the plantation system following the slave's escape, the second half of the tale harkens back to the current state of the slave. The tortoise's metamorphosis into stone, at least in the eyes of his former master, at the end is significant because he is fortified and transformed, physically and metaphorically by his flight to freedom or a maroon space. By the same token, the tortoise's petrification renders him useless to the master in that he is no longer the source of physical nourishment.

Finally, it is interesting to note that in this instance the trickster is represented by the tortoise, and not the rabbit or fox (which would be typical of the African or European tradition, respectively), as is so common in other animal tales. The protagonist tortoise

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[31] "He took the carving-knife, in vain. He took the hatchet, in vain. He took the axe, he broke the dishes, the table, but the tortoise remained intact. He then saw it was a stone, and to this day he has not understood how his tortoise was changed into a stone" (Fortier 28)

outsmarts the boy through cunning and by biding his time. Like so many Louisiana tales, physical strengths are subverted here. Unlike the speed of the rabbit or the brute strength and size of the elephant, patience and cleverness enable the tortoise to gain his freedom.

"Tortie" bears a striking resemblance to a passage in Mercier's novel *L'habitation Saint-Ybars*. In the novel, Mamrie, the most important domestic slave on the plantation and very much a mother figure to her young master Démon (Édmond), tries to impress upon the boy the sadness that must be felt by the larks he has captured in a small cage (Mercier 1881 and 2003 54). Although Mamrie does not explicitly mention slavery, the reader nonetheless understands the parallel between captive animals and enslaved humans. Similarly to Fortier's tale, the boy releases the larks; however he does so willingly and out of compassion (Mercier 1881 and 2003 55).

The tale's capacity for conveying secret information among slave communities and maroon spaces has been observed by numerous historians, including Levine, who remarks that "for the most part tales were the vehicle through which slaves rehearsed their tactics, laughed at the foibles of their masters (and themselves), and taught their young the means they would have to adopt in order to survive" (Levine 125). In this sense, such a tale could have a served as a hidden message for potential escapees to wait until plans to revolt were finalized.

Tales that could be interpreted as slave narratives are not the only folktales that feature the animal trickster figure. Moreover, it will be shown in the third chapter that such slave narratives are not limited to animal tales, but human trickster tales are also found to be quite common. Because of the important place that the trickster holds in the folklore of Louisiana, it will be useful to explore this figure in more detail here.

1.3 The Trickster Figure

In "Tortie," the tortoise winds up playing the role of trickster, although the rabbit or hare is cast in this role with a much greater frequency in the Louisiana oral tradition. As Levine and others have noted, the trickster figure, found almost universally in folklore, takes on a special significance in the African American and black Creole oral tradition of Louisiana. As a result of slavery, oppressed slave communities found in the trickster figure not only a form of amusement, but also a means by which they could be victorious through cunning and cleverness, despite a lack of physical or political power. The trickster also filled a void in the cultural and moral gap between Africa and white-controlled plantation society. Levine notes that through trickster tales:

> It was possible for slaves to rationalize their need to lie, cheat, and steal without holding these actions up as models to be followed in all instances, without creating, that is, a counter-morality. In their dealings with whites the conditions permitting the application of their moral values were frequently absent" (Levine 123).

Although the perception and the interpretation of the trickster figure may have taken on different connotations as a result of the slavery experience, the trickster genre was already "perhaps the most common type of tale in the African repertoire" (Abrahams 155).

It should be noted that the trickster figure, in a number of African traditions, is often a mythological trickster who in some instances is even linked to the existential origins of a tribe. Robert Pelton gives ample information regarding these trickster figures, often possessing their own 'cycles' of tales, and even remarks that, "the trickster appears in the myths and folktales of nearly every traditional society, sometimes as a god, more often as an animal" (Pelton 1). The African trickster bordering on the mythological is not

dissimilar to certain Native American traditions such as the "Winnebago Hare Cycle," extensively analyzed by Paul Radin in what remains a fundamental text on the Native American trickster and includes commentary by C.G. Jung (Radin 63-91). In contrast to these more lofty representations, the typical trickster of French and Creole Louisiana, often characterized in animal tales by Lapin, the rabbit, possesses no god-like characteristics and relies solely on his wit to trump his opponent.

The linguistic issue of French, Creole or English aside, it could be said that the black Creole folklore of Louisiana has many similarities with the African-American folk tales collected by or commented on by Dundes (1971), Dorson (1956 and 1967), Levine (1977), and others. One particular marked commonality - and perhaps the best-known tale of the American South - is the episode of Brer Rabbit in the briar patch. For numerous reasons, not least of which the oppression of slavery, the trickster figure abounds in the black folklore of the New World. Levine comments on the perseverance of the trickster figure in African-American folklore:

> Despite all of the changes that took place, there persisted the mechanism so well developed throughout most of Africa, by means of which psychic relief from arbitrary authority could be secured, symbolic assaults upon the powerful could be waged, and important lessons about authority relationships could be imparted. Afro-Americans in the United States were to make extended use of this mechanism throughout their years of servitude" (Levine 105, 106).

In practically all of the trickster tales analyzed in this chapter, we can attest to Alan Dundes' interpretation of the typically African patterning of trickster tales, which consists of a "progression from *contract* (friendship or family) to a *deception,* a *violation* of the contract, and the dissolution of the bond and everything it stands for" (Abrahams 156, Dundes 1971 171-180). Part of my goal in this chapter is to show that this formula can be extrapolated in such a fashion that the narrative structure of the trickster tale can

inform us of the cultural trauma caused by slavery. In other words, the state of contract, of which we will see narrative representations in each of the tales analyzed, is broken or violated through the slave trade. I posit that the trickster serves as a reaction to the dissolution of the human and social bond. As Levine notes, this does not necessarily imply a 'counter-morality', but rather a means of survival that is made possible through adeptness and social dexterity.

Closer analysis of the animal trickster tale in Louisiana and African folklore should in no way imply that this figure is unique to these oral traditions. However, of interest to this study are the cultural singularities of the trickster figure's representations in our corpus and the social and psychological needs for such a pervasive figure in the oral tradition.

1.3.1 "Hare Gets Hyena and Elephant to Work on His Farm," a Gambian Tale

Dembo Fanta Bojang and Sukai Mbye Bojang present a trickster tale entitled "Hare Gets Hyena and Elephant to Work on His Farm" in the second volume of *Folk Tales and Fables from the Gambia* (Bojang and Bojang 2: 72-82). Similar to the two preceding Louisiana Creole tales from Fortier's collection, the motif of food and specifically the cultivation of crops, representing the continued survival of the characters, plays a large role in the story.

The story begins with the hyena and the hare talking about a plot of land that the hare has acquired in the Sare Alpha area. As is customary in the Louisiana variants of Bouki and Lapin, the characters are first introduced as "two friends" (Bojang and Bojang 2: 72). The rapport between the two animals and their human-like traits are further underscored by their designation as '*Maubeh*'. The word, *maubeh* is a derivation of the

Fula[32] *mawbe* or *maodo,* meaning 'wiseman' or 'elder'. The word is still used today among the Fulani to refer to the chief elders or council (Riesman 1997 67). Although it may seem contradictory to attribute the title of *maubeh* to the hyena, who invariably plays the role of the dupe in these tales, one can imagine that the title denotes a certain importance or status in the local culture and oral tradition. The use of such a title is analogous to that of *compère* used in Louisiana Creole animal tales, mostly frequently used to refer to Compère Bouki and Compère Lapin. I would argue that the use of a humanizing term like *compère* represents both a holdover from the African tradition as well as an adaptation to the sociocultural context of Louisiana. Although *compère* cannot be considered a direct, Gallicized translation of *maubeh*, in the sense of 'elder' or 'sage', it certainly elevates the status of the animal characters and imparts a human quality to their respective roles of dupe and trickster in the narrative. Such titles also testify to a common vision of animal tales as didactic tools among African and Creole communities. As Levine notes, "the journey to the New World did not inexorably sever all associations with the Old World [...] aspects of the traditional cultures and world view they came with may have continued to exist not as mere vestiges, but as dynamic living, creative parts of group life in the United States" (5). The 'Old World', African understanding and practicality of animal tales and the need to give their characters human titles obviously persisted and is apparent not only in the Louisiana Creole tales, but also in the African American tradition of the English colonies in the form of 'Brer' ('brother') Rabbit,

[32] Fula (or *peul/peulh* in French) is related to Wolof and is the first language to most of the Fulani and is spoken in approximately twenty Western and Central African countries. Austin notes that "Fulani-speaking areas cover a vast territory, comprising a belt along the entire Sahel from Mauritania to Sudan, and falling into two large dialect areas: Pulaar in the western areas, with the Fuuta Tooro dialect spoken in Senegal and the Gambia" (Austin 69).

popularized by the *Uncle Remus* tales of Joel Chandler Harris (1848-1908), although many other variants exist (see Levine 81-135).

This story even specifies the characters' motivation for starting his own farm: "The two would spend hours talking a lot with admiration about the ways of life of human beings. They marveled at the system of government and their various means of earning a living" (Bojang and Bojang 2: 72). The storytellers' explicit connection between the animal and human kingdom is telling of the African understanding of the universe and underlines the didactic utility of the tale.

The two animals decide that millet would be the best yield for the first crop and decide to clear the land as soon as possible in light of the oncoming monsoons. As in many West African and Louisiana tales of the hyena and the hare, the two animals set off more or less on equal footing. The hyena is usually in a state of relative well being compared to the hare, that is, until he is duped. However, the hare is determined to see his crops sown and harvested without doing any of the work himself. He decides to enlist the help of the elephant. It is worth noting that the presence of other animals in tales that one could otherwise simply classify as 'Hyena and Hare' tales is not uncommon in West African tales, nor in the early black Creole tales collected by Alcée Fortier. However, the hyena and hare appear much more exclusively in later collections (see Ancelet 1994 and Claudel 1978), especially among white francophone or Cajun communities. In this tale from the Gambia region, the elephant's more minor role in the genre is evidenced in the manner in which the tellers refers to him simply as "Elephant" (Bojang and Bojang vol. 2:73), without according him the status of 'Maubeh'.

As one might expect, the hare bests his fellow animals, not by force, but by his cunning and wit. In this tale, the hare dupes both the elephant and the hyena into working the plot of land in exchange for a share of the harvest. The hare first visits the elephant, offering to work the morning shift if the elephant will work during the afternoon. Against the advice of his wife, the elephant agrees, without even settling the details of their business arrangement. The hare then proceeds to visit the hyena, offering to work during the afternoon if he will take the morning shift. After three days' time, the land is completely cleared and the hare has never touched a hoe. Just before finishing the clearing, Maubeh Hare provides the elephant and Maubeh Hyena millet seeds for sowing, doing so separately as "they were both ignorant of each other's toil in the farm although they innocently competed over performance on their daily output in the farm" (Bojang and Bojang 2: 78).

After the plentiful rains, it is not long before the millet is ready to be harvested and Maubeh Hare is determined to have his gullible friends reap the crop for him. The hare recounts to the elephant a false rumor of Maubeh Hyena planning to steal their crop during the night. The hare then tells a similar falsehood to Maubeh Hyena about Elephant's scheme to raid the millet the same evening. Thus the elephant and hyena catch each other at what they believe to be theft. Although the Maubeh Hyena escapes, to be deceived another time by the hare, Elephant is caught in a trap set by the hare and is left hanging from a tree. The unfortunate Elephant eventually falls from the tree and dies.

The motif of theft or at least trickery resulting in the acquisition of food by the trickster figure seems to be a common theme in the oral traditions of West Africa and French and Creole Louisiana. However, the death of the dupe, most often the hyena,

elephant, or monkey is generally a trait found only in the African tradition, rarely occurring in the Louisiana corpus. The final and often morbid endings of many African animal tales can be considered as part of the "realism that pervaded black folktales (Levine 99).

1.3.2 AaTh 9B: A Comparative Look at the *Crop Division*

Motifs involving crop theft are by no means unique to African or Louisiana oral traditions. Motifs like K171.1 *Deceptive crop division: above the ground, below the ground* can be found in *Le Roman de Renart* and Louisiana French and Creole versions of such tales seem to be quite common. Ancelet's *Cajun and Creole Folktales* (1994) includes a typical Louisiana variant of AaTh 9B *In the Division of the Crop the Fox takes the Corn* entitled, "En haut la terre ou en bas la terre," told by Martin Latiolais of Catahoula, Louisiana (Ancelet 1994, 10-11). This variant features Bouki and Lapin who are surveying their crop of potatoes. Similarly to the hyena and hare tales in the Bojang collection, the storyteller begins the tale by mentioning the "friendly" relationship between the characters, alluding to the regularity of their visits with each other: "Là, une autre fois (ils étaient associés, tu vois), ils ont fait une récolte. Ça fait, la première année, ils ont planté des patates, juste des patates, O! C'était beau, ces lianes de patates-là" (Ancelet 1994, 11).[33] [34] The once peaceful relationship between Bouki and Lapin, or Hyena and Hare, is consistently iterated in both Louisiana and African traditions. This trait suggests a harkening back to an older African convention, and corresponds to Abrahams' observation that:

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[33] "Then, another time (they were associates, you see) they made a crop. So the first year, they planted potatoes. Oh, it was beautiful to see those potato vines" (Ancelet 1994, 11).
[34] As with the excerpts from Fortier's collections, the English translations or those of the collector (Ancelet) except where noted.

> As a matter of convention, the scene is set for Trickster by reminding the audience at the start of a narrative that at the beginning of time everything in nature was harmonious, everyone was friend and family to everyone else. The state is referred to only for dramatic contrast to the chaos that is about to be described, and the tellers do not dwell on the tranquility of such an Edenic condition (Abrahams 155).

Deciding how to divide the crop, Lapin gives Bouki his choice as to whether he would rather have what was above the earth or below, expecting Bouki to foolishly be tempted by the beautiful sweet potato vines, and he was. Here, Lapin gives Bouki the illusion of being in control while anticipating his stupidity, as in motif J1731.9.1 *Ignorance of which part of plant is the fruit (crop).* While Lapin enjoys the potatoes throughout the year, Bouki is stuck with the useless flowers and vines of the potato plants and nearly starves. The following year, the two planted a crop of corn. Determined not to be outsmarted once again, Bouki insisted on taking his share of the harvest from below the ground, saying "tu me blufferas pas cette année. Je vas prendre ça qu'est dans la terre!" (Ancelet 1994 11).[35] Of course, Lapin happily obliges, enjoying his plentiful harvest of corn, while Bouki was once again left with nothing.

There exists a sort of supernatural counterpart of *The Crop Division* classified as AaTh 1030 among other tales of pacts between Man and the Devil. Ancelet suggests that there are two basic presentations of this type and notes that "the version casting humans and/or anthropomorphic spirits (such as St. Michael and the Devil) tend to focus on the cleverness of the hero" whereas the variants casting animals, like Bouki and Lapin, "tend to focus simply on the stupidity of the dupe who "chooses unwisely, motivated by greed or a misunderstanding of the true value of the shared commodity" (Ancelet 1994 10-11).

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[35] "You won't fool me this year. I'll take what's below the ground" (Ancelet 1994 11).

Calvin Claudel offers an almost identical variant of Type 9B titled "The Farm," also featuring Bouki, here spelled 'Bouqui', and Lapin in his collection, *Fools and Rascals* (29).[36] Although the body of the tale is the same, Claudel's informant adds, "during the winter Bouqui went to ask Lapin for something to eat. Lapin refused him. Bouqui almost died from hunger that year, and he decided not to work on shares with comrade Lapin anymore" (Claudel 29). Despite such endings, it is generally understood that these tales constitute what can be considered as a tale cycle and therefore the characters are continually reappearing in subsequent tellings of similar or different tale types.

Despite the casting of Bouki and Lapin, this tale is most likely not of African origin. Ancelet notes that, "in African tradition, stories concerning *The Unjust Partner* (type 9) are grouped together by Klipple though the crop division is never present, usually one hunter tricks another as they divide their common prey" (Ancelet 1994, 11). This motif much more closely resembles another tale in Bojang and Bojang's collection, "The Hyena and the Hare," described below. Of course, these two aforementioned Louisiana variants of AaTh 9B share many similarities with Bojang and Bojang's, "Hare Gets Hyena and Elephant to Work on His Farm," and many parallels can be drawn between the two. However, the lesser frequency of the *Division of the Crop* type in the African tradition suggests more of an overlapping or superimposition of the African animal character paradigm Bouki and Lapin over a European form. Moreover, even

[36] The original phonographs of these tales told by his informants (many from his own mother in Avoyelles Parish) can be found in the Louisiana Research Center at Tulane University, but were still inaccessible at the time of this study. Claudel only published English translations, which will be used here.

though there is mention in Claudel's "The Farm" that Bouqui "almost died", he does not perish at the end, as in most hyena and hare tales of West Africa (Claudel 29).

In another tale from the Senegambia found in the Bojang collection, "The Hyena and the Hare," the hare repeatedly outwits the hyena (Bojang and Bojang 1: 52). The narrator of this particular tale casts the two animals as brothers-in-law. Like Fortier's "Tortie," this tale could be interpreted as two separate narratives fused together. The story begins when the hyena and the hare leave their village Sutura early in the morning in order to visit their in-laws. Each animal carries with him a bag of rice meant as gifts for the family. Along the way the hyena feels the need to relieve himself and wishes to do so with some privacy so he walks away from the path. The hare deceitfully assures the hyena that he is still visible from the path and encourages him to walk further and further away. While the hyena is at a distance and out of sight, the hare plays his first trick on the hyena. Noticing that the hyena's bag contained clean and well-sieved rice, and that his own rice still contained husks and was not clean, the hare decides to switch out the rice from the two bags, leaving hyena with the lower quality rice. "This will serve him right. If he thinks he's smart in his effort to win over our in-laws, he's making a big mistake. [...] I intend to be, and must be, the favorite son-in-law" (Bojang and Bojang 1: 53). As this tale attests, although hyena is cast as the typical dupe of the tale, he is sometimes the more logical and prepared of the two characters.

Upon arriving at the home of the father-in-law Pa Juma, hyena is shocked at how poor his rice looks since he had last seen it. Pa Juma assures both hyena and hare that he loves them equally, but just before their departure, he gifts the hare with a large bull and gives to hyena only a meager goat.

Halfway along their journey home, hyena becomes hungry and suggests to hare that they kill and eat the goat and the bull. Hare replies, “perhaps you didn’t notice how much I ate during lunch. You know when it comes to food I have my fill no matter who is present. I’m not hungry. [...] If you want you can kill your goat and eat it” (Bojang and Bojang 1: 55). Here the gluttony displayed by the hare earlier at his father-in-law’s resembles the hyena character of Louisiana tales like “Dans la grosserie,” and “Dézéf zozo,” described in more detail below. In this African tale, hare is devoid of any redeeming qualities, while hyena is duped despite his good moral judgment.

While hyena was hardly even full after eating his skinny goat, hare paraded his bull into the village, “determined to show everybody in a quiet way that his in-laws held him in higher esteem than the hyena that came home with nothing” (Bojang and Bojang 1: 55). To further humiliate the hyena, hare sent meat to all of the villagers and since the hyena had no food left over from the father-in-law’s gift, his own family had nothing but the bones sent to them by the hare.

Not unlike other hyena and hare tales of Africa and Louisiana, this tale includes a second part, which takes place five months later, that could very well be considered a separate tale altogether or even a variation on the first, as it also takes place at the father-in-laws home.

After a morning of working on the farm and lunch, the father-in-law asks hyena and hare to retrieve some honey from a large beehive “in a big tree separating this village from Tambakoto” (Bojang and Bojang 1: 56). The location of the tree is symbolic of the liminal nature often associated with the trickster figure, as he is often portrayed as being at the border between friend and foe, part of society and yet marginalized. This peripheral

quality of the trickster figure is consistent with Hynes and Doty's persuasion that "plurality, plurivocity, and ambiguity are essential to the trickster Gestalt" (Hynes and Doty 9). The hare offers to retrieve the honey for the hyena saying, "I know you are very weak with sweet food. [...] We'll be very embarrassed if we don't take back any" (Bojang and Bojang 1: 56). Much in the same way that Lapin gives Bouki first choice of the two crop divisions in two Louisiana variants of AaTh 9B mentioned above, here too the hare lets the hyena set his own trap.

When the two arrive at the beehive, the hare decides to go first, putting his head in the hole, staying there for ten minutes while he licks up the honey. Hyena grows impatient during this time and when the hare finally takes his head out of the tree, the hyena eagerly pushes his large head into the hole and is nearly unable to remove his head at all. The narrator states that "as he pulled with force, the top skin of his head came off and remained on the bark of the tree trunk" (Bojang and Bojang 1: 57). Although the hyena does not die in the tree, the scenario is otherwise identical to motif K.1020.1 found in type AaTh 41 *The Wolf Overeats in the Cellar*, of which we will see another variant below from Claudel's collection.

Pa Juma, unsatisfied with the pitiful amount of honey that he received is obliged to return to the tree himself to get enough honey for his family. Upon his arrival at the tree, he is amused to find hyena's scalp stuck near the opening of the hole and carefully carves it out with his knife and returns to the farm. Pa Juma then instructs his wife to cook the skin separately with palm oil and that night he and the hare eat only the rice and porridge, while the hyena feasts on everything, including his own skin. Unaware of what he was really eating, the hyena asked, "where did you get the meat? It tastes very nice

and my mother-in-law is a very good cook. I really envy you" (Bojang and Bojang 1: 58). When the hyena is informed that he eating his own skin, he tries "to throw it up but the chewed skin would not come out!" (Bojang and Bojang 1: 58). The motif of eating one's own flesh is found elsewhere in the oral tradition. Christine Goldberg notes that, "unwitting cannibalism (motif G60), *Human flesh eaten unwittingly*, emphasizes the horror of eating taboo (or contaminated) food more than the horror of being eaten" (230). Goldberg goes on to note that the similar motif G61, *Relative's Flesh Eaten Unwittingly*, is "amply documented in North America, Asia, Africa, and Europe" (231).

The meaning of such a motif in this tale could be found in its relationship to the motif K1856.1 *Human flesh substituted for eaten (lost) meat*. The hyena's ingestion of his own skin is meant to serve as a punishment for his eating honey that was not his to consume. In this sense, he compensates for his debt to society incurred by eating the taboo honey from the tree. Once again, the role of food is one of utmost importance. Here, not only is food a representation of one's survival, but also, and by extension, is a sort of social currency that, once borrowed or stolen, must be repaid. Pa Juma, true to his role as village elder, acts as the authoritative figure fit to administer hyena's punishment and restore balance to the social order. Moreover, from a structural perspective, the hyena's eating of his own flesh can be viewed as an intensification of what has already taken place in the narrative. Each time that the hyena is deceived it is through his own fault or negligence, first by leaving his bag of rice in the hare's keeping, second by allowing the hare to enter the tree first, and thirdly by being the only one at the table to serve himself his own skin.

This tale seems to be mostly didactic in nature against greed, as the hyena is consumed, both figuratively and literally, by his own gluttony. However, a closer reading reveals that the hare is just as much or even more of a glutton than the hyena. Perhaps the real lesson here is one of the values of intelligence and social comportment. In other words, the hare is successful, not because he manages to avoid overeating, which is not the case at any rate, but because he possesses the finesse to remain in good standing with the villagers as well as his own father-in-law. The tale also suggests a natural order of things, implying that the hare will always outwit the hyena.

It would appear that one of the most striking differences between African and Louisiana animal tales is the manner in which African tales include not only a greater number of animals, but also the implication of a greater society (villages, families, tribal origins).[37] The reason for this is directly related to the African philosophy of the union between man and nature as well as the more important societal role of the folktale. Koffi Konan, a native of the Ivory Coast, speaks of the polyvalent nature of the folktale in African society:

> En effet, le conte est le reflet de la société, de toute la société. C'est la vie de notre peuple, de notre civilisation traditionnelle avec sa structure sociale, sa vie économique, politique, son système culturel. La société que nous offre le conte est d'abord celle dans laquelle hommes et bêtes vivent en symbiose. Le conte nous fait connaître la civilisation du peuple, plus précisément sa culture, c'est-à-dire un

[37] As it appears that within the animal tales of the Senegambia region, the characteristics of animals are largely the same as those found in the Louisiana folktales, an argument could even be made for the African tradition, where a greater number of animal characters are present, that a certain continuum exists ranging from the cleverest hare to the most foolish hyena with other animals, such as the elephant lying somewhere in between.

> héritage de coutumes, de connaissances lentement acquises, au cours des siècles, des croyances (Konan 3).[38]

In contrast, the majority of Louisiana animal tales seem to exist in a spatial and temporal frame removed and independent from the real world. This difference between the two traditions suggests a decline in the didactic need for folktales in the New World, with a more institutionalized system of education, as well as a greater distance with the source culture of Africa (Levine 90).

As much as food plays an integral and symbolic role in the animal trickster tales examined thus far, by its very nature, food demonstrates a remarkable quality of adaptability to a given context as we will see in the following variants of tale types AaTh 41 and AaTh 15.

1.4 The Symbolism of Food as Power

In "Compair Bouki, Compair Lapin, et dézef zozo," from Fortier's collection, we see a relatively common beginning in both the Louisiana and West African corpuses, whereby Bouki (the hyena) is hungry and asks Lapin (the hare) to show him where he finds his food. This tale also starts with an abbreviated version of the description of the 'Edenic' natural state present in most African trickster tales: "Compair Bouki et Compair Lapin té voisin" (Fortier 30).[39] What is curious in this tale is that Bouki exclaims to his neighbor consecutively his extreme hunger and his terrible toothache. Admiring his kettle of food on the fire, Bouki is keenly intent on finding out what Lapin is preparing for

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[38] "In effect, the folktale is the reflection of society as a whole. It is the life of our people, of our traditional civilization with our social structure, its political and economic life, its cultural system. The folktale offers us a society in which man and beast live in symbiosis. The folktale makes us understand the people's civilization, more specifically, its culture, that is to say a heritage of customs, of knowledge slowly attained over the course of centuries, and beliefs." Translation is my own.

[39] "Compair Bouki and Compair Lapin were neighbors" (Fortier 31).

dinner and repeats his two ailments: "Qui ça qui senti si bon dans chaudière la, Compair Lapin? Oh comme mo gagnin mal aux dents!" (Fortier 30).[40] From the very beginning of the tale, Bouki demonstrates the paradoxical nature of his character that we find to be so prevalent elsewhere in the West African and French and Creole Louisiana oral tradition. He is both hungry and ravenous, starved and gluttonous, famished but unable to eat. There probably lies some symbolic significance in Bouki's complaint of his aching teeth. Michel Cazenave notes that "pour des raisons sans doute d'ordre analytique, les dents sont le symbole le plus souvent de la vitalité, de la procréation, de la puissance et du sperme. [...] 'Rêver que les dents tombent a par ailleurs, comme le mal de dents, un rapport avec l'expression de l'impuissance" Cazenave 1996 193). The relationship between teeth, vital mechanisms for the consumption of food, and physical survival is extended by Cazenave's assertion to encompass the possibility of future progeny. This symbolic relationship will reappear below in another tale from Magel's collection, "Hyena in the Well."

Lapin informs Bouki that he is cooking birds' eggs, and Bouki is convinced that this is just what is needed to cure him. Giving Bouki a few eggs, Lapin even promises to take him the next day to the place where he finds them. Bouki returns home to his mother, who upon smelling her son's breath, insists on scraping particles of the eggs off his teeth with a piece of wood. Impressed by the smell, she says to Bouki: "Faut to porté moin in pé!" (Fortier 30).[41] [42]

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[40] "What smells so good in that kettle, Compair Lapin? Oh! what a toothache I have! " (Fortier 31).

[41] "You must get me some!" (Fortier 31).

[42] The complicit nature between Bouki (acting here as the dupe) and his mother is comparable to that of Jean-le-Sot as will be seen in the next chapter.

As promised, the next day Lapin shows Bouki where he had been finding his eggs, but warns Bouki that he must not take more than one egg from each nest, lest the birds realize that they have been stolen. Of course, Bouki does not heed Lapin's advice and it does not take long for the birds to notice that their eggs are missing. Similar to what can be found in the African tradition, Bouki and Lapin are not the only animals present, as the ox and the horse are suspected to have taken the eggs, but they answer that they only eat grass and hay, respectively. A similar tale of African origin would presumably include a series of animals interrogated one by one about the possibility of their eating the eggs, each one declaring their innocence and what they eat. When Bouki is finally interrogated, he foolishly replies, "Oui, c'est moin qui mangé vous dézef" (Fortier 30).[43] Immediately thereafter, the birds put his eyes out and nearly tear him to pieces.[44]

1.4.1 The Starving Glutton: Two Variants of AaTh 41

In both the West African and Louisiana oral traditions many tales of Bouki and Lapin, or hyena and hare, consist of narrative that depends heavily on the dupe's role of glutton. "Dans la grosserie," found in Ancelet's collection told by Elby Deshotels, is one such example that has made its way into the repertoire of white francophone storytellers. Elby, like his twin brother Edward, was a gifted musician and storyteller who learned many tales from their father, Marcellus. The family was from the Mamou and Reddell area in Evangeline Parish, which as Ancelet notes, is on "the northern edge of what is called Cajun country" and "was actually settled largely by French Creoles" (Ancelet

[43] "Yes, it is I who ate your eggs" (Fortier 31).
[44] Consistent with the other Louisiana tales of the corpus, the dupe does not die at the end of the tale, in contrast with many African tales.

1994, lxi). The tale is just one example of how the characters of Bouki and Lapin have been integrated into white French-speaking circles and also exhibits motifs similar to those of the West African tales in our corpus. Similar forms of the tale type 41, *The Wolf Overeats in the Cellar,* can certainly be found elsewhere in the oral tradition, but the characters' names suggest sustained contact with elements of West African folklore. Although the principal motifs and character names of this tale are reminiscent of Africa, the setting is adapted to the context of twentieth-century Louisiana. 'La grosserie' is the common term in Louisiana French for "food store, grocery store" where people historically bought their goods *en gros*, or 'in bulk' ("Grosserie", *Dictionary of Louisiana French* 323). The majority of type 41 tales take place in 'a forbidden place', in this instance the grocery store where live animals are generally not welcome (Ancelet 1994, 8).

The opening of Deshotels's tale deserves some consideration as it embodies several of the nuances that are the subject of our analysis. "Il y avait deux malfaicteurs,[45] une fois. Il y en a un, son nom, c'était Bouki, et l'autre, c'était Lapin. Et Lapin était tout le temps gras. Il était en bonne condition, et Bouki était tout le temps, tout le temps maigre" (Ancelet 9).[46] Once again, this first sentence of the tale reaffirms a certain degree of preexisting complicity between the two characters, suggesting that they are both *malfaicteurs*. The distinction seems to be mostly a physical one and no emphasis is placed on one being more intelligent or tricky than the other at the opening of the

[45] *Malfaicteur*/*malfacteur* in Louisiana French is roughly equivalent to 'wrong-doer', 'criminal' or 'rascal'.

[46] "There were these two rascals, once. One's name was Bouki and the other was Lapin. And Lapin was always fat. He was in good shape, and Bouki was always, always skinny" (Ancelet 9).

narrative. Moreover, Deshotels's telling of this tale draws the listener's attention to the similar ambivalence found in the preceding tales with regard to the dupe's tendency to overeat despite explicit factors that would suggest the contrary (constant toothache, skinniness, eating less than the hare). This marked ambiguity of the Bouki character is complemented by the sexual ambivalence of the hyena in the African tradition as described by Gaudet below. In this tale, even Bouki is puzzled at how Lapin is so well fed and asks him why he's always fat and in such good shape. Lapin eventually lets Bouki in on his secret and decides to show him that night the grocery store from where he often steals food. Deshotels describes the scene: "Il y avait un beau clair de lune. Ils ont arrivé à une grosserie. Et Lapin s'est trainé dessous la grosserie. Il a arrivé droit dessous le milieu du plancher. Il y avait une planche qu'était déclouée. Ça se fait, il a poussé la planche et il s'est trainé dedans la grosserie" (Ancelet 1994, 9).[47]

Like the tree separating the two villages in the "The Hyena and the Hare" from the Bojangs' collection, Bouki's gluttony also takes place in a liminal space, "under the middle of the floor," that the animals are only able to penetrate in order to enter the next part of the narrative. The two find a big box with a jar inside full of cream. Lapin begins to eat the cream, but Bouki is so greedy that he begins to stuff his face with both hands despite Lapin's warning to him that the storekeeper will open soon and they will get caught, saying, "C'est l'heure on *gone*" (Ancelet 9).[48]

After a while, Lapin has enough sense to leave the grocery store, but Bouki stays behind, eating so much cream that he is unable to pass through the hole through which he

[47] "They arrived at a grocery store. The moon was bright. And Lapin crawled under the grocery. He arrived just under the middle of the floor. There was a plank that had come unattached. So he pushed the plank and he crawled into the grocery" (Ancelet 1994, 9).
[48] "It's time to leave" (Ancelet 9).

first entered and is trapped. It is interesting to note that Bouki, although he is so thin, is the one who is caught whereas Lapin is capable of both being 'tout le temps gras et en bonne condition' and also able to enter and exit the grocery unimpeded by his size. It is as if the grocery represents more of a narrative space than a physical one. In this sense, Bouki's folly is that he is not able to sufficiently navigate the liminal space that he is forced to inhabit. His inability to leave the store in time makes him a prisoner in that very narrative space.

Calvin Claudel offers another variant of AaTh 41 from Avoyelles Parish, a region located north and northeast of Evangeline Parish, again, an area settled largely by French Creoles. True to the form seen thus far in this study and resembling the early phase of the narrative that Dundes refers to as the *contract* between the two characters, the anonymous teller of "Bouqui and Lapin in the Smokehouse" introduces Bouqui and Lapin as "two fellows who were very fond of each other" (Claudel 26, Dundes 1971 171-180). Here again, the representation of food seems to be particularly malleable in this tale type and it is not surprising that the 'forbidden place' should be a *boucanière* or 'smokehouse' in this area of Louisiana.

"Bouqui and Lapin in the Smokehouse," begins much like "Dans la grosserie" with Bouqui asking Lapin where he gets all of his good meat. Lapin replies that he gets it from "the smokehouse of the Frenchmen" (Claudel 26). The designation of the smokehouse owners as 'Frenchmen' here is perhaps a way of distinguishing human from the animal characters in the tale, but also raises the question of whether the storyteller

heard this tale from black Creoles as would be suggested by the presence of Bouqui cast as the dupe.[49]

Lapin cautiously agrees to show Bouqui the location of the smokehouse, saying, "Come here tonight after midnight. You must not come before the roosters crow for midnight, when all the lights are out, because we will get caught" (Claudel 26). In contrast to the bright moonlight in "Dans la grosserie," in this variant the two animals take advantage of the darkest moment of the night to sneak into the smokehouse.

Bouqui agrees to return to Lapin's home that night, but quickly grows anxious and returns well before the agreed meeting time with a blanket under his arm and a stick. Bouqui, in a futile attempt to make time go by faster, begins to poke the chickens with his stick, saying, "Crow! Crow for midnight!" (Claudel 26). Lapin comes outside, startled by the cries of his chickens, and urges Bouqui to go back to bed, as it is still too early to go to the smokehouse lest they get caught. In what may be either a departure from the West African oral tradition or rather a European influence, here it is Bouqui, and not Lapin, who transgresses the 'contract' between the two characters, to borrow once more Dundes' term. As in "Dans la grosserie," Bouqui is unable, or unwilling, to abide by the temporal, and once again, liminal, space allotted to him in the narrative. Midnight, between night and day, '*l'heure du crime*', is the only time during which the theft can be successfully executed, a detail that only Lapin seems to understand.

After going back to sleep, the two wake up again at midnight and set off for the Frenchmen's smokehouse. Once inside the smokehouse, the storyteller explains: "Bouqui

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[49] This cannot be known with any degree of certainty; however, many of Claudel's Avoyelles Parish informants were his own family members and of white Creole ascendance.

spread his blanket upon the ground. He began piling up meat, sausage, in fact all sorts of good things to eat that were in there. Lapin himself cut off a piece of meat and then went out, leaving through the hole by which he entered" (Claudel 27). Unlike the greedy Bouqui, Lapin cuts off one piece of meat and then leaves the smokehouse. Bouqui stayed, taking the four corners of his blanket and tying them together to fill it with meat. He later tries to squeeze his bundle through the hole they had entered, but it would not pass and when the sun rose, the Frenchmen discovered Bouqui stuck in the corner of the smokehouse "still tugging" at his bundle. "They seized him and got out a big rawhide whip. They gave him a big beating then they gave him a large piece of meat, saying to him, 'Go home and eat now!'" (Claudel 27). It may seem odd that the Frenchmen should throw yet another piece of meat at Bouqui, but it seems to be a punishment very much like the one administered by Pa Juma. Bouqui's transgression, the theft of food, can only be remedied by the consumption of meat that is forced upon him by a higher social authority. Although Bouqui is not forced to eat his own flesh like in "The Hyena and the Hare," collected by Bojang and Bojang, the punishment inflicted upon him is still one of forced consumption as recompense for eating forbidden food.

This kind of punishment is contrary to what one finds in the Judeo-Christian tradition, whereby Adam and Eve are punished by God for eating the forbidden fruit of knowledge, not by forcing them to eat more, but by banishing them from the Garden of Eden, threatening them with starvation rather than forced feeding.

> To the man he [God] said: 'Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree of which I had forbidden you to eat, cursed be the ground because of you! In toil shall you eat its yield all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to you, as you eat of the plants of the field' (*New American Bible,* Gen. Ch. 3.17-18).

Similar warnings against gluttony are found elsewhere in the Old Testament, including two references in the book of Proverbs:

> "And put a knife to your throat if you have a ravenous appetite" (*New American Bible,* Prov. Ch. 23.2).
>
> "Consort not with winebibbers, nor with those who eat meat to excess; For the drunkard and the glutton come to poverty and torpor clothes a man in rags" (*New American Bible,* Prov. Ch. 23.21).

The motif of forced eating, or even self-cannibalism, as a punishment for greed or gluttony contrasts dramatically with the biblical passages above. It is quite possible that this might be a vestige of the African oral tradition and a quite different set of moral values.

One final example of auto-cannibalism worth consideration is "The Hare and Hyena in the Well," found in Emil Magel's collection of forty-five Wolof narratives from the Gambia.[50] This tale begins with the hyena and the hare banding together to set traps. Upon returning to their traps later, they find very few animals and the hare persuaded the hyena to let him take their meager catch to his own village, promising to let the hyena have all of what they would catch the next day. However, this went on for days and days until the hyena grew skinny and weary. Angered, and under increasing pressure from his household, hyena seeks revenge by beating the hare and throwing him down a well. The hare quickly finds a way to obtain food, even at the bottom of a well.

The sheep is the first who falls prey to the hare, who cries to each passing animal, "You are very bad. [...] You, since I have been sick, until today, you have not visited me" (Magel 186). When asked how to enter the well by each passing animal, the hare

[50] Magel gives a surprising amount of detail for each tale collected. This tale was, "narrated by Malik Boye in Porli, The Gambia, on October 30 [1973] at 2:45 p.m. in the center of the village before 13 men, 9 women and 12 children" (Magel 187).

responds, “If you go this way and then that way, you will arrive here” (Magel 186). This ruse enables the hare to surprise and kill the sheep, the goat, the bull and other animals until he himself grows bigger than a cow. Because of the hare’s cunning, he actually thrives in the well in a scenario that, on a basic level, resembles that of Brer Rabbit in motif K581.2 *Briar-patch punishment for rabbit*.

Expecting him to have starved to death, the hyena is surprised to find the hare so big and healthy when he goes to check on him. As the hyena grows envious of all the food the hare is able to acquire at the bottom of the well, it is not difficult for the hare to persuade him to switch places with him. The hare explains to the hyena his method of enticing the passing animals to descend into the well, however the hyena lacks the intelligence to execute the scheme properly, saying to each passersby, “You only have to walk here and then there, fall into this hole and I will devour you” (Magel 187). Not surprisingly, none of the animals were deceived by such a poor attempt at copying the hare’s trickery. The hyena eventually begins to starve and hallucinate from lack of food. The storyteller, Malik Boye, recounts how the hyena “no longer knew what he was doing. He began to salivate whenever he looked at his own testicles. He said, ‘HUMMM it is honey. If I devour you, you will know it’. [...] Then he seized them into his mouth and said, ‘Hai! They are on me... they are part of *me!*’” (Magel 187). The hyena eventually dies from starvation at the bottom of the well, for “what else could he do but just hold the testicles in his mouth?” (Magel 187).

It is significant that this tale combines aspects of Motifs G60 and C221.3.1 *Tabu: Eating Animal's Genitals*, as it juxtaposes auto-cannibalism as penalty for gluttony with castration. In this sense, there is a direct link between food, which has been seen in each

tale thus far in the corpus to be a symbol of survival or power, and the loss of virility or sexual power. The end of this tale also suggests a certain sexual ambivalence of the hyena, which is likely connected to popular beliefs about the hyena in West Africa. Marcia Gaudet argues that doubts surrounding the sexual nature of the hyena may have had an influence on the representation of Bouki in Creole Louisiana folklore. Gaudet states that, "the unusual genitalia of the female hyena cause it, until puberty, to look and act like a male. Because of this, hyenas have been surrounded with folk beliefs, and surely this is significant in the African tales and in the Louisiana Bouki and Lapin tales (Gaudet 67).

Although the sexual ambivalence of Bouki is not expressed in the Louisiana French and Creole tradition, the figure remains both marginal and liminal. He is systematically humiliated, emasculated in a way, and often held captive in liminal spaces as demonstrated in the above analyses.

1.5 Intersection of European and African Elements in AaTh 15

Due to a high degree of overlap with African and European motifs and tale types, attempts to determine with accuracy the origin of certain tales always become problematic, especially where similar narrative structures exist in multiple traditions that have intersected, such as the trickster and dupe scenario (i.e. the European *loup et renard* and the African hyena and hare). Regarding the origins of tales of African origin in his own collections of black American folklore, Levine finds that, "a roughly similar percentage were tales common in both Africa and Europe, so that, while slaves may have brought the tale type with them, its place in their lore could well have been reinforced by their contact with whites" (Levine 82). One tale type that is very prevalent in French and

Creole Louisiana folklore as well as elsewhere in the French American oral tradition is type AaTh 15, *The Theft of Butter (Honey) by Playing Godfather*.[51]

One of Ancelet's most prolific informants, Martin Latiolais, a Cajun from Catahoula, Louisiana, offers a version found in *Cajun and Creole Folktales* titled, "Le gros baril de beurre." (Ancelet 1994 3-5). The body of this tale exhibits minimal variation from the majority of catalogued variants throughout North America and the West Indies. Similar versions are found in Louisiana in French, Creole and English and are relatively uniform in their structure.[52] While Bouki and Lapin are out working in the field, Lapin repeatedly pretends to be called away by someone to name or baptize a baby, although he is actually stealing food (or butter, or honey). Each time Lapin returns, Bouki inquires about the name he has given the newborn child. The first 'child' is named "*Commencé*," the second, "*Un quart*," the third, "*La moitié*," followed by "*Trois quarts,*" and "*Fini*."

The beginning of Latiolais's rendition of this tale puts into question the nature and identity of the Bouki character as well as the storyteller's ability to place him in different roles. Latiolais recounts: "Là, quand ils travaillaient comme ça-là, Lapin s'avait mis comme un prêtre, tu vois? Il baptisait les enfants. Mais, ils s'avaient acheté un baril de beurre, un gros baril de beurre" (Ancelet 1994, 4).[53]

The relationship between Bouki and Lapin had actually already been established by another tale immediately preceding this one, but is nevertheless reiterated as it is

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[51] For a summary of North American attestations of AaTh 15, see Ancelet 1994, pp. 3-4.
[52] One exception is noted by Ancelet (1994 4), found in Brandon's doctoral dissertation (Brandon 1955 365-367), which does not include the name telling motif.
[53] "Now, when they worked together like that, Lapin posed as a priest, you see? He baptized children. But they had bought a barrel of butter, a big barrel of butter" (Ancelet 1994 4).

almost systematically in the Louisiana and African tales.[54] Moreover, Lapin's faculty as a trickster is intensified here, as he is not only called to name the children (as in the Congo variant) or act as godfather, but also he is capable of disguising himself as a priest and performing baptisms. Lapin's 'transformation' is carnivalesque in the Bakhtinian sense insofar as the trickster dons a religious costume in a momentary mockery of the baptismal rite in the interest of his own gluttony.[55] Furthermore, the animals' purchase of the large barrel of butter seems to have little relevance to their agricultural endeavors. It would seem that the contents of the barrel, or the well, are of little importance and represent another example of how easily food can be adapted, or localized, to a given geographic or cultural context.

Several Acadian variants of AaTh 15 can be found in the Centre d'études acadiennes Anselme Chiasson (CEAAC) at the Université de Moncton. These tales feature a much more European-influenced casting of characters, the fox as the trickster and the wolf as the dupe. In the "Le loup et le renard," told by Alyre Maddix of Abrams Village, Prince Edward Island,[56] the first half of the tale is basically identical to that of Martin Latiolais's. The fox pretends to be called off to play godfather to a child and gives the imaginary children names like, "Bien Commencé," "Mi-Vide" and "Cu-Frippé." The fox proceeds to trick the wolf several more times, enticing him with clams and lobsters, yet another example of localization in how food is adapted to fit the cultural environment

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[54] In the sound recording from which this tale was transcribed, we find that "Le gros baril de beurre," follows "En haut la terre ou en bas la terre." AN1.077 in the Archives of Cajun and Creole Folklore, Center for Louisiana Studies, Lafayette, Louisiana.

[55] This image echoes the notion of *rabaissement* of religious or official ceremony that will be developed in the third chapter of this study.

[56] "Le loup et le renard," #29, roll 3, Collection: Georges Arsenault. Rec. December 31, 1971.

of the storyteller. The fox finally convinces the wolf to play dead on the side of the road, wait for a traveling fisherman to pass by with a load of lobsters and take him by surprise: "Saut-là, p'is prends quoisque tu voudras, i' s'en aparçevra jamais!" (Maddix 2).[57] However, when the man passes by, he pickes up the wolf with a pitchfork, throws him atop his load of lobsters and takes him away, leaving the fox safe and sound. In another Acadian variant of AaTh 15, "Le conte du loup et du renard," recounted by Cyrille Comeau in Sheila, New Brunswick, the fox is also successful in escaping the wolf by climbing up a tree. The end of this variant suggests the permanence of the fox's victory over the wolf: "Vas-t-en i' a dit, le loup tu m'oiras jamais, i' a dit j'te paierai ton quart de miel. Ça fait toujours le loup s'en a 'té p'is le r'nard i' a eu la vie sauve" (Comeau 2).[58]

Joseph Carrière incudes two variants of AaTh 15 in his collection of Missouri French folklore, *Tales from the French Folk-Lore of Missouri* (1937). Barry Ancelet asserts that, "the use of Bouki and Lapin in Missouri French tradition indicates a Mississippi River Valley connection through Louisiana to West Africa," but the type is also widely found in the French tradition with the fox and the wolf, Renart and Isengrin in the *Roman de Renart* (Ancelet 1994 3). May Klipple, in her doctoral dissertation *African Folk Tales with Foreign Analogues* (1938), only mentions four African attestations of AaTh 15, which differ considerably from most Louisiana variants. The first variant from South Africa, which casts the jackal and the hyena as trickster and dupe, includes the motif of smearing fat on the hyena's tail to incriminate him (Klipple 42). Only one of the tales from Klipple's catalogue features the name-giving motif, an

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[57] 'Jump up, and take what you want! He'll never notice!' (Maddix 2). Translation is my own.

[58] 'Go away, he says! Wolf, you'll never catch me. He said, I'll pay you for your quart of honey. So the fox went away and was safe' (Comeau 2). Translation is my own.

integral trait of the Louisiana variants. Given, the importance of slave trade linking Louisiana to the Congo, it is probably not coincidental that this variant was collected in the Congo region in Dennett's *The Folk-lore of the Fjiort* (Klipple 44, Dennett 90). Of the four African variants provided by Klipple, "The Rabbit and the Antelope," is the only one that bears significant resemblance to the Louisiana variants beyond the most basic structure of the tale type. In this Congo variant the rabbit and the antelope set out to dig a well and the rabbit leaves, saying that he is being called to name someone's baby. Upon the rabbit's first return, he informs the antelope that he named the child "Uncompleted one," and then "Completed," the second time.

Although Klipple's summary does not cover the entire tale, the ending of the tale in Dennett's full transcription is quite intriguing. When the antelope discovers that the rabbit has been stealing food, he challenges him to a truth test (motif K981), which, as Ancelet notes, is also present in the two French Missouri variants collected by Carrière.[59] The truth test consists of both animals eating the casca (truth bark), an emetic, in front of all the villagers. Whoever's tail is wet after eating the bark is the liar (Dennett 92). The rabbit is found guilty and flees, but some time thereafter, a bird tells the antelope that the rabbit is still in the habit of drinking water from the well every day. The antelope is enraged by this news and devises a small figure out of sticks about the size of a rabbit, sets it near the well and smears it with birdlime, an adhesive substance used for trapping birds. What ensues is basically a variation of type AaTh 175 *The Tarbaby and the Rabbit*. The rabbit is annoyed by the presence of this strange figure near the well and asks repeatedly who he is and what he is doing there (Dennett 93). When the figure does not

[59] Numbers 6, "Bouki p'is Lapin," and 7, "Entamé, à moiquié mangé, tout mangé," in Carrière's *Tales from the French Folk-lore of Missouri.*

respond, the rabbit punches the figure with his right hand, then his left. With both hands stuck in the birdlime, he then kicks the figure with right foot and then his left. When the rabbit begins to cry for help, the antelope finds him "helplessly fastened to the figure," laughs at him and then kills him (Dennett 93). Klipple gives thirty-nine African variants of AaTh 175 (213-233), although the cast of characters and the manner in which the trickster is caught differ greatly from the Louisiana variants. In several instances the leopard is cast (either as trickster or dupe) and a number of variants do not include a sticky figure, but rather a tortoise shell into which the jackal jumps and becomes ensnared.

What is significant for the purposes of this study is the fact that among the thirty-nine variants of AaTh 175 comparable to the Louisiana French and Creole variants, none of the tales exhibit a 'successful' trickster. At best, the rabbit is able to escape, but only in a few of the African variants listed by Klipple is this the case. In the vast majority of the cases, the trickster (rabbit, jackal, monkey, or other animal) is killed and sometimes eaten. Moreover, Klipple notes that, "in nineteen of the thirty-nine versions of type 175, the type is combined with one or more types," among which she mentions type 15, *The Theft of Butter (Honey) by Playing Godfather*.

This is certainly an important commonality with the Louisiana variants of type 175; however, an important distinction lies in the absence of motif K581.2. *Briar-patch punishment for rabbit*, in the African variants. In fact, Klipple gives only three instances of motif K581.2. from Africa, each one showing noticeable dissimilarities from the typical scenario associated with Louisiana Creole Bouki and Lapin tales or the Brer Rabbit tales of the English-speaking American South (Klipple 869). The astounding

prevalence of the trickster's victory following motif K581.2., compared to its relative absence in the continental African corpus provided by Klipple, implies more of a New World phenomenon than a holdover from the African tradition.

Even in the oldest collection of our corpus, Fortier's 1895 collection of Louisiana black Creole folktales, "Fillèle Compair Lapin" ("Compair Lapin's Godchild") concludes with the dupe giving the trickster the choice between being thrown in the fire or into the briers.[60] I would argue that the change in how the briar patch motif plays out is a reaction to the cultural trauma of slavery. Familiar with Bouki's malice and lack of intelligence, Lapin pleads for the fire, the opposite of what he really wants. To spite Lapin he throws him into the briers, to which he retorts, "Merci, mo bon Compair Bouki, to metté moin jisse la ou mo moman resté" (Fortier 34).[61] Therefore, although the hyena and hare have penetrated the cast of characters of French and Creole Louisiana as Bouki and Lapin, the inherent moral values and social implications of the tales have changed on a fundamental level.

Conclusions similar to motif K581.2. are found in later tales among predominantly white francophone communities of Louisiana as evidenced by Corinne Saucier's *Folk Tales of French Louisiana*, first published in 1962 and based largely on tales collected in Avoyelles Parish. Tales 30 and 31 of her collection demonstrate striking similarities to the Congo variant collected by Dennett with regard to the narrative

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[60] The inquiry has been made as to whether or not Fortier and Harris were aware of each other's work. In the 2011 introduction to Fortier's 1895 collection, Russell Desmond states: "It is clear that Joel Chandler Harris was unfamiliar with Alcée Fortier's work. Indeed, Harris' first published article featuring B'rer Rabbit material predated Fortier's first piece with such material by eight years, and his first Uncle Remus book preceded Fortier's book publication of the tales by some fifteen years" (Desmond ix).

[61] "Thank you, my good Bouki; you placed me exactly where my mother resides" (Fortier 35).

structure, but end in a manner much more typical of the New World briar-patch scenario. Number 30 in Saucier's collection, "Brer Goat," is a variant of type 15, and includes Brer Goat, Brer Rabbit and Brer Turtle. It is interesting to note that storyteller casts Brer Goat as the trickster. Curiously, Brer Turtle is mentioned only once in the very beginning of the tale and not again (Saucier 86). The very next tale in Saucier's collection, "Brer Turtle," is quite similar to Dennett's tale of the rabbit and the antelope, although it does feature the familiar 'forbidden well' scenario representative of the African corpus (Saucier 87). It seems strange the trickster in this tale is Brer Turtle, who is stealing water from Brer Goat's well. As one might expect, Brer Goat decides to place a tar baby near the well to which Brer Turtle becomes attached after his bout with the sticky figure. Much like "Fillèle Compair Lapin" in Fortier's collection, Brer Goat gives the turtle his choice of punishment: to be thrown in boiling water or thrown in the river. The choice between heat (fire, boiling water) and the cool river (or the shade of a briar patch) seems to be a recurrent trait of the Louisiana variants of type 175. Moreover, we can consider the goat or wolf's 'punishment' that he administers to the trickster as a fitting recompense for his transgression. In other words, it is fitting for him who has stolen water to be thrown in the river, just as the glutton in the African tales is forced to eat more. Although the structure and motifs of the Louisiana and African variants of type 175 are largely the same, it is the effect of the trickster's punishment that has morphed into a victory of cleverness over brute force. Furthermore, the characterization of "Brer Turtle" from Saucier's Avoyelles Parish informant lucidly displays the confluence of European and African traditions as well as the resulting fluidity and interchangeability within the animal paradigm of trickster and dupe.

Tale types 15 and 175 are also prime examples of the problems encountered when attempting to trace certain types or motifs to the African or European oral traditions. This is even more so the case with type 175, which Ancelet suggests is "easily one of the most widely known animal tales of all" (Ancelet 1994 5). In effect, the confluence of these contrasting cultures is rendered even more opaque in light of the considerable degree of commonalities between them. Naturally, when a given motif is present in two oral traditions that have been mixed together in a culturally diverse environment like Louisiana, it becomes impossible to ascertain the origin of such a motif, or if it is simply a shared trait. It is for this reason that this study aims to explore the reasons why such motifs may have adapted or evolved in their new context of Louisiana. Levine says on this subject:

> Unfortunately, extended debate concerning the exact point of origin of these tales has taken precedence over analysis of their meaning and function. Cultural continuities with Africa were not dependent upon importation and perpetuation of specific folk tales in their pristine form. It was the place that tales occupied in the lives of the slaves, the meaning slaves derived from them, and the ways in which slaves used them culturally and psychically that the clearest resemblances with their African past could be found" (Levine 82).

The strong presence of Bouki and Lapin in the oral tradition of white francophone communities of Louisiana demonstrates that these tales were equally pertinent to their social reality. Of course, due to the oral nature of the transmission and diffusion of folktales, there is a lack of written documentation of tales' African origins.

This is not to say, however, that the kind of comparative analyses that I advocate in this study cannot be informed by examining historical connections between Louisiana and West Africa. More specifically, consideration of church and census records can

perhaps partially explain how Afro-Caribbean motifs and characters were integrated into the folklore of Louisiana early on.

For instance, the significant number of Saint-Domingue refugees would have been sufficient to influence the body of animal tales in Louisiana, not only in New Orleans, but in the rural parishes as well. The 1810-1820 Census Reports show that twenty-two percent of the Saint-Domingue refugees settled in Louisiana's rural parishes (Brasseaux and Conrad 1992 x).

> Most of the rural refugees initially tended to congregate in two areas – St. Martin Parish, which then also contained present-day Lafayette and Vermilion parishes, and the French-speaking river parishes, from Pointe Coupée in the north to St. James Parish in the South (Brasseaux and Conrad 1992 xi).

Therefore it is not surprising that the majority the Bouki and Lapin tales from Ancelet's collection were found in St. Martin Parish, including the tales of Martin Latiolais and Ben Guiné. In addition, Alcée Fortier collected numerous tales from the plantation region in St. James Parish, two of which are credited to "'an old negro at *La Vacherie*, St. James Parish,' the site of the plantation where Fortier had been raised and of the St. James Sugar Refinery which was also on his grandfather's property" (Desmond xii).

Besides certain areas disposed to contact with Creoles of color, be it slave trading posts like Opelousas or Donaldsonville, or previous maroon spaces like St. Martin and St. James parishes, the social divide between white and black French and Creole communities may have been less marked than in other American states, if the shared repertoire of folktales is any indication.

1.6 Conclusions

The slave trade to Louisiana also brought with it a remarkably rich oral tradition and folktale repertoire from Africa and the Caribbean, which integrated the already

established European (mainly French) paradigm of animal tales. Of particular relevance to the present study, we have seen that the trickster figure has taken an especially important role in Louisiana Creole folklore. I argue that the augmented prestige of the Louisiana trickster figure, exemplified by Lapin, was an indirect reaction to the cultural trauma caused by slavery. In this sense, the Lapin character of Creole Louisiana is comparable to other tricksters found in English-speaking slave communities elsewhere in the American South, such as Brer Rabbit.

In light of the terrible oppression of slavery, a trickster figure became essential on a psychological level, as "antebellum slaves manifested a central feature of the consciousness graphically and dramatically through the medium of trickster tales featuring the victories of the weak over the strong" (Levine 83). Ernest Jones confirms folklore's role in the expression of social consciousness in saying that "the material studied in folklore, whether it be customs, beliefs, or folksongs [...] is the product of dynamic mental processes, the response of the folk soul to either outer or inner needs, the expression of various longings, fears, aversion, or desire" (Jones 90).

Although the notion of slavery as being traumatic is not new, I have argued in this chapter that cultural trauma likely had an effect on the adaptations of folktales among slaves and former slave communities. As mentioned in my introduction, cultural trauma differs from personal trauma in the sense that, "as cultural process, trauma is mediated through various forms of representation and linked to the reformation of collective identity and the reworking of collective memory" (Eyerman 1). Therefore folklore can be considered one such form of representation and I would argue that the perseverance of the trickster figure in black Creole folklore played a role in forming a certain collective

identity. In the case of African-American identity, Eyerman examines the trauma of slavery, "not as institution or even experience, but as collective memory, a form of remembrance that grounded the identity-formation of a people" (Eyerman 1). The cultural trauma of slavery resulted in the need (and thus the prevalence of) a trickster figure and some animal tales also lent themselves to hidden slave narratives, as I have demonstrated through my analyses of "Tortie" and "Chien avec Tigue," from Fortier's collection.

Through cultural contact between black Creole and white francophone populations, the African animal paradigm (specifically the hyena and the hare) has demonstrated its ability to superimpose itself onto typically European tale types. We have seen an example of this phenomenon in type 15, *The Theft of Butter (Honey) by Playing Godfather.* Because of the paradigmatic simplicity of the trickster and dupe scenario, the characters of Bouki and Lapin were able to transplant themselves into narratives that fit a basic structure, regardless of the supposed origin of more specific motifs. Another example is the motif K581.2, in which we see a dramatic shift from the African tales in Klipple's catalogue. Instead of being killed and eaten, the trickster anticipates the malice of the dupe by tricking him into throwing him into his own home (the river or briar patch).

The animal trickster tales from our West African corpus differ from the Louisiana variants, in that the African tales are generally more didactic in nature, serving to warn their audience against the wiles of the trickster. In Louisiana folktales and elsewhere in southern folklore, the trickster figure is celebrated for his cleverness and victory over physical strength. The didactic nature of these tales is thus shifted with relation to the

African tradition. I have argued for an interpretation of the shift as a reaction to the cultural trauma of slavery. Moreover, the propagation of trickster tales including (but not limited to) animal trickster tales into white francophone communities was facilitated by a certain shared experience. Although white Creoles and Acadians were not subjected to slavery, other opposing factors, such as the *Grand dérangement*, extreme poverty, and lack of political representation, would have made such trickster tales relevant to their experience.

In the following chapter, I examine a corpus of tales that highlights the opposing force of the trickster-dupe dynamic, the fool. Tales of Jean-le-Sot, the archetypical fool of French and francophone folklore, are particularly prevalent in French and Creole Louisiana, although attestations abound in many francophone regions. Comparisons of variants from Louisiana, France, and other regions will shed light on how portrayals of this character may have adapted to fit the social and cultural realities of Louisiana.

Chapter Two: Heroic Fool and Foolish Hero: Representations of Jean-le-Sot

1.1 The 'Fool' in Folklore

It could be said that the trickster-dupe dynamic is practically universal in folklore traditions. These two opposing types make up an important, albeit exaggerated, part of the way in which popular traditions have long since envisioned the social dynamics that prevail in human interaction. In the previous chapter, I have demonstrated that this general structure is highly pervasive in the oral tradition of French and Creole Louisiana. It is not by accident that Calvin Claudel entitled his collection of Louisiana folktales *Fools and Rascals*, as tales of tricksters and their unfortunate dupes make up considerable portions of all of the major collections of Louisiana folktales. Revon Reed, educator, folklorist, author, and radio host, observes how "le cadien aime toujours parler de ci-là qu'est pas tout là" (Reed AN1.077{32:15}).[62] As we have seen in the preceding chapter, the Bouki and Lapin tales certainly fall into this category, and resemble, on a fundamental level, the hyena and hare tales of Africa, as well as the fox and wolf tales of the French tradition. When considering the role of the fool in Louisiana French and Creole folklore, it is important to note that the opposition between trickster and dupe is not always at the forefront, or even present at all; the 'fool' sometimes acts alone.

The most recognizable example of such a fool in Louisiana folklore is Jean Sot, or Foolish John, as he is commonly called in English translations. Jean Sot tales of comprise one of the most prevalent folktale genres in Louisiana and whose protagonist could be considered as the numbskull *par excellence* of Cajun and Creole folklore. Revon Reed goes so far as to call the character "le parangon des idiots" (Reed AN1.077{32:08}).

[62] "The Cajun always likes to talk about the one that is 'not all there'." Translation is my own.

Ancelet refers to Jean Sot as "the traditional fool of French Louisiana," noting that he "resembles the traditional French fool Jean le Sot" (Ancelet 1994 78). As in Louisiana, Jean-le-Sot enjoys a wide popularity in France. Gerald Thomas even suggests that "Jean-le-Sot est, peut-être, sous des noms multiples, l'un des caractères les mieux aimés de la littérature orale en France" (16).

The aim of this chapter is to present comparative analyses of the varying representations of Jean-le-Sot in francophone folklore with a particular focus on French and Creole Louisiana. After briefly discussing some examples of this character's attestations in the world, I will explore possible implications regarding the historical and etymological significance of the name 'Jean'. In the subsequent analyses, I will demonstrate what I believe to be an underlying structure in many Jean-le-Sot tales that is shared by variants from France and Louisiana. Similarities across regions are limited, however, as I will demonstrate by examining discrepancies in how the 'fool' is portrayed in Louisiana folktales compared to other regions. This line of questioning will be informed by a consideration of the role of formal education in French- and Creole-speaking Louisiana, particularly in the early- to mid-twentieth century, and the resulting state of linguistic inferiority among many speakers of French and Creole. As in the previous chapter, social theories related to cultural trauma will be used to support proposals of possible sociocultural factors responsible for the differing depictions of Jean-le-Sot in Louisiana vis-à-vis their counterparts in other francophone regions.

1.1.1 Jean-le-Sot: The Fool of Francophone Folklore

Louisiana is by no means the only region outside of France to possess versions of the Jean-le-Sot character in its oral tradition. Claudel draws attention to tales featuring

similar “doltish lads” in “Missouri, Canada, Haiti, Martinque [sic] and Santo Domingo” (5). Gerald Thomas observes:

> En traversant l’Atlantique, nous savons que Jean-le-Sot se retrouve partout où des Français se sont installés. Elsie Clews Parsons a recueilli à l’Île Dominique plusieurs contes de ‘Jeane [sic] Sotte’ racontés en créole. Jean Sotte figure dans les contes de la tradition française de la Louisiane, dans l’état de Missouri il s’appelle Jean Bête ou Jacques Pataud. Au Canada français, c’est Jean-le-Sot; Luc Lacourcière a recueilli plusieurs contes de sots [...] (18-19).

The most common spelling in French folklore collections seems to be Jean-le-Sot; however much regional variation exists in France as well. Gerald Thomas observes numerous variations on the name including Jan le Pec in Gascogne, Joan le Piot in the Aude region, and Jouan Nesci (Jean le Niais or ‘John the Nave’) in Auvergne (Thomas 17). Other regional variants in France exist in Occitan and Poitevin-Sainteongais, as we will see below in Nowak’s collection, where we find Jhan-le-Sot (Nowak 48-53).

Tales of Jean-le-Sot seem to be particularly prevalent in Western France as one finds a number of variants in the major collections of folktales from Poitou, Valière and Robert (1979), Pineau (1892), Nowak (2011), to name a few. Moreover, in light of the geographical provenance of the Acadians and other early settlers of Louisiana mentioned in the introductory chapter, it is not surprising that Jean-le-Sot tales are also common in Acadian communities of Maritime Canada.

Typical variants involve Jean-le-Sot being given one or several errands and failing miserably. Jean’s incompetence often results in wasted food or broken goods. In the French tradition, the character is sometimes linked to tales resembling, “Jack and the Beanstalk,” as observed by Reed (1976 70). Thomas notes that Jean-le-Sot tales are sometimes presented as multiple episodes similar to the *contes merveilleux* (15). In the oral tradition of the West Indies, the character is more often associated with the Master

Thief type (1525A), also assuming a heroic quality (Ancelet 1994 79). Therefore, I suggest that one could conceive of a certain continuum of the Jean-le-Sot character in francophone folklore, ranging from the simple hero to the unredeemable imbecile. One of my goals in this chapter is to explore the relationship between the Jean-le-Sot variants in the corpus and propose some explanation for the discrepancies in the character's representation across regions. Why has Jean-le-Sot proved to maintain such a strong foothold in the oral traditions throughout the francophone world? Perhaps more importantly, why do depictions of the character exhibit such variability from one region to another, such that he is depicted as a hero in some regions and simply as a fool in others?

Before proceeding to a discussion of several tales of Jean-le-Sot and placing the character in a larger context of francophone folklore, it will be useful to consider some of the possible origins, variations, and implications of the character's name.

1.2 Jean-le-Sot, Jean Sot or Jeansotte: What's in a Name?

The Jean-le-Sot genre's deep roots in the French oral tradition are reflected in the geographical prevalence and also in the pronunciation of his name, variations of which suggest early origins. I have mentioned above the variable pronunciation and even spelling of the character's name, although depending on the degree of orality in certain cultures it may be more accurate to consider spelling as a representation of the pronunciation already in place. The pronunciation of *sot* among Louisiana French- and Creole-speakers is also variable as one hears both [so] and [sɔt] in the masculine form ('sot' Valdman et. 2010 588). It is possible that the realization of the final [t] in the masculine form could be a vestige from an earlier dialectal form. Moreover, *sot* is

probably not the most widely used term in Louisiana French for 'fool'. The *Dictionary of Louisiana French* (2010) gives several French equivalents for 'fool': *calebasse, cocodrie, dinde (d'inde), estragot, estronfillau, imbécile, sot* (745). The survival of the former pronunciation [sɔt] could be directly related to a fossilized form of the character's name. Calvin Claudel suggests this as a possibility and also remarks on the pronunciation of the final [n] in 'Jean'. He states, "in dialect his name in *Jean Sot*, which is pronounced as it was in Old French with the final consonants sounded. The preservation of the old pronunciation is not at all surprising, because the character himself is very old in folktale and literature" (Claudel 5). Variants from the Antilles also seem to exhibit a similar pronunciation, often transcribed as 'Jean Sotte' (Parsons 1933 1: 264).

1.2.1 Reflections on Possible Significations of the Name 'Jean'

It is not known with any degree of certainty why the name Jean is so widely associated with this particular character. Claudel alludes to the name's significance in his collection *Fools and Rascals*, stating:

> in early times the Latin name Johannes meant *boob, dupe,* or *fool*, and in all other languages its derivatives (*Giovanni, Jeannot, Juan, Johann,* etc.) have the same meaning. There are countless proverbial names and phrases coined around this name and types meaning *cuckold* or *boob* (Claudel 5).

The accuracy of Claudel's assertion is difficult to verify; however, perhaps there is something to be said about the commonness of the name, highlighting the ordinariness or undistinguished nature of the character. Perhaps the use of a common name provides storytellers and their audience with a sense of proximity to the tale, as Thomas suggests: "on le sent plus près de nous: c'est le *fils* stupide" (16). Despite the lack of a clear point of origin of the name's association with the character, the ambivalence of Jean-le-Sot's

character - as a hero, a fool, or both – is reflected in the etymology of the name and the history surrounding it.

1.2.2 'Jean': A Brief Etymology

The name has undergone a number of transliterations and adaptations in many cultures, as Claudel reminds us above. The Greek Ioannes (Ιωαννης) is derived from the Hebrew, Yochanan (חנן), loosely translating to 'Yahweh is gracious'.[63] As such, the Hebrew חנן is composed of two elements. The first is יו ('Yu'), which is the truncated form of יהוה ('Yahweh') the Name of the Lord. The second and final element of Yochanan comes from the verb חנן ('hanan'), meaning to be gracious ("John" *Abarim*). The notion of compassion, sympathy, or even generosity corresponds closely to the character's traits in the majority of the Jean-le-Sot tales, particularly in the French, Acadian, and Cajun variants. Indeed, besides his lack of intelligence, Jean-le-Sot's depiction as a good-hearted young lad, generally empathetic toward animals and nature, constitutes a defining characteristic of the figure in the French oral tradition. It is often the case that Jean-le-Sot is generous to a fault, or rather that his sympathy is misplaced, thus causing his downfall.

With regard to the Jean Sot (or Jeansotte) character in Louisiana's oral tradition, Revon Reed observes: "Jeansotte avait le cœur beaucoup sensible. Il aimait tout le monde. Il aimait toutes les bétailles. Il aimait aussi la nature, les arbres, les fleurs, la terre. Il avait un grand sentiment pour tous [sic] ce qui existait" (Reed 70).[64] The character's

[63] Chantal Labre gives the French translation, "Dieu fait grâce" (169).
[64] "Jeansotte had a very sensitive heart. He loved everyone. He loved all of the animals. He also loved nature, the trees, the flowers, the earth. He felt deeply for everything (and everyone) that existed." Translation is my own.

relationship with nature and animals is particularly salient, as I will explore in more detail below.

Beyond the relationship between the literal meaning of 'John' or 'Jean', it can be enlightening to note that the name has been particularly popular in Christian cultures, as it was borne by two important figures of the New Testament: John the Baptist and the apostle John. Although it is unlikely that these two biblical figures have had any direct influence on the preference for the name Jean for the foolish character in the French oral tradition, there are a certain number of parallels to be explored.

1.2.3 'John' in the New Testament

John the Baptist is considered by biblical scholars to be associated with a marginalized group of Jewish society of the period and spent much time in the wilderness. An ascetic, he was directly opposed to the established power of Herod. Mikeal Parsons observes that John the Baptist is the only character in the New Testament whose physical appearance receives any attention at all, referring to Mark 1:8 where he is described as wearing a garment of camel's hair, a leather belt around his waist and nourishing himself on a diet of locusts and wild honey (Parsons 1996 179, *New American Bible* Mark 1.8). Parsons goes on to note that in many cultures, and "throughout the biblical tradition," hair is associated with "an intimacy with nature" as well as "nonconformity," which is reflected in John the Baptist's "grounding in a marginalized community, outside society" (1996 179). In the French oral tradition, Jean-le-Sot exudes a distinctive quality of nonconformity and is rejected from the normal society of the village. He is often described at the beginning of tales as having a different appearance than those around him. Revon Reed says to this effect: "Malgré toute sa follerie,

Jeansotte avait un certain air autour de lui qui le faisait différent de tous les autres jeunes gens du voisinage. Peut-être, c'était ses yeux; peut-être sa manière de marcher ; ou peut-être c'était sa personnalité, je ne sais pas" (Reed 1976 69).[65]

Another important figure of the New Testament, John the Apostle, has a particularly close relationship to Jesus, as Labre refers to him as his "disciple bien-aimé" (169). What is interesting here is not only the close association between John the Apostle and Jesus, but also John's relationship to Mary. Moments before Jesus' death, he confides the well being of his mother to John: "When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, your son'. Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother'. And from that hour the disciple took her into his home" (*New American Bible* John 19.26-27). This gesture symbolically designates John as Mary's son, effectively replacing Jesus in that role.

A parallel could be made to the remarkably close bond between Jean-le-Sot and his mother that constitutes an integral trait of the Jean-le-Sot genre's narrative structure. In the majority of the tales, Jean-le-Sot interacts mainly, and often exclusively, with his mother. The trust that the mother invests in the son, constantly broken and renewed through multiple tasks, later botched or left unaccomplished, contrasts sharply with the mother-son dynamic presented in the aforementioned biblical context. Gerald Thomas has observed the importance of the mother's role in the Jean-le-Sot tales: "En général, nous voyons Jean-le-Sot opposé à sa mère (rarement à son père), et nous entendons réitérer cette formule désespérée de la part de sa mère, à la suite d'une aventure

[65] "Despite all of his foolishness, Jeansotte had a certain air about him that made him different from all the other young people in the village. Maybe it was his eyes, the way he walked, or maybe his personality. I do not know." Translation is my own.

désastreuse: “Ah, malheureux! Tu seras donc toujours aussi sot!” (Thomas 16). Beyond the important role played by the mother in Jean-le-Sot tales, there are even instances of the character encountering the Virgin Mary, as we will see in “Jean le Sot, Jean le Fin, Jean le Rusé” told by Marie Vidaud of Turgon, France (Valière and Pintureau 149-154).

1.2.4 The ‘Word’ and Literal Obedience

A final possible reflection regarding a parallel with the apostle John can be made concerning the notion of the ‘Word’. Chantal Labre describes John’s gospel as “highly poetic and mystical” stating that it places an “emphasis on the Word”[66] (Labre 169). This notion is exemplified by the opening passage of his gospel: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (*New American Bible* John 1.1). The contiguous relationship between the word and existence – saying and doing – is mirrored and even mocked in the Jean-le-Sot tales. As we will see through examples, it is the ‘word’, along with an utter lack of worldliness, that serves as a catalyst for Jean’s misadventures. Unable to penetrate the underlying meaning of words and understand his mother’s orders, Jean becomes blocked at the superficial or literal meaning of her commands. As Gerald Thomas puts it, “son problème est celui de l’interprétation; il suit ses instructions au pied de la lettre” (16). On a structural level, such antics manifest themselves through the motif J2460, “Literal obedience,” and J2259*(p), “Fool’s action based on pun” (Ancelet 1994 79).

There is certainly a strong link with the French oral tradition with regard to the use of puns or other plays on words in the Jean-le-Sot tales. A considerable number of

[66] “Son Évangile, hautement poétique et mystique, met l’accent sur le Verbe, la venue de l’Esprit, que Jésus annonce, sur l’amour et la vie que Jésus, par l’amour, apporte” (Labre 169).

examples can be found in the UPCP-Métive/CERDO archives in Parthenay, France. One common type found in France and Louisiana is AaTh 1006 *Casting Eyes*, wherein Jean-le-Sot, following a friend's advice to 'cast eyes' at girls to get their attention, tosses eyeballs plucked from a sheep or another animal (Fumeron). Moreover, this practice of including puns can be observed in various dialects. Emile Caillon, a storyteller from the Deux-Sèvres region tells a variant of Aarne-Thompson type 1204 *Fool Keeps Repeating his Instructions So as to Remember Them*, in which Jean-le-Sot, on an errand to purchase salt in the village, continuously mutters to himself, 'Sàu, sàu, sàu', or 'salt' in Poitevin-Saintongeais dialect. A man that he crosses along the way believes the murmuring to be an insult directed towards him and beats Jean-le-Sot (Caillon).

Therefore, it is possible to interpret a number of the depictions of Jean-le-Sot as parodies or deformations of certain characteristics associated with the John the Baptist and the apostle John in the New Testament. Jean-le-Sot's personage calls into question the 'word' through his repeated literal obedience, by exhibiting a very close yet precarious relationship with his mother, and in being often placed in comparison with a more admirable counterpart. Like John the Baptist, Jean-le-Sot is a marginalized figure, a threat to the society around him. His mother, often Jean's only human contact, is perpetually disappointed by him despite their close attachment.

1.3 Jean-le-Sot and the 'Carnivalesque'

One could consider Jean-le-Sot's portrayal as a carnivalesque rendering of the aforementioned traits associated with the biblical figures. We cannot know if there was indeed any direct influence on the naming of the 'Jean' character as the fool *par excellence* of the French oral tradition; however, there is certainly evidence of a tradition

of religious parodies in popular culture dating back to the Renaissance and the Middle Ages. Bakhtin alludes to the possibility that some early religious parodies may have been assimilated into folklore (Bakhtin 21).

> Dans toute leur diversité, ces formes et manifestations: réjouissances publiques du carnaval, rites et cultes comiques spéciaux, bouffons et sots, géants, nains et monstres, pitres de nature et de rang divers, littérature parodique vaste et variée, etc. toutes ces formes possèdent une unité de style et constituent des parties et parcelles de la culture comique populaire, notamment de la culture du carnaval, une et indivise (Bakhtin 12).

Bakhtin describes this early tradition of parodies, in the form of oral narratives, manuscripts, or plays as "extrêmement répandue" and states that in them "toute l'idéologie officielle de l'église, tous ses rites sont décrits sur le mode comique. Le rire atteint les plus hautes sphère de la pensée et du culte religieux" (Bakhtin 22).

The carnivalesque nature surrounding the Jean-le-Sot genre is accentuated by the fact that the character is capable of straddling the border between fool and hero, intermingled or even interchangeable with the heroic figures of Ti-Jean and Jean l'Ours depending upon the region. I will include examples of this kind of ambivalence in the Louisiana Creole tale "Jean Sotte," collected by Alcée Fortier, whose protagonist possesses an underlying cleverness despite his foolish appearance and who 'becomes' Jean l'Esprit at the end of the tale (Fortier 62-69). A French variant, "Jean le Sot, Jean le Fin, et Jean le Rusé," portrays Jean le Sot as a loveable simpleton who, through his generosity and trust in the Virgin Mary, wins the hand of the princess (Valière and Pintureau 149-154).

Many of these portrayals of Jean-le-Sot, either as hero or fool, depend on the employment of several tale types and motifs. As will be shown in more detail below, many of these types and motifs are shared among Louisiana, French, and Acadian

variants. Depictions of Jean-le-Sot failing to complete simple errands, revolve around an implicit agreement between the boy and the mother that is put into question through his repeated failure. In a sense, these episodes recall Dundes' notion of the 'social contract' evoked in the previous chapter.

1.4 The Fool's Errands and the Social Contract

Within the narrative, Jean-le-Sot's ineptitude is often demonstrated by a certain number of recurrent types and motifs. As mentioned briefly above, some of the most common are Aarne-Thompson types 1696 *What Should I Have Said (or Done)?*, 1291B *Filling Cracks with Butter*, and motifs J2259*(p) "Fool's action based on pun," and J2460 "Literal obedience" (Ancelet 1994 79). Despite the recurrence of these particular narrative structures, the pervasiveness and variability of Jean-le-Sot tales throughout the francophone world make it difficult to conceive the genre in simple terms of one or several Aarne-Thompson tale types.

As mentioned above, several common scenarios can be found among the Jean-le-Sot tales that typically consist of some variation of the boy's mother ordering him to do some kind of errand. One finds a surprising degree of similarity among variants from France, Louisiana, and Acadian communities of Maritime Canada. Jean-le-Sot tales are often linked together in succession forming somewhat of a tale cycle (Thomas 15). These short scenarios could be described as being in anecdotal form and seem to be interchangeable and independent of one another. Variation and apparent arbitrariness of the character's mishaps typically demonstrate elements of numerous tale types. Therefore, I suggest examining the basic narrative structure of the Jean-le-Sot tales from

the Louisiana, France, and Acadian communities of Canada through the lens of Alan Dundes' theory of motifeme patterns.

1.5 Understanding Structure through Dundes' Motifeme Patterns

Dundes, who conceived a system of 'motifemes' in order to better understand the structural typology of North American Indian folktales, suggests the possibility that a more universal employment of this structure could be found in other oral traditions (Dundes "Structural Typology" 214, Neemann 118). Although Dundes' system does not constitute an exhaustive means of folktale analysis, Neemann notes that his system does underline certain basic "structural regularities comparable to European fairy tales" (Neemann 119).

In large part, Dundes' system of structural analysis of folktales grew out of a certain dissatisfaction with Vladimir Propp's notion of the *function*, which essentially refers to a character's *action* as a segment of narrative discourse. Dundes prefers the term *motifeme*, similar to Propp's notion of *function* (Propp 29), and refers to the different manifestations of these motifemes as *allomotifs*. In the interest of clarity, it will be useful to quickly review the most salient tenets of Dundes' system of motifemes of which Harold Neemann offers a succinct summary:

> The term 'motifeme' designates a tale's fundamental structural unit, specified or manifested by a motif. As such, a motifeme is to a motif as a function (in the Proppian sense) is to an action, or a phoneme to a phone. The term 'allomotif' denotes a motif that occurs in a particular motifemic context and manifests a specific motifeme. Accordingly, allomotifs are to motifemes as allophones (variants of the same distinctive sound class) are to phonemes (distinctive sound classes). In other words, while the motifeme constitutes a morphological unit, the allomotif represents a thematic unit (Neemann 118).

1.5.1 Equilibrium and Disequilibrium: A Basic Structure of the Tale

Despite the seemingly complex nature of the motifeme system, Dundes argues that the most basic structure of the folktale can be considered as a question of equilibrium and disequilibrium:

> Folktales can consist simply of relating how abundance was lost or how a lack was liquidated. In other words, something in excess may be lost or something lost or stolen may be found. Both of these situations fall under the rubric of moving from disequilibrium to equilibrium (Dundes "Morphology" 62).

Dundes asserts that this "two motifeme sequence may be said to constitute a minimum definition of an American Indian folktale" ("Structural Typology" 208) and indeed the opposition between equilibrium and disequilibrium is particularly applicable to practically all of the Jean-le-Sot tales found in the Louisiana corpus. As mentioned briefly in the introductory chapter, one also finds elements of what Dundes refers to as 'medial motifemes', which can be found amid the basic structure of Lack and Lack Liquidated. These medial motifemes are 1) Task (or test) and Task Accomplished, 2) Interdiction and Violation, 3) Deceit and Deception (Dundes "Morphology" 63). According to Dundes, the total of four pairs of motifemes is applicable to the structural analysis of any tale, "notwithstanding the differences between American-Indian folktales and Russian fairy tales" (Neemann 118). More often than not, analyses of the Jean-le-Sot variants of Louisiana employ the medial motifemes related to a certain 'Task'; however, the dichotomy of 'Task' and 'Task accomplished' is problematized in many tales since Jean fails to complete his orders.

The state of disequilibrium in Jean-le-Sot tales is often related to a lack of household supplies, particularly food. Frequently found examples in the oral traditions of France, Louisiana, and Maritime Canada involve an initial lack of food (evoked at the

beginning of the narrative) or Jean-le-Sot wasting food or other goods. Drawing from Dundes' list of medial motifemes, we can identify elements of Interdiction, although Jean's transgressions are for the most part well intentioned. Dundes also considers Consequence as a medial motifeme, which occurs in the form of the mother's disappointment, scolding, and beating. In the end of the Jean-le-Sot cycle collected by Léon Pineau, the character's foolishness eventually causes his own death (Dundes "Structural Typology 209, Pineau 259). In a way, the Louisiana variants of the Jean Sot tales resemble the four motifeme sequence described by Dundes as being a common structure in North American Indian folktales: Interdiction, Violation, Consequence, and an Attempted Escape from the Consequence (abbreviated Int, Viol, Conseq, and AE)," although, as Dundes notes, the presence of the AE motifeme "may depend on the particular culture or particular informant within that culture" and is not always present ("Structural Typology" 209).

1.6 Principal Motifs of the Jean-le-Sot Tales

In selecting variants of Jean Sot, or Foolish John, tales from the principal collections of Louisiana French and Creole folklore, one observes a remarkable degree of homogeneity with regard to the motifemes of Lack (L) and Lack Liquidated (LL). Corinne Saucier offers several variants in her collection, *Folk Tales from French Louisiana* (1962), as does Calvin Claudel in *Fools and Rascals* (1979). There are also a number of variants found in Barry Ancelet's collection in the Archives of Cajun and Creole Culture in the Center for Louisiana Studies.[67]

[67] These variants can be found in the following collection numbers : AN1.077, AN1.082, AN1.091, AN1.175, AN1.215.

Upon assembling all of the Jean Sot variants available in the Louisiana corpus, in both edited collections and sound recordings from folklore archives, several scenarios and motifs appear to be particularly prevalent. One of the most common inclusions in these tales is type 1291B *Filling Cracks with Butter*. Ancelet notes that this type is particularly popular in French America, stating that there are 81 versions in Laval University's Archives de Folklore (Ancelet 1994 78), although several other similar examples of other materials or food being wasted are found among the Louisiana variants, showing similarities to the French oral tradition.

In some instances, Jean Sot's tendency to waste food is linked to his affinity for nature that causes him to place inanimate elements of nature above the needs of his mother or family. In Revon Reed's telling of, "Jean Sot," he evokes the character's problematic attraction to nature:

> Un jour, sa mère lui a donné un gros quart de beurre pour aller vendre à la boutique et *trade* ça pour des marchandises, des grosseries, mais en allant là-bas, Jean Sot était fier et bien associé avec la nature. Il sifflait, il chantait, mais tout d'un coup, tandis qu'il traversait un marais sec, il a vu des craques dans la terre, des grosses craques. Et il croyait que c'était des gerçures, ça. *Chapped*, on dit en anglais. Alors, il a ouvert la jarre de beurre et il a commencé à graisser les crevasses dans un effort d'essayer de les guérir. Et il pleurait. Il trouvait beaucoup mauvais que la terre était après gercer comme ça. Et quand tout le beurre a manqué, il s'est vite retourné chez sa mère pour d'autre. Après qu'il a conté qui il y avait eu, naturellement, elle lui a pas donné d'autre beurre. Puis elle l'a bien fouetté pour ça, mais c'était trop tard (Ancelet 1994, 79-80).

A similar example is found in Calvin Claudel's variant from Avoyelles Parish, Louisiana (Claudel 6). Foolish John is sent into town by his mother to fetch some cotton cloth and thread. While returning home with the goods, he crosses a small gum tree shaking in the wind. Out of pity for the tree, Foolish John uses all of the newly purchased cloth to cover up the tree. As in Reed's tale, the mother beats the boy after he explains what happened

(Claudel 6). The chart below shows five variants that exhibit the most commonly found scenarios consisting of the L and LL motifemes, particularly with regard to the loss or wasting of food (e.g. butter, lard, milk) or essential resources. Because of the considerable amount of similarities within these variants, the following figure will render these commonalities visually in a more effective way than lengthy textual descriptions.

Reference (see below)	Geographical provenance	Lack (L) or Disequilibrium	Lack liquidated (LL) or Equilibrium	Lack (L)	Consequence
1.	Louisiana (Avoyelles Parish)	pot	pot	pot lost	whipping
		pot	money for new pot	money lost	whipping
		flour	flour	flour fed to ants	whipping
		lard	lard	cracks filled with lard	whipping
			goose	goose killed	whipping
2.	Louisiana (Mamou)	money	butter to sell	cracks filled with butter	
3.	Louisiana (Coulée Croche)		lard	lard lost	
			pot	pot broken	
4.	Louisiana (Avoyelles Parish)	cloth or thread	cloth and thread acquired	cloth and thread lost	

		lard	lard acquired	cracks filled with lard	
		needles	seven needles	needles lost	grief of mother
		milk	--	cow shot	grief of mother
5.	Louisiana (Mamou)	supplies	butter to sell	cracks filled with butter	whipped by mother
		supper	gosling for gumbo	dogs cooked	--
		milk	cows to be milked	cows shot	strangled by father
		needle	needle given by mother	needle lost in hay	abandoned by parents

1. "Foolish John," collected by Corinne Saucier. Excerpt from *Folk Tales from French Louisiana*, pp. 69-70
2. Jean Sot variant told by Elizabeth Landreneau of Mamou, Louisiana in 1975. Collected by Barry Ancelet. Sound recording AN1.091 [07:45] in the Archives of Cajun and Creole Folklore.
3. Jean Sot variant told by Tanisse Faul of Coulée Croche, Louisiana. Collected by Barry Ancelet. Sound recording AN1.175 [13:00] in the Archives of Cajun and Creole Folklore.
4. "Foolish John and the Errands." collected by Calvin Claudel. Excerpt from *Fools and Rascals*. pp. 6-8.
5. "Jean Sot," told by Revon Reed, collected by Barry Ancelet. Excerpt from *Cajun and Creole Folktales*. pp. 78-81.

In addition to food and other necessary resources being wasted, there is a recurrent theme of killing farm animals (cows, geese, sheep). One example is the shooting of the cow, accomplished through the motif J2259*(p), when Jean Sot shoots the family's cow after misunderstanding his mother's orders to *tirer* (to milk) instead of *tirer* (to shoot). Other examples include the crushing of the mother goose's eggs – sometimes after killing the mother goose – while he tries to sit on the eggs following her

death; this is very prevalent in the Poitou region (Nowak 52-53). It should be noted that in rural environments, like Louisiana, the death of domestic and farm animals and the wasting of food can be considered as significant losses. As Ancelet notes, "all of these massacres of farm animals have a certain black humor in the Louisiana French context, where a large part of the population still lives in the country and even much of the first and second generation urban population remains attached to the rural family homestead" (Ancelet 1994 79). In this cultural context, Jean Sot represents a true threat to the livelihood of his family despite the comedic backdrop of the story.

When compared to the Jean-le-Sot cycle collected by Léon Pineau, we can observe a remarkable degree of similarity between the Louisiana and French variants.

Reference (see below)	Geographical provenance	Lack (L)	Lack liquidated (LL) or Equilibrium	Lack (L)	Consequence
Pineau	France (Poitou)		goose	goose killed	grief of mother
		mother goose to lay	eggs	eggs broken	grief of mother
			needles	needles lost in hay	grief of mother
		fence posts	sheep	legs of sheep cut off	grief of mother
		pot	pot	pot lost	grief of mother
			lard	cracks filled with lard	grief of mother
		money	cloth to sell	cloth lost	grief of mother
		wife for Jean	song	song lost	grief of mother
		wife for Jean	eyes	sheep eyes lost	grief of mother

A comparison of the Louisiana variants with the Jean-le-Sot cycle offered by Léon Pineau of the Poitou region of France reveals a striking degree of continuity, or at least

similarity, between the Cajun and French variants. We can see that nearly all of the scenarios are in common between the two oral traditions: the lost needles, the butter or lard spread in the dry earth, the laying of eggs, etc. What is perhaps more intriguing, however, is that the Jean Sot tales found in the Louisiana corpus are limited to the narrative structure shown in the above chart and represented by [L + LL + L + Conseq.] in Dundes' system of motifemic analysis.[68]

In the French oral tradition, these tales, although nearly identical to their Cajun counterparts, constitute but one of a number of portrayals of the Jean-le-Sot character. Overall, it seems that variants from France are more disposed to cast Jean-le-Sot as a hero in spite of himself.[69] Whereas the Jean Sot of Louisiana is always depicted as a hopeless young boy, some French variants have him marry the king's daughter at the end of the tale.

1.7 Jean-le Sot as a Hero: AaTh 513B *The Land and Water Ship*

"Jean le Sot, Jean le Fin, Jean le Rusé" (Valière et Pintureau 149-154), told by Marie Vidaud of Turgon, France is an example of the kind of heroic qualities of the Jean-le-Sot character within the French oral tradition that seems to be entirely absent in the Louisiana corpus. Valière categorizes the tale under the subcategory 513B *The Land and Water Ship*. This variant is similar to the archetypal version in that the king calls for a suitor for his daughter, offering his daughter's hand to him who can fashion a boat that can travel on land as well as water. Jean le Sot is one of three brothers who set out, one after the

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[68] For a much more recent Jean Sot tale, see "Jean Sot et le marais" in *Graines de Parasol* (13-14), a collection of short tales by Jude R. Chatelain, a native of Avoyelles Parish. Shreveport: Tintamarre, 2012.

[69] Numerous examples can be found in the UPCP-Métive/CERDO archives, including, "Jean-le-Sot et la fille du roi" (Ribardière) and "Vengeance de Jean-le-Sot chez son patron" (Morin).

other, to complete the task. Shortly after departing from home, each of the sons encounters the Virgin Mary who asks them to share with her some of the meager rations that their poor mother prepared for their respective travels to the king's court. Despite the intelligence that their names might imply, Jean le Fin and Jean le Rusé fail to complete the task because they do not show generosity toward the Virgin Mary who, in turn, does not grant them help in their impossible task. Only Jean le Sot, who has the least amount of food, offers to share with the Virgin Mary, although she politely declines the boy's humble gesture. As recompense, each time Jean le Sot strikes the tree from which he aims to construct his magical vessel; an entire portion of the boat is produced. This particular variant includes motifs that are reminiscent of those found in the Cajun variants. Even after having constructed the boat requested by the king, Jean le Sot is asked to perform several more seemingly impossible tasks. Jean must collect a handful of millet cast into a bushel of heather, retrieve keys to the castle thrown into a lake, etc. The function of these motifs in the narrative, however, is the contrary of what we find in the Cajun variants where Jean Sot repeatedly loses needles, cloth, butter, and so forth. Here, it is Jean who *finds* the lost objects.

On a structural level, the tale type 513B *The Land and Water Ship*, differs greatly from the [L + LL + L + Conseq.] pattern seen in the Louisiana variants. Moreover, Michel Valière suggests that this tale may be linked to a male version of Cinderella:

> D'autres versions françaises et notamment bretonnes ont appelé ce héros Cendrillon (masculin). De fait, lors d'un autre enregistrement de Marie Vidaud, la conteuse lui avait attribué pour toute alimentation au lieu d'une simple sardine, du 'pain de cendres' qu'il voudra bien partager avec l'être secourable qu'il a rencontré (Valière and Pintureau 154).

Beyond this major difference in structure, it should be noted that Jean le Sot is depicted as a character to be emulated because of his generosity, not toward nature, but to the Virgin Mary. The storyteller, Marie Vidaud, summarizes the moral of the tale by saying "alors, tu comprends, o s'aghit pas d'être malin, o s'aghit d'être bon ! Tu vés, li, eu sit bon, alors eu réussissit, et lous frères qu'atiant plus fins, atiant plus bêtes ! Voilà. Et Jhean le Sot ayit la fille du roi" (Valière and Pintureau 154).[70]

It is worth mentioning that the absence of heroic traits in portrayals of Louisiana's Jean Sot does not imply that tale types like 513B *The Land and Water Ship* are not attested in the region. For example, "Jean l'Ours et la fille du roi" told by Elby Deshotels of Reddel, Louisiana is a variant of AaTh 513B included in Ancelet's 1994 collection (37-42). This tale also formed the basis for the first Cajun play, *Jean l'Ours et la fille du roi* (Ancelet and Guidry 1979). Therefore it appears that such tales were indeed conserved and appreciated, but not as 'Jean-le-Sot' tales.

1.7.1 Jean-le-Sot et la fille du roi

The protagonist succeeds in marrying the king's daughter in another tale from the Poitou region collected by Michel Valière, "Jean-le-Sot et la fille du roi" (Valière and Robert 63-64). Unlike the Jean Sot of the Cajun variants who repeatedly fails in his endeavors due to his literal interpretation of verbal messages, the Jean-le-Sot in this French tale proves to be a master of language. Along with his brothers, Jean-le-Sot sets off to the castle of the king's daughter, hoping to win her hand in marriage by making her say three words. Thus far, nobody is capable of causing her to say more than two words:

[70] "So, you understand, it's not about being clever, it's about being a good person! You see, he was good, so he succeeded. His brothers who were cleverer were also dumber! There you have it. And Jean le Sot had the king's daughter" (Valière and Pintureau 154). Translation is my own.

'I brûle', or 'I'm burning' (Valière and Robert 63). Jean-le-Sot has the idea to collect wood along the way and brings a rotten egg to the princess, and says to her: "Si vous brûlez, faites cuire mon œuf, faites cuire mon œuf!" (Valière and Robert 64). Disgusted by the taste of the egg, the princess exclaims: "... *une belle chiée,*" and with these three words, Jean-le-Sot wins the hand of the princess (Valière and Robert 64).

A significant number of similar variants in which Jean-le-Sot marries the king's daughter at the end of the tale can be found in the archives of the UPCP-Métive/CERDO in Parthenay, France. Particularly prevalent in Poitevin-Saintongeais are variants of tale type 853 *Hero Catches the Princess with her own Words*, wherein Jean-le-Sot succeeds at the queen's task of making her daughter laugh, and thus acquires her hand in marriage (Giraud, Morin).

In a sense, the fantastic deeds demanded of Jean-le-Sot in the French variants – creating a boat that moves on land and water, acquiring the hand of the king's daughter in marriage – mirror the menial tasks given to the character by his mother in the Cajun Jean Sot variants. The French oral tradition consists of a much wider gamut of representations of Jean-le-Sot, ranging from fool to hero. This range of variation includes, but is not limited to, the [L + LL + L + Conseq.] structure that we have seen be the almost exclusive medium for Jean Sot's appearance.

In light of the high degree of similarity between the French, Acadian, and Louisiana variants of the [L + LL + L + Conseq.] tales with regard to motifs (e.g. buttering the earth's cracks, lost needles), it is strange that other tales, where Jean-le-Sot possesses more heroic qualities, have not survived in Louisiana's oral tradition. What sociocultural factors could be at the root of the total absence of admirable traits

associated with the 'fool' figure in the Jean Sot tale found in the Louisiana corpus? Is it possible that difficult conditions of rural life and the need for a cohesive community, would have made the Jean Sot character an undesirable vehicle for 'heroic' traits, and therefore not an example to emulate? In the subsequent paragraphs, I will present a discussion of the role of education in Louisiana in the early- to mid-twentieth century with regard to the French language, particularly following the 1921 Louisiana constitution.

1.8 Language and Education in French and Creole Louisiana

Historian Carl Brasseaux notes that the state-governed educational institution was already viewed as a foreign concept to many French-speakers of the region who viewed education as the work of the Catholic Church. Brasseaux observes that this reality is reflected in the early history of education in the Acadiana region, represented by Franklin College of Opelousas, St. Charles College and Sacred Heart Academy of Grand Coteau, "antebellum Acadiana's leading education institutions" (Brasseaux "Education" 214). Brasseaux goes on:

> Unlike their predominantly Protestant Anglo-American neighbors, the staunchly Catholic Acadians traditionally viewed education as a function of the Catholic Church – not the state. The roots of this attitude can be traced to the development of education in France, where the Catholic Church had served as the wellspring of fundamental learning from the Middle Ages well into the nineteenth century. Acadian ignorance of public education was further supplemented by their experience in Acadia, where the educational system had been also closely tied to the Catholic Church (Brasseaux "Education" 213-214).

The Louisiana State Constitution of 1921 remains a pivotal moment in history for the French language in Louisiana, often cited by historians as a major factor in the decline of the language's transmission (Blyth 31). The 1921 constitution was not the first to bring up the legislative and education status of French; however, its definitive stance on

English-only education and, arguably to a greater degree, the methods used by schoolteachers to enforce the policy marked a generation of Louisiana francophones. James F. Domengeaux, a Louisiana attorney and nephew of the founder of CODOFIL (Council for the Development of French in Louisiana) observes that the "first three Louisiana constitutions of 1812, 1845, and 1852 contained no requirements that courses in public schools be conducted solely in the English language," leaving educators in primarily French-speaking areas free to conduct lessons in the students' native language (Domengeaux 1191). The constitution of 1864 passed just after the Confederate defeat in the Civil War was the first to interdict the French language in public education. "Under the 1864 constitution," Domengeaux notes, "it became unconstitutional to conduct courses in public schools in any language other than English" (1191). Some relief came in the constitutions of 1879 and 1898, the latter expanding French language provision to all grades; however, in 1921, "during the 'melting pot' resurgence, the state constitution reverted back to its Reconstruction era position on language in the classrooms" (Domengeaux 1192). The nationalistic fervor and ideals of English-only proponents of the era are exemplified by President Theodore Roosevelt's oft-cited proclamation that:

> We have room for but one language here and that is the English language, for we intend to see that the crucible turns our people out as Americans, and American nationality, and not as dwellers in a polyglot boarding house; and we have room for but one soul [sic] loyalty, and that is loyalty to the American people[71] (cited in Potowski 13).

The nationalistic pressure to assimilate into English-speaking American society was met with much tension in primarily francophone Louisiana and resulted in the widespread stigmatization of the French language, instilling a sentiment of linguistic

[71] The letter from which this quotation is taken was read by Roosevelt to the American Defense Society on January 5, 1919.

inferiority in the generations to come. As James Dormon puts it, the schools rendered "the ethnic French monolingual population an object of derision and scorn, even among its own children" (70). Although the constituion of 1921 did not explicitly outlaw the use of French on schoolgrounds, rather merely making it the only acceptable language of education, personal accounts of how this policy was enforced vary. Some Louisiana francophones claim to have received no punishment for speaking French at school, while others describe humiliation, and both physical and emotional pain. Carl Blyth explains:

> Many older Cajun French speakers recall being physically abused and humiliated in front of their classmates. One punishment in particular has reached mythic status in the collective consciousness of Cajun French speakers – the writing of pages upon pages of the infamous line: 'I must not speak French on the schoolgrounds' (Blyth 31).

Regardless of the extent of punishment (or lack thereof) administered to young French-speakers in Louisiana's public schools in the early- to mid-twentieth century, it is clear that a trauma narrative has come to surround the implementation of the 1921 constitution. As I will explain below, this narrative has become a part of the oral history and literature of francophone Louisiana.

1.8.1 Linguistic Conflict and Cultural Trauma

As Blyth notes and as I have mentioned briefly in my introduction, the nearly across-the-board and often violent enforcement of the English-only language policy in Louisiana schools following the 1921 legislation has resulted in a collectively shared trauma narrative that appears in poetry as in Jean Arceneaux's "Schizophrénie linguistique," and music in Hadley Castille's "200 lignes." (Arceneaux 1980, Castille). The presence of this collective experience in poetry, music, and especially oral history, reflects Jeffrey Alexander's understanding of cultural trauma in that "it is the result of

this acute discomfort entering into the core of the collectivity's sense of its own identity" (Alexander "Trauma" 15). Moreover, the widespread and humiliating punishment of French-speaking children in the early- to mid- twentieth century was even used as a slogan by CODOFIL for French-language immersion programs, advocating a duty of the state to undo the previous damage done to the French language by the educational system: "Schools have destroyed French, schools must restore it" (Henry 190). Domengeaux expresses the experience of francophone children in Louisiana schools following the 1921 constitution using similar vocabulary to what one finds in Alexander's descriptions of cultural trauma:

> Educators barred the use of French in the classrooms, and French-speaking pupils were severely disciplined for speaking French. The result was a practically irreversible psychological scar, which connected the speaking of French with ignorance and shame. The long-term result was that the language was nearly lost and the solidarity of a culture severely tested" (Domengeaux 1154-55).

Domengeaux's description of 'psychological scar' inflicted upon French-speakers at a young age as being 'irreversible' echoes Alexander's understanding of cultural trauma, particularly with regard to the close relation between identity and shame. Alexander states: "Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (Alexander "Trauma" 6). These scars would have arguably manifested themselves in folktales and humour dealing with 'foolish' characters through the phenomenon, which I have called cultural prisming. This could explain the absence of heroic traits for Jean Sot in Louisiana, but it is also worth considering that the

opposite reaction is possible. In other words, sometimes self-mockery can be an equally effective defense mechanism among cultural or linguistic minority communities.

As Domengeaux observes, Louisiana French speakers were viewed in a negative light and there was prevalent "image of the Acadian as an illiterate, shallow and self-indulgent creature" (Domengeaux 1156). In light of this collective experience, it is understandable that a character like Jean Sot would no longer be a desirable vehicle for positive character traits, whether it is heroism or simply 'dumb luck'. As Gerald Thomas has noted, Jean-le-Sot tales possessed a certain didactic purpose for children: "Certains folkloristes ont noté que les conteurs peuvent utiliser les contes de Jean-le-Sot à l'intention des enfants. Ces contes serviraient non seulement de divertissement, mais aussi d'avertissement" (Thomas 16). It seems logical that a collectivity having experienced a cultural trauma – a trauma born of the connection between ignorance and identity – would no longer promote the archetypical fool as an example to emulate. To put this into terms of Zumthor's notion of false reiterability, tales featuring Jean-le-Sot as one who, despite his stupidity, still wins the princess's hand in marriage would be culturally obsolete.

The connection between linguistic confusion and formal education also becomes the subject of other areas of the oral tradition, such as jokes. The following narrative collected by Barry Ancelet, perhaps presented here as a true story told by Larrell Richard or Ossun, Louisiana, is also sometimes heard in the form of a joke.

> My father sent me to school in the first grade and I came home after only twenty minutes. When my father asked me why I wasn't in school, I told him, 'I came home because that's all there was. The teacher said everybody had to talk only English. There were a few who understood, but most of us didn't know what she was saying. Then she said something about numbers and said, 'Say one'. A few

> people around the classroom said, 'One'. The she said, 'Say two'. So we all got up and left (Ancelet 1991 220).

As Ancelet notes, the punch line "is based on the confusion between the bilingual homonyms 'Say two' and 'C'est tout', and plays on the assumed eagerness of Cajuns to be rid of schooling as soon as possible" (Ancelet 1991 220). Here, the implicit situation of linguistic inferiority becomes the source of humor and defiance of educational authority.

1.8.2 "Le rata" and "Jean Sot à l'école"

Other examples of the relationship between formal education and cultural or linguistic identity can be found in the oral tradition. An interesting comparison can be made between two variants of a similar narrative found in Carencro, Lafayette Parish, Louisiana and Civray, in the Vienne department of Poitou-Charentes, France.[72] The Louisiana variant was collected in 1974 from Clotilde Richard by Barry Ancelet who entitled it "Jean Sot à l'école" in his *Cajun and Creole Folktales* (Ancelet 1994 82). The variant told by Baribeaux Marcelle was recorded in 1984 and can be found in Éric Nowak's *Contes traditionnels du Poitou* (60-61). They are variants of Aarne-Thompson type 1628 *The Learned Son and the Forgotten Language*, and Ancelet notes that variants of this tale have been found in several European countries, Quebec and Ile Maurice; however, apparently no English-language equivalents have been attested in England or North America (Ancelet 1994 82).

Marcelle tells the following tale in Poitevin-Saintongeais dialect. The young boy, having studied in Paris, attempts to impress his family and neighbors by employing the word '*rastelle*' in an effort to show off his knowledge of Latin.

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[72] See appendix A for the complete texts of these two tales.

> L'aviont un vosin qu'était parti à Paris. Pi au bout de quèques temps, l'est de retour au péyi. Alore l'a velu. Et pi le fasait dau chiqué le velait épater.
>
> O n'avait un qui manquait, l'était dans les prés à minme rateler dau foin. Pi alore [le vat le trouver], ét pi le dit tout d'un cop:
> - De quoi que tu te sert là? C'est bien une 'rastelle'?
> - Une 'rastelle'? qu'o dit le vieux.
> - Bé oui.
>
> Le se revire, le marche su lés pues dau ratâ. Le yi revint peur le nez. Le se revire, le dit:
> - Cré fi d'guiarce de ratâ! L'm'a fait dau mau! (Nowak 60).[73]

The Louisiana variant told by Clotilde Richard describes a nearly identical situation. Interestingly, Jean Sot is cast as the young boy in this tale. Jean has gone to school to study English and, upon returning home, pretends to have forgotten his French. The mother quips, "mon garçon, je vois ton français commence à te revenir!" (Ancelet 1994 82).

It is important to note that Poitou-Charentes and francophone Louisiana are both regions exhibiting a considerable degree of diglossia. In Richard's rendering of the same tale type, the structure is almost identical to the tale above, although the languages in question differ. Whereas the young Poitevin boy, has studied Latin and presumably the Île-de-France, or Parisian dialect, the young Cajun has gone off to study English at school. Therefore, in these two diglossic contexts, French occupies the status of the low-language in Louisiana, but the high-language in the Poitevin variant.

It is interesting to note that although Nowak's collection contains three tales of Jhan-le-Sot recorded in the same general region of Marcelle, this tale is not considered one of them. The Cajun variant, however, does cast Jean Sot as the young boy, implying formal education should not necessarily be perceived as true intelligence. In francophone Louisiana, this tale takes on a larger dimension, bringing to the forefront the struggle to

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[73] The translation in standard French can be found in appendix A.

maintain a linguistic identity despite the encroachment of the dominant Anglo-American culture. Ancelet also included a mostly English-language version of the tale in his article, "The Cajun Who Went to Harvard" in which he notes:

> Current jokes even take on defectors as the following story directed at children who grew up speaking French but abandoned the language once away at school. [This story] reflects the Cajuns' desire to preserve their linguistic and cultural integrity now that giving up the language, once considered a prerequisite for social promotion, is seen as an affectation which can only lead to cultural suicide (Ancelet 1989 112).

Revon Reed, at the end of his Jean Sot cycle, alludes to the mysterious disappearance of Jean Sot at the end of the narrative. Reed jokingly suggests that "il y en a qui dit qu'il a été au collège, et il est devenu professeur" (Ancelet 1994 81). Barry Ancelet, who collected this particular variant, argues that Reed's statement "is based in part on a lack of regard for education within traditional Cajun society" (Ancelet 1994 79).

In both variants, there is a surface-level commentary on formal education's value (or lack thereof) in traditional and presumably rural society that is very apparent. I would suggest that a more symbolic and underlying meaning should not be ignored. Both narratives show a direct link between language and a traditional, agricultural lifestyle. In both tales, the boy 'loses' contact with his mother tongue by distancing himself from the countryside and migrating to the city. Upon returning, it is the rake, a simple agrarian tool, that literally knocks the boy to his senses, reminding him of his forgotten vernacular. Moreover, there is a carnivalesque nature to this scene, in that the 'low' language in both diglossic contexts (represented by the rake) is unexpectedly raised up, temporarily displacing the 'high' language from the boy's mind, bringing back a sense of equilibrium. Such imagery echoes Cécilia Camoin's interpretation of how language and

agricultural imagery manifest themselves through traditional carnival celebration in Louisiana.

> "Le carnavalesque est une forme de résistance à la politique linguistique, tout d'abord parce qu'il place les corps sociaux et culturels au centre de la fête. Terme emprunté à Michel de Certeau, Dominique Julia et Jacques Revel, 'l'agri-culture'[74] se concentre, dans la littérature orale, sur la vie paysanne et ses fêtes villageoises, comme le Mardi-gras. Lors de cette fête, les instruments agraires se font objets de jeu théâtral, créant une composition poétique à partir de matières premières pratiques. Ils transfigurent la réalité, faisant du quotidien agricole une scène de théâtre" (Camoin 189).

In addition to the stigmatization and devaluation of the French language in Louisiana in the wake of the 1921 constitution, other sociocultural factors may explain the absence of the positive portrayals of Jean Sot in Louisiana's French and Creole oral tradition. In the beginning of this chapter, I argued that Jean-le-Sot – in the traditional narratives found in both France and Louisiana – is, regardless of the presence or absence of heroic qualities, systematically depicted as a marginalized figure. Not only is Jean-le-Sot excluded from the rest of society, but he is also responsible for wasting his family's food and livestock. A collective disinclination to cast such a figure in a favorable light or to portray him as a model for children would be understandable, particularly in Louisiana French communities, where cohesiveness would have been paramount in adapting to a new and difficult rural lifestyle.

Carl Brasseaux reminds us that "the bayou country was not an 'Eden in Louisiana', as Longfellow and his successors have claimed, but a dense and forbidding semitropical jungle" (Brasseaux 2005 63). James Dormon remarks on "the sense of community solidarity" as a defining trait of the Acadians soon after settling in Louisiana

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[74] Certeau, Michel de, Dominque Julia, and Jacques Revel. *Une politique de la langue*. Paris: Gallimard, 2002. Print. pp. 134-140.

(Dormon 58). Brasseaux places an even stronger emphasis on 'cohesiveness' among the Acadians, "deeply traumatized by the destruction of their homeland" (Brasseaux 2005 64).

> The unshakable unity and basic cultural homogeneity of the Acadians permitted them to endure the trauma of the terrible diaspora of 1755. The cohesiveness of the Acadian exiles, which enabled them to maintain their identity throughout the long years of exile, permitted them to weather the rigors of establishing a new homeland – a new Acadia – in semitropical Louisiana (Brasseaux 2005 66).

A number of Jean-le-Sot variants collected in Acadian communities in Maritime Canada exhibit many of the same motifs found in the Louisiana corpus. "Jean le Sot," told by Siphrone d'Entremont of Pubnico West, Nova Scotia, consists of a 'cycle' of scenarios similar to the variant told by Revon Reed. This variant of tale type 1696 *What Should I Have Done* collected by Helen Creighton includes the buttering of the cracks in the earth, the loss of the needles, and the Jean-le-Sot who attempts to brood eggs after killing the mother goose (D'Entremont). Although the Acadian variants found in the Centre d'études acadiennes Anselme Chiasson folklore archives generally portray Jean-le-Sot as a marginalized and ignorant young man, there are several instances of more positive traits attributed to the character despite his lack of intelligence. Catherine Jolicoeur collected a variant including tale types 1691A and 1653 wherein Jean repeatedly fails at household tasks, yet manages to unwittingly protect his home from burglars (Benoît). At least six similar variants of 1653A *Guarding the Door* can be found in the UPCP-Métive/CERDO collection. Finally, "Jean le Simple," told by renowned storyteller Exelda Hébert of Richibouctou, New Brunswick, includes a character who cunningly tricks the king into firing his guards, appointing Jean le Simple as his new counselor.

According to the admittedly limited corpus of Jean-le-Sot from Acadian communities in Maritime Canada, there appears to be a sort of intermediary between France and Louisiana. Positive character traits for Jean-le-Sot seem to be most common among the French variants of the corpus, whereas no such Cajun tales could be found. Could this imply the Louisiana experience discouraged even more the need to portray Jean-le-Sot as a hero?

1.9 "Jean Sotte," a Black Creole Variant

As we have seen in the previous chapter, cultural contact and sustained interaction between black Creoles and white francophones have resulted in the introduction of the character Bouki into the Cajun folk repertoire. In a similar way, Alcée Fortier's collection shows that the Jean Sotte had entered into the black Creole oral tradition of New Orleans by the end of the nineteenth-century, and most likely much earlier. Contact between white French Creoles and black French- or Creole-speakers in the Crescent City during the nineteenth century resulted in a form of characterization of Creole tales that was heavily influenced by the African oral tradition (the hyena, elephant, tiger), but also included traits of French folklore, explaining the presence of "Jean Sotte" in Fortier's collection. It was likely the simple nature of the characters like the hyena and the hare, that fully embody the roles of trickster and dupe, that facilitated their interchangeability as we have seen with *le loup et le renard* and *Bouki et Lapin*.

Fortier's transcription of "Jean Sotte" in his 1895 book *Louisiana Folktales* exhibits a characterization that can be described as a hybrid with typical attributes of African animal tales over a substratum of the Jean-le-Sot tales originating from France. In this sense, the tale's characterization can be likened to the Creole language itself,

lexically based in French, but *creolized* through linguistic contact with African languages. The diegesis of Fortier's transcription of "Jean Sotte" is a world in which the protagonist meets and interacts with Compair Bouki and Compair Lapin. Fortier himself notes in his commentary that "this story might have been included among the animal tales," although he decided to place it among the Märchen in the second part of his work (Fortier 189). The tale is reminiscent of African folklore, in the sense that the boundary between the animal and human kingdoms is fluid or even absent.

Unfortunately, it cannot be known how or at what point in time the character Jean Sotte might have penetrated the repertoire. This particular tale is one of the relatively few in Fortier's collection for which the informant's name is given. In the introduction to *Louisiana Folktales*, Fortier alludes to the notion that tales were once told to white children during slavery for their entertainment: "It is a strange fact that the old negroes do not like to relate those tales with which they enchanted their little masters before the war" (Fortier xvii). Although Fortier's observation would suggest an established practice of sharing stories between white and black Creoles, such a description seems to be one-directional. In light of the prevalence of Jean-le-Sot in Maritime Canada and the Acadians' historical ties with the Poitou and surrounding areas (where Jean-le-Sot tales are particularly pervasive), contact between Acadians and black Creoles would seem a much more likely explanation.[75] The seemingly impossible task of determining exactly at what point Jean Sot would have penetrated the Afro-Caribbean oral tradition is

[75] Contact between Acadians and black Creoles was considerable and occurred in various social arenas. New Orleans was the port of entry for the Acadians and many of their later settlement sites were in close proximity to black communities west of the Crescent City (i.e. the River Parishes). Moreover, contrary to popular belief, Acadians were also known to own slaves (Baker 118).

complicated by the presence of the same characters in Haitian tales. Harold Courlander observes that "among many characters who appear again and again in Haitian stories are Jean Sot and Jean l'Esprit (Foolish John and Smart John, or European beginnings)" (60). The origin of the Jean Sot and Jean l'Esprit characters may be European, but their traits would have been easily recognizable as similar to the hyena and hare tales of West Africa. Moreover, their prevalence in present-day Haiti should not discount the possibility of an Acadian connection in the tales' integration into the Afro-Caribbean oral tradition. In the years following the *Grand dérangement* of 1755, many within the Acadian diaspora looked to other areas within the French colonies as alternative settlements. Brasseaux notes:

> The Acadians in Nova Scotia, and particularly those in Halifax were confronted with the choice of either remaining under English rule and facing a proposed scheme of intracolonial dispersal and the possibility of rapid assimilation, or utilizing their own hard-earned financial resources to flee British tyranny. First the French government was quite interested in bolstering through immigration the porous defenses of the French Antilles. To this end, the governor of Saint-Domingue (present-day Haiti) invited the Acadian dissidents in the summer of 1764 to relocate in that prosperous sugar island [...]" (Brasseaux "Founding" 32)

Whereas the majority of the tales collected name informants simply as "old negro" or 'old negress', Fortier credits this tale to "Dorlis Aguillard, 127 Thalia Street" (189). It is curious that the storyteller shares her name with an important figure in the traditional beliefs in the Antilles. Amadou Ouédraogo reminds us that according to popular belief in the Caribbean, "le *dorlis* est ce 'mauvais *quimboiseur*' qui, moyen des pouvoirs occultes exceptionnels qu'il détient, est capable de se métamorphoser en insecte afin de s'introduire la nuit dans les maisons même hermétiquement fermées, afin d'avoir des 'relations' sexuelles avec les femmes endormies" (207). Could the storyteller's name be linked to the magical being, *dorlis*, in Caribbean folklore?

'Jean Sotte' is described just as he is in the French variants, as a young man who does everything incorrectly, wearing a heavy coat in the summer yet walking around nearly naked in winter, lighting his lamp in the daytime and carrying an umbrella only at night. Jean Sotte is not only out of sync with nature, he is also marked by his physical appearance. As in many of the Jean Sot tales from the French tradition, the Jean Sotte in this Creole variant is challenged by a higher authority, oftentimes the king who is searching for a suitable groom for his daughter. The King Bangon, whose name remains obscure, upon first encountering Jean Sotte asks him if Compair Lapin is his father. When another person in the king's audience cries that Compair Bouki is actually Jean Sotte's father, the protagonist responds by affirming that they are both his father. As seen above, Jean Sotte's misunderstanding comes from his literal interpretation of verbal messages: "Tout ça yé, c'est tout mo popa, chaquéne dans yé quand yé passé dit moin: - Bonjou, mo piti, alors mo croi yé tout c'est mo popa" (Fortier 62).[76] Jean Sotte's response is not without comedic value; however, his reaction is significant in that it forces the audience or reader to consider the character's ambiguity and his liminal position between fool and trickster. In this sense, Jean Sotte is, in a figurative sense, the progeny of Compair Bouki and Compair Lapin, in that he embodies the characteristics of both figures.

Amused by Jean Sotte's simple nature, King Bangon decides to give him a chance at winning his daughter's hand in marriage. He first challenges Jean Sotte to bring him a bottle of bull's milk the next morning as a remedy for his daughter who is sick "with a

[76] "All of them; they are all my fathers. Every time one of them passes by me he says, 'Good-morning, my child'. I must believe them, then, that they are all my fathers" (Fortier 63).

sideache in her back" (Fortier 63). The king goes on to challenge Jean a second time, inviting him to return in one month, on the first of April to answer a question within three guesses. If Jean should succeed, he would win the king's daughter in marriage; if he should fail after three attempts, the king would have him beheaded. The mention of the first of April as a suitable day to trick someone (i.e. April Fool's Day) suggests a strong connection with the European, presumably French, tradition. Dundes notes that "the custom of indulging in pranks on April 1st is fairly widespread in Europe" and suggests that the custom goes back "at least to the early sixteenth century" (Dundes "April" 99 and 101).

The symbolism of the bull's milk can be interpreted in at least two ways. One interpretation is as a euphemism for sperm, and by extension a suitable husband for his daughter and heir to the throne. Dundes mentions several similar examples of such sexual imagery in Russian folklore (Dundes "Psychoanalytic Study" 114-117). It can also be seen in a more obvious way as what Dundes calls a "fool's errand," in his article "April Fool and April Fish: Towards a Theory of Ritual Pranks" (Dundes "April" 98). Moreover, the mention of April Fool's Day in the tale itself provides a strong connection to this pranking ritual. Dundes goes on to say "sometimes false quest objects are localized by occupation," citing diverse examples including a carpenter's apprentice being sent for a board-shortener, a painter for a bucket of striped paint, etc. (Dundes "April" 98). In this instance, the king seems to be attempting to take advantage of Jean Sotte's reputed lack of knowledge of nature and sexuality.[77]

[77] The Jean Sot character's fickle relationship with nature and animals is a common trait in many variants, including the greasing of cracks in the ground, laying eggs, and so forth.

Unlike the typical scenarios of Bouki and Lapin, King Bangon's effort in deceiving Jean Sotte is played out as a spectacle in his court before his subjects as a very public practical joke. Dundes observes:

> Jokes are almost always at someone's expense (even if it is just the joketeller himself). This is unquestionably the case with practical jokes. There must be a prankster (corresponding to the trickster in trickster tales) and a gullible dupe. In addition, one finds that there is typically an audience, often consisting of the prankster's peers, present to enjoy the prank. The audience frequently joins in to assist with the eventual humiliation of the victim (Dundes "April" 102).

An important detail in this narrative, as the reader discovers later, is that Jean Sotte is only pretending to be tricked by the king. Therefore, although he verbally agrees to leave the king's court in search of the bull's milk, his lack of intelligence is only an illusion. Dundes cites Richard S. Tallman in his essay "A Generic Approach to the Practical Joke" in which he states:

> The practical joke, as a folklore form, is first an event, a competitive play activity in which only one of two opposing sides is consciously aware of the fact that a state of play exists; for the joke to be successful one side must remain unaware of the fact that a play activity is occurring until it is "too late", that is, until the unknowing side is to seem foolish or is caused some physical and/or mental discomfort (Tallman 260).[78]

1.9.1 Bakhtin's *détrônement*

The ruse attempted by King Bangon can certainly be considered an 'event', even a public one at that, including a large 'audience' of spectators as mentioned in Dundes' observation. What is peculiar in this black Creole tale is that Jean Sotte, by way of his concealed knowledge of the prank, effectively reverses the roles of the 'aware' and 'unaware'. Tallman's definition of the practical joke thus stands true here, only it is the king who assumes the role of dupe. This role reversal of Jean Sotte (the fool) and Bangon

[78] Cited in Dundes article, "April Fool and April Fish," p. 102-103.

(the king) is reminiscent of Bakhtin's notion of *le détrônement carnavalesque*, or "carnivalesque dethronement." Bakhtin describes the carnivalesque as a modality where we see "*le haut mis à la place du bas*" and "*le bouffon est le roi*" (Bakhtin 368). This reversal of roles and power structure will become even more evident at the end of the tale as will be discussed below. Moreover, the fact that Jean Sotte is not actually deceived by the king represents a significant difference from the invariably gullible Jean Sot seen in the majority of the variants collected in white francophone communities.

When Jean returns home from his first encounter with the king, he recounts the day's happenings to his mother:

> Quand li rivé coté li, li raconté tout ça so moman, et vié femme prend crié, crié, pasqué tout sotte so garçon té yé moman la té laimin li quand méme, pasqué c'était jisse ein piti li té gagnin. Li défende Jean Sotte couri, ménacé li marré li ou ben fait sheriff jété li dans prison (Fortier 62-64).[79]

It is interesting to note the compassion that the mother shows Jean, which is quite different from the image of the scolding mother, ashamed of her son, that one finds in nearly all of the Cajun variants.

Jean Sotte leaves his mother's house armed with an axe, intent on boldly challenging the king's authority. Even early in the story, it is clear that Jean Sotte is much unlike the typical Cajun representation of the amiable Jean Sot described by Reed. In this Creole tale, Jean Sotte's transgression of the king's law is more akin to what one finds in other "Jean" characters of the French tradition, such as Jean de l'Ours, 'Tit Jean, or the Master Thief. This characteristic is in line with what Ancelet has observed: "In the

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[79] When he reached home, he related to his mother all that had happened, and the old woman began to cry, and could not be consoled, because, however foolish her boy was, she loved him, as he was her only child. She forbade him to go to the king, and threatened to tie him in her cabin, or to have the sheriff throw him in prison (Fortier 63-65).

French West Indies, the tales of Jean Sot are often linked to the theme of the Master Thief (cf. 1525A)" (Ancelet 1994 79).

Upon arriving at the king's property, Jean Sotte climbs up an oak tree just in front of the king's door and begins to chop away, purposely attracting the attention of the watchman and eventually drawing out the king himself. Much unlike the French and Cajun variants, the Jean Sotte of this black Creole tale insists on speaking directly to the king, affronting him both by his presence and his words.

Whereas the French and Cajun tales discussed above describe a character as lacking the ability to effectively use language and understand his mother's instruction beyond the literal meaning of her words, in this tale Jean Sotte is quick-witted and facetious. The angry king demands that Jean Sotte explain what he is doing to his tree, to which Jean retorts that he is cutting the bark to make tea for his father, who had just given birth to twins the previous day (Fortier 65). The king answers back, "mais pou qui to prend moin, Jean Sotte, ou ça to déja tendé ein n'homme accouché? Mo pensé to oulé foute toi dé moin"[80] (Fortier 64). Jean Sotte reminds the king that a man giving birth is no more ridiculous than his earlier request for a bottle of bull's milk. In this way, he shows him that he does understand the simple nature of basic sexuality, which is put into question in the Jean Sot cycle in Pineau's collection (Pineau 256-259). It is interesting to note that Jean Sotte's audacity is respected and even rewarded by the king, as he invited Jean into the kitchen for breakfast.

One of the more surprising elements of the tale is that when Jean Sotte returns to the king one month later on the first of April, Bouki and Lapin suddenly enter into the

[80] "For whom do you take me, Jean Sotte. Where did you ever hear of a man in childbirth? I think you mean to make fun of me" (Fortier 65).

narrative. This tale is unique among the major collections of Louisiana tales in that Jean Sot is found alongside Bouki and Lapin in the same narrative. Bouki, who is described as '*traite*' and '*malfaisant*' ('deceitful' and 'evil-minded') plots to sabotage Jean Sotte's mission and plans to leave a basket of poisoned cakes on the road as bait in order to steal his horse once he is dead. The villainous representation of Bouki is a departure from the African tradition, where the hyena is often portrayed as a 'victim' to the hare's ruses, as seen in the first chapter.

The tale shows that not only does Jean Sotte inhabit the same narrative world as Bouki and Lapin, but there is a preexisting complicity between Jean Sotte and Lapin. Although the storyteller does not go into any detail about this relationship, it is mentioned that

> Compair Lapin té laimin Jean Sotte, pasqué ein fois li té trouvé li méme dans grand nembarras, li té trouvé dans prison dans ein la trappe et Jean Sotte té laché li. Pou ça Compair Lapin dit li méme: - Mo va protégé pove ninnocent la. / Compair Lapin liked Jean Sotte, because one day, when he was caught in a snare, Jean Sotte had freed him. He did not forget that, and said: 'I want to protect the poor fellow' (Fortier 64-67).

Having overheard Bouki's malicious plans, Lapin decides to wait for Jean Sotte on the road as early as daybreak and, upon their encounter, warns him not to eat or drink anything on his way to see the king. Lapin effectively save Jean's life, but he does not expect this good deed to go unrewarded, saying: "pas blié moin quand ta marié avec fille lé roi, voyé chercher moin et na fait bon zaffaire"[81] (Fortier 66). In this way, Lapin recognizes Jean Sotte as a peer, even a fellow trickster.

[81] "Don't forget me when you marry the king's daughter; we can have good business together" (Fortier 67).

Jean Sotte heeds Lapin's advice, but nevertheless tests the validity of his warning by feeding a few of the cakes to his horse. The horse drops dead immediately, and Jean throws it into the river just before three buzzards alight on it. Jean Sotte continues on foot, recalling Lapin's advice to him: "*gardé, couté et pas dit arien* / listen, look, and don't say anything" (Fortier 66-67).

By the time Jean Sotte arrives at the castle, King Bangon, described as a horrific tyrant, has already killed fifty men for guessing incorrectly at his riddles. In light of Jean Sotte's reputation as a halfwit, the court attendants are surprised to see Jean return to make an attempt at answering the king's riddle: "*Qui ça qui bon matin marché en haut quatre pattes, a midi en haut dé pattes, et lé soir en haut trois pattes*?"[82] (Fortier 66). Reminding the king of his promise to give his daughter's hand in marriage should the riddle be solved, Jean responds: "*C'est ein piti moune qui marché en haut quatre pattes. Quand li vini grand li marché en haut dé, et quand li vini vié li bligé prend ein baton pour apiyer li, ça fait trois pattes*"[83] (Fortier 68). The crowd is astonished by Jean Sotte's correct response, and Bangon, not to be outdone, proclaims that if anyone present should stump him with a riddle of their own that he would relinquish to them his crown and fortune. In a scenario much like what is found in the Master Thief type, explored in more detail in the next chapter, Jean Sotte composes a riddle based on his journey that day: "*Mo oua ein mort qui té apé porté trois vivants et apé nourri yé. Mort la té pas touché la terre ni li té pas dans ciel, dis moin qui c'est ou ben mo va prend vous place avec vous*

[82] "What is it that early in the morning walks on four legs, at noon on two, and in the evening on three legs?" (Fortier 67).
[83] "Jean Sotte told him, it was a child who walked on four legs; when he grew up he walked on two, and when he grew old he had to take a stick, and that made three legs" (Fortier 69).

fortine"[84] (Fortier 68). When the king proves to be unable to respond, Jean Sotte explains: "*Mo choal mouri en haut ein pont, mo jété li dans la rivière et quand li té apé dérivé carencros posé en haut li et mangé li dans dolo. Li té pas touché la terre ni li té pas dans ciel*" (Fortier 68).[85]

At the end of the tale, Jean Sotte seems to undergo a transformation whereby his name is replaced. Once everyone saw that Jean Sotte was much more clever than he had appeared, he married the king's daughter and appointed Lapin as his first overseer and hanged Bouki for his '*coquinerie*' ('rascality') (Fortier 68-69). Jean's change of name is noteworthy in a number of ways. Firstly, the character's new name of Jean L'Esprit represents a clear shift in his identity, and perhaps more importantly, in the way in which he is perceived by others. With regard to the characterization of the Jean Sot genre, the eventual conflation of the Jean Sotte and (the sometimes present) Jean L'Esprit is somewhat an anomaly among variants of all of the regions concerned in this study. The fact that there is mention of a character named Jean L'Esprit provides evidence of a certain vestige of the European tradition, although his apparition and function are radicially different from the French oral tradition. Finally, by uncrowning the king and assuming the role as leader, Jean Sotte incites a carnivalesque reversal of traditional power structure. It is worth returning to the passage cited above from Bakhtin's description of 'carnivalesque dethroning':

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[84] "I saw a dead being that was carrying three living beings and was nourishing them. The dead did not touch the land and was not in the sky; tell me what it is, or I shall take your kingdom and your fortune" (Fortier 69).

[85] My horse died on a bridge, I threw him into the river, and three buzzards alighted on him and were eating him up in the river. They did not touch the land and they were not in the sky" (Fortier 69).

> Le détrônement carnavalesque accompagné de coups et injures est de même un rabaissement et un ensevelissement. Chez le bouffon, tous les attributs royaux sont renversés, intervertis, le haut mis à la place du bas: le bouffon est roi du 'monde à l'envers' (Bakhtin 368).

The transformation of Jean Sotte and the carnivalesque reversal of power are significant here because a fundamental difference from the Jean Sot variants collected in presumably white francophone communities can be observed. Moreover, it seems to be the only variant found in the major Louisiana collections where Jean Sotte (or Jean Sot) exhibits this radical change and becomes king. As mentioned briefly above, this variant demonstrates a much closer link to the Jean Sot tales found in the West Indies that are, as Ancelet has remarked, linked to the Master Thief type (Ancelet 1994, 79).

Another important difference here is that Jean Sotte (the fool) has arguably been a trickster figure all along. The fact that he chose Lapin as his overseer implies a mutual recognition between the two characters as tricksters. Moreover, because of the dynamic between the tyrannical leader and the protagonist, this tale could even be interpreted as a slave narrative. In this sense, the character Jean-le-Sot, originating from France, likely took on a new significance among slave communities in Louisiana and the Caribbean. Lawrence Levine describes a similar legendary 'John' figure that was prevalent in the black folklore in the American South. Levine notes that "the cycle of stories featuring the relations of a slave trickster, often named John, and his master were based upon the kinds of incidents related in these factual and pseudo-factual tales, but by removing them from the realm of the immediately personal it allowed storytellers even more scope for their imaginations and their psychic needs" (Levine 127).

Although the appearance of Jean Sotte is limited in the black Creole oral tradition, this variant collected by Alcée Fortier suggests that the appropriation of the character was

dependent on a fundamental shift in the character's role in the narrative. I suggest that the marginalized figure, presumably of lower social status, would have been perceived differently in groups that were oppressed by slavery. Jean Sotte may have been an ideal vehicle to satisfy their 'psychic needs' by depicting a hero capable of not only compensating his lack of social or economic power by his cleverness, but also concealing his intelligence until an opportune moment.

1.10 Conclusions

Through comparative analyses of a corpus of Jean-le-Sot tales taken from various francophone regions, I have demonstrated in this chapter that the character's representations are many and diverse (Thomas 16). At times appearing alone in the narrative, at other times alongside one or two cleverer characters, Jean-le-Sot is consistently a marginalized figure that succeeds with difficulty, and often not at all, in the world that he inhabits.

I have chosen to focus particularly on the similarities and differences among variants from French Louisiana, particularly white francophone communities, and variants from the Poitou-Charentes region of France. On one hand, by comparing all of the Jean Sot variants from the major collections of French Louisiana folklore with the Jean-le-Sot cycle collected by Léon Pineau, a clear delineation from the French oral tradition is apparent. The high degree of preservation can be seen in motifs J2460, "Literal obedience," and J2259*(p), "Fool's action based on pun" and its tale types 1696 *What Should I Have Said (or Done)?*, and 1291B *Filling Cracks with Butter*. Also of significance is an identical underlying structure that I have identified as [L + LL + L + Conseq.] through Dundes' motifemic system. On the other hand, an examination of

several variants from the Poitou-Charentes region, for example that of Marie Vidaud, demonstrates that a much larger and varied repertoire of Jean-le-Sot tales exists in France. In a considerable number of these tales, Jean-le-Sot exudes positive character traits and is portrayed as a hero, eventually marrying the king's daughter. The tales from the Louisiana corpus attribute none of these heroic qualities to Jean Sot. It is possible that tales casting Jean-le-Sot in a more favorable light were simply not preserved in the French Louisiana oral tradition; however, by basing my interpretation on Zumthor's notion of false reiterability, I have suggested that the depiction of the fool as a hero became culturally obsolete in the Louisiana context. I have hypothesized that the cultural trauma experienced by Louisiana's francophone children following the 1921 state constitution would have made the 'fool' an unlikely and undesirable narrative vehicle for any kind of heroic qualities. Moreover, a character that in so many variants is associated with the wasting of food and the death of farm animals would have been considered as a threat to the community considering the difficult conditions of rural French-speaking Louisiana leading up to the mid-twentieth century. Ancelet has qualified these tales as having particularly "black humor" (1994, 79) in the French Louisiana context, and it is likely that the Jean Sot tales would have taken on a didactic purpose for a young audience to warn them about the consequences of careless actions.

The black Creole variant collected by Alcée Fortier is very different from both the Cajun and French variants examined in the corpus. In this tale, Jean Sotte conceals his cleverness and eventually dethrones the king, lending the tale to interpretation as a slave narrative. This variant also seems to be linked to the type 1525A, or the Master Thief, as Ancelet has observed to be the case in the French West Indies (1994, 79), suggesting that

the character was probably introduced into the Creole oral tradition of the Caribbean before arriving to Louisiana.

The following chapter will return to the discussion of the trickster figure in the folklore of French and Creole Louisiana. In many ways similar to the animal trickster, the human trickster is also a fundamental element of the region's oral tradition and shares many aspects with other francophone and Creole folktale repertoires. More specifically, I will concentrate on the Master Thief figure, often associated with tale type 1525.

Chapter Three: The Master Thief: 'An Amoral Tale with a Moral Hero'[86]

Wherever and whenever significant numbers of people believe they are the victims of inequity, injustice, and oppression, historical and/or fictional outlaw heroes will appear and continue to be celebrated after their deaths.
- Graham Seal[87]

1.1 The Master Thief: A Human Trickster Figure

In the first chapter of this study, I undertook comparative analyses of a corpus of animal trickster tales from French and Creole Louisiana, Acadia, and especially West Africa, while promoting the argument that the trickster figure came to acquire an increased level of prestige in the Louisiana variants as compared to their African counterparts. In the present chapter, I will explore representations of a similar figure, the human trickster, found throughout French and French American folklore. More specifically, I will focus on the Master Thief figure, often called 'Le fin voleur', or 'Le franc voleur' in francophone folklore, that is generally associated with the Aarne-Thompson tale type 1525 *The Master Thief*; however, as will become apparent through examination of a number of variants, distinct classification of Master Thief tales can prove to be problematic.

Protagonists cast as clever-minded thieves are by no means unique to the oral tradition of French and Creole Louisiana. As Calvin Claudel observes, "all these rogue types are basic in human life. The admiration or approbation of cleverness is characteristic of the folk" (54). Graham Seal states that Master Thief motifs date back far into history and can be found in both literary and mythological sources, "most obviously in the Greek figure of Autolycus, son of Hermes and stealer of his neighbour's flocks"

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[86] Phrase borrowed from Carl Lindahl in, "Who is Jack? A Study in Isolation." p. 380.
[87] (Seal "Robin Hood" 83)

(Seal 2011 *Heroes* 27). In the context of European folklore, there are strong resemblances between French figures like the 'Fin voleur', or 'Franc voleur', and English folklore heroes in tale cycles like Jack and the Beanstalk.

As is the case of the 'fool' figure, exemplified in the preceding chapter by Jean-le-Sot, considerable variation exists with regard to the character's name, and oftentimes these sly protagonists remain nameless. In the French-speaking oral tradition of North America and the Caribbean, the unassuming yet clever folk hero Ti-Jean, or Petit Jean, is sometimes cast in the role of the Master Thief, although Jack and Ti-Jack (Petit Jack) are also common in the Acadian communities of Maritime Canada.[88] According to Ancelet, AaTh 1525 is "one of the most popular English-language tales in the South," but there exist many attestations of this type in French and Creole oral traditions (1994, 51). The collections of Brandon (1953), Claudel (1979), and Saucier (1972) all include variants of AaTh 1525 involving a Master Thief-like protagonist by the name of Roclore or Roclos.[89] Ancelet notes that the name Roclore is often associated with a master thief-life character in French American folklore (Ancelet 1994, 52). Numerous instances of folktales and other narratives featuring Roquelaure exist in France. I aim to shed light on the possible connections between the French and French American oral tradition vis-à-vis the Roquelaure personage.

Although considerably dated, Bolte and Polívka's *Anmerkungen zu den Kinder- und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm* (Bolte and Polívka 1963 379-406) and Emmanuel

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[88] Two such examples are found in the archives of the CEAAC: "Conte du Ti-Jack, le bon voleur," told by Henriette Savoie of Pont-Landry, New Brunswick in 1974 (collected by Laurie Duguay) reel 3, number 19, and "Le conte du bon voleur," told by Mme Georges Duguay of St. Irénée, Quebec in 1971 (collected by Carmen LeBreton) reel 35, number 5.

[89] Henceforth, I will use the spelling employed in the transcription in question.

Cosquin's discussion of homologues in his collection of folktales from the Auvergne region of France (Cosquin 1886 274-281) remain among the most detailed accounts of the many attestations of AaTh 1525 *The Master Thief*. Nevertheless, such accounts fall short of providing in-depth analyses of catalogued variance, and relatively little scholarly attention has been accorded to the cultural significance of this admittedly peculiar tale type in which the hero is observed committing criminal acts.

It is this very notion of socially acceptable or justified theft that I aim to explore here, as I believe it to be particularly salient on a sociocultural level. The Master Thief tale type presents an interesting case study because although variants of this type are attested around the world, the specific needs for an 'outlaw hero' who transgresses normal moral boundaries are necessarily unique to the group relating the narrative. Likewise, the justification for the hero's 'immoral' acts are subject to the storyteller's own moral perspective informed by his or her feelings toward theft and the notion of authority.

In this chapter, I employ a comparative approach to analyze a number of Master Thief tales collected in Louisiana, and other variants from France, Maritime Canada, as well as other Creole traditions, namely a Guadeloupian variant and another from Réunion. Although comparing differences in the theft motifs in these variants will shed some light on the cultural significance of the Master Thief tales, I will focus particularly on the notion of justified theft. When is theft socially or even culturally permissible for an otherwise 'moral' hero, and why? In another kind of comparative perspective – that of American and British 'Jack tales' – Carl Lindahl argues that the Master Thief tale type "offers an exceptional opportunity for cross-cultural comparison because it is an amoral

tale with a moral hero," wherein the protagonist, "normally the embodiment of his society's more positive values – is here asked to do the work of a sociopath, performing a series of robberies to win his fortune" (Lindahl 380). Faced with this ethical tension and fundamental dilemma, what is at stake for the storyteller and his or her audience on a moral, social, and even cultural level?

In order to provide some answers to these questions, it will be necessary to examine how storytellers, as members of their respective sociocultural milieus, portray the Master Thief character. Are his actions justified by his own personal charm and wit? Is it poverty that warrants his nefarious deeds that would otherwise be considered as criminal? What role, if any, does the figure's familial situation and upbringing play in this situation? In proceeding with this reflection, I will consider the Master Thief as a sort of 'social bandit' to borrow the term proposed by Eric Hobsbawm (1972), or perhaps more accurately as the kind of 'outlaw hero' that Graham Seal (1996, 2009, 2011) defines through what he calls the Robin Hood Principle. Such a line of thought implies a certain degree of overlap, and even mutual inspiration, of real-life historical outlaw figures and folklore heroes, including (and perhaps especially) the Master Thief figure. The Roclore character of the French and Creole Louisiana folklore will provide an effective case study of this phenomenon.

1.1.1 AaTh 1525 The Master Thief

In the interest of clarity, it is worth noting that nearly all of the variants of AaTh 1525 in my corpus include one or more of a handful of motifs of theft. Overall, it could be said that the AaTh 1525 variants in this corpus, despite their diverse origins with regard to time period and geographical space, exhibit a remarkable degree of

homogeneity concerning the motifs of theft. Therefore, it is worth giving a brief overview of these recurring elements here.

Generally speaking, variants of AaTh 1525 feature a figure of power or authority (usually a king) that learns of a poor, young inhabitant near his land who is reputed to be a master thief. The protagonist is then challenged to perform one or more acts of theft, often progressively more difficult. Although Graham Seal, a prominent scholar of the outlaw heroes in Britain, Australia and the United States, posits that the "core" of this tale type is a lazy, good-for-nothing hero" who "trumpets his belief that he is a master thief" (Seal 2011 *Heroes* 27), this does not at all seem to be the case in francophone oral traditions. On the contrary, it is often the hero's mother who tells the king of her son's profession, and the thief is often reluctant to participate in the king's challenge. In fact, one motif that seems to be particularly recurrent across regions is the threat of death by hanging proclaimed by the king, or other authority figure, should the Master Thief refuse to abide by the orders or fail to complete the tasks. With each one of the thief's successes, the king's anger and humiliation increase until he decides to kill the thief, often by drowning. Even at this point, the Master Thief succeeds in escaping by tricking someone else to take his place, dying in his stead (Seal 2011 *Heroes* 27). In the French oral tradition, this last act of defiance often manifests itself through motif K842 *Dupe persuaded to take prisoner's place in a sack: killed*. As will become apparent through analysis, the sack exchange motif seems to be particularly prevalent in Louisiana folklore, and is found in tale types outside of AaTh 1525 (Ancelet 1994 52). A heavy concentration of motifs in the category H1150 *Tasks: stealing, capturing, or slaying* is a defining trait of this tale type. The most commonly found motifs consist of some

variation of the following, usually in this order: 1) stealing horses from a guarded stable, 2) stealing cows or sheep while they are being guarded by the overseer's field hands, and 3) stealing the sheets from the authority figure's bed during the night (Seal 2011 *Heroes* 27).

In a sense, these extraordinary tasks associated with the H1150 motifs, assigned to the protagonist by a figure of authority, mirror the mundane errands so emblematic of the Jean-le-Sot tale cycle. Fin Voleur and Jean-le-Sot could be considered as two sides of the same coin; together they constitute an intricate dichotomy that maintains the balance of this folk narrative diegesis. The Master Thief reluctantly follows the orders of a male superior (e.g. a king, count, or abbot), while Jean-le-Sot willingly obeys (or tries to obey) a female authority figure (i.e. his mother). Whereas Fin Voleur invariably succeeds in each one of his challenges, failure seems to be Jean-le-Sot's *raison d'être*. While Jean-le-Sot is sent to town in order to sell cloth or other goods to fulfill a monetary need at home, the Master Thief is responsible for stealing what is already in the king's possession.

Before entering into an analysis of several Louisiana Master Thief tales, it will be helpful to first examine two European variants of AaTh 1525. The Brothers Grimm's "Der Meisterdieb" ('The Master Thief'), often considered by folklorists as an important point of reference of the AaTh 1525 tale type, and "Le franc voleur" collected by Emmanuel Cosquin from the Lorraine region of France will be useful in understanding the significance of the sack exchange motif so common in Louisiana's francophone oral tradition.

1.2 "Der Meisterdieb," no. 192 of the Brothers Grimm Collection

In Emmanuel Cosquin's remarks on "Le franc voleur," from his collection *Contes populaires de Lorraine* (1886), he states: "Nous avons ici une version, altérée sur divers points, d'un conte très répandu qui se retrouve sous une forme mieux conservée, par exemple dans le nº 192 de la collection Grimm" (Cosquin 274). Cosquin's notion of particular variants being "better conserved" than others is typical of his time in that it implies the existence of a tale's archetype, or original, form. Although I, like most folklorists today, refute the monogenesis-based theory claiming the existence of an original form, no. 192 of the Grimms' collection does seem to include several motifs that appear more fully developed than in the Louisiana variants. At times variants display motifs whose narrative roles are obscure or perhaps nonexistent. Comparison with other (and often older) variants can provide insight into the mysterious nature of these motifs and suggest remnants of previously more complete motifs.

What seems to be a distinctive aspect of the AaTh 1525 tale type is the notion of thievery as an actual profession (Ancelet 1994 51) and this tale is no exception. Despite a number of differences, the Thuringian variant, "Der Meisterdieb," collected by the Brothers Grimm, bears a number of significant similarities with the Louisiana variant recounted by Stanislaus Faul seen below. One important point of commonality is that the parents of an old family are first greeted by who they believe to be a wealthy passerby requesting a home-cooked meal ('ein ländliches Gericht zu genießen') (Grimm 775). He has a mark on a shoulder that distinguishes him, and he manages to convince his parents that he is indeed their long-lost son. The physical mark of the thief, distinguishing him from the rest of his family, is also found in the Louisiana variant told by Stanislaus Faul

below. The need for the narrator to physically set apart the master thief is similar to the typical representation of the trickster figure in African folklore. Roger Abrahams observes that the trickster "is always a marked creature, an anomaly among animals or humans" (Abrahams 155). In this sense, the physical singularity of the master thief can be likened to the description of Jean-le-Sot who, as Revon Reed notes, always had "un certain air autour de lui qui le faisait différent de tous les autres jeunes gens du voisinage" (Reed 1976 69).

Although his family is distraught upon learning of their estranged son's 'profession', the thief aptly justifies his craft and attempts to put his parents at ease saying:

> "ich bin ein Dieb geworden. Aber erschreckt Euch nicht, ich bin ein Meisterdieb. Für mich gibt es weder Schloß noch Riegel: wonach mich gelüstet, das ist mein. Glaubt nicht, daß ich stehle wie ein gemeiner Dieb, ich nehme nur vom Überfluß der Reichen. Arme Leute sind sicher: ich gebe ihnen lieber, als da ich ihnen etwas nehme" (Grimm 776).[90]

Although such reassurance from the thief seems to be implicit in many tales, the only other variant in this study's corpus where one finds such an explanation of the thief's intention, and perhaps consequently any evidence of grief shown by the parents, is "Frank Rascal" collected by Calvin Claudel in Avoyelles Parish (Claudel 1979 55). In Grimm's "Der Meisterdieb," poverty and redistribution of the 'overflowing' wealth of the rich justify the protagonist's wealth in the same manner observed by Lindahl in the outlaw hero of the American tales of Jack, whom he likens to "Robin Hood, giving to the poor the money he has stolen from his rich enemy" (380). The relationship between the

[90] 'I became a thief. But do not be frightened, for I am a master thief. For me, there are neither locks nor bolts. Whatever I want is mine for the taking. Do not believe that I steal like a common thief. I only take from the abundance of the rich. Poor people are safe. I would rather give to them than take from them' (Grimm 776). Translation is my own.

thief's poor family and the count ('*Graf*') is clearly established in the beginning of the narrative and the parents express fear that the count will not welcome their son back on his property. Similar to most of the Louisiana variants, it is the authority figure (here, the count) who initiates the series of challenges to test the skills of the master thief. Should he refuse or fail, he is to be made to "marry the rope-maker's daughter" (Grimm 777).[91]

The thief's first challenge is the same that is commonly found in the French oral tradition, the theft of the count's horses while they are guarded. He accomplishes this by disguising himself as an old woman seeking refuge for the night, and offering the guards a jug of Hungarian wine. When the guards are sufficiently inebriated, they fall asleep, allowing the thief to steal the count's horses. In this study's corpus, the theft of horses is invariably the first task whenever it appears in the narrative and it is usually completed with the help of a disguise. C.G. Jung, in his commentary, "On the Psychology of the Trickster Figure," in Paul Radin's *The Trickster*, comments upon the trickster's affinity for disguising himself, and in some traditions even taking the form of a woman (Jung 203).

After successfully stealing the count's horses, the Meisterdieb is challenged to enter the queen's bedroom that night and steal her sheets and wedding ring. This motif is common in the Louisiana variants, although in each tale from the corpus, it is the final theft in the narrative. By removing a hanged man from the gallows and lifting the corpse up to the count's window, he tricks him into shooting the cadaver, believing that he has killed the thief. While the count descends to bury who he believes to be the Meisterdieb,

[91] In other words, he is to be hanged. My translation of the German, "... so mußt du mit des Seilers Tochter Hochzeit halten..." (Grimm 777).

the real thief enters the count's chambers to steal the sheet from underneath his wife as well as her wedding ring (Grimm 780).

Disguise is once again important at the end of this tale, which I would like to draw particular attention to here. The final theft motif in "Der Meisterdieb" is exemplary of the scenario known as type AaTh 1737 *The Parson in the Sack to Heaven*. In response to the count's final challenge to steal his parson and clerk and deliver them both to the count, the Meisterdieb stages an elaborate trick by dressing himself in a monk's cloak and placing lighted candles on top of live crabs set free in the cemetery. Pretending to be Saint Peter announcing the end of the world, the Meisterdieb enters the church at the stroke of twelve. Midnight, the point in between one day and next, or '*l'heure du crime*,' is symbolic of the thief's ambiguous state between hero and criminal. The Meisterdieb convinces the clergymen that what they see in the cemetery is in fact the buried arising from the dead, gathering their bones in preparation for their ascension into heaven. If the parson and clerk wish to enter heaven they must crawl into the Meisterdieb's sack. The thief cries:

> 'hört an, ihr sündigen Menschen, das Ende aller Dinge ist gekommen, der jüngste Tag ist nahe: hört an, hört an. Wer mit mir in den Himmel will, der krieche in den Sack. Ich bin Petrus, der die Himmelstüre öffnet und schließt. Seht ihr, draußen auf dem Gottesacker wandeln die Gestorbenen und sammeln ihre Gebeine zusammen. Kommt, kommt und kriecht in den Sack, die Welt geht unter' (Grimm 781).[92]

[92] 'Listen, sinners! The end of all things has come. The last day is upon us. Listen, listen! Whosoever wishes to go to heaven should crawl in the sack. I am Peter, who opens and closes the gates of heaven. Look how the dead are wandering around out in the churchyard gathering their bones. Come now, get into the sack for the world is ending!' (Grimm 781). Translation is my own.

Of course, all of this is the Meisterdieb's ruse to transport the abbot and parson in his sack to the count's estate, and he succeeds in doing so. The episode is at the root of type AaTh 1737 *The Parson in the Sack to Heaven*.

1.3 Carnivalesque Elements and Bakthin's *rabaissement*

This kind of mockery of religious elements is also common in French variants of AaTh 1525. Two variants[93] found in the UPCP-Métive archives that were collected from Western France describe similar episodes of a 'Maître Voleur' figure who tricks the priest into climbing into a sack. One of them features the young protagonist hiding in the choir loft, imitating the voice of the Virgin Mary while calling down to his praying mother to let him take up the trade of master thief.[94]

I would argue that the inherent comedic value of satirical portrayals of clergymen and perversions of church ceremonies in European folklore in the eighteenth through twentieth centuries probably harkens back to the Middle Ages. This kind of laughter belongs to what Mikhail Bakhtin refers to as the 'second' or 'unofficial life' of popular society (Bakhtin 18). There are numerous carnivalesque elements present in AaTh 1737 *The Parson in the Sack to Heaven*, which are made possible by the thief's disguising himself as Saint Peter. Bakthin states that "un des éléments obligatoires de la fête populaire était le déguisement, c'est-à-dire la rénovation des vêtements et du personnage social" (Bakhtin 90). In subsequent analyses, it will become clear that the disguise is an

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[93] UPCP-Métive reference : DCC00005-003/ CON_CAT_21-029. Collected in Vendée/ Noirmoutier-en-l'Ile (canton de)/ Barbâtre (La Fosse) by Providence Bouteau. Told by Marguerite Morisson. UPCP-Métive reference: DCC00102-030/ CON_CAT_21-030. Collected in Deux-Sèvres/ La Forêt-sur-Sèvre (La Rainelière) by unknown collector. Told by Evelyne Sireau.

[94] UPCP-Métive reference: DCC00102-030/ CON_CAT_21-030. Collected in Deux-Sèvres/ La Forêt-sur-Sèvre (La Rainelière) by unknown collector. Told by Evelyne Sireau.

integral part of many of the Master Thief's thefts and is not limited to AaTh 1737. The Meisterdieb's hoax fulfills the other important element of the carnivalesque mode, which is the inversion of hierarchical roles. Bakhtin goes on:

> L'autre élément de grande importance était la permutation du haut et du bas hiérarchiques: le bouffon était sacré roi; pendant la fête des fous on procédait à l'élection d'un abbé, d'un évêque et d'un archevêque pour rire, et dans les églises placées sous l'autorité directe du pape, d'un pape pour rire (Bakhtin 90).

Although the setting of "Der Meisterdieb" tale does not consist of a procession or *fêtes des fous*, the narration of the tale creates a temporal sphere in which the inversion of power structures is possible. Moreover, Bakhtin points to the interconnection of *la fête carnavalesque* and *le folklore local* in saying: "C'est lui [le folklore] qui, dans une large mesure, a alimenté l'imagerie et le rituel de l'aspect populaire et comique de la fête" (Bakhtin 91). The episode of AaTh 1737 *The Parson in the Sack to Heaven* is carnivalesque in that it results in the thief taking on one of the highest roles (Saint Peter) at the expense of the abbot and parson, who are effectively reduced to fools. The permutation of official, and especially religious, ceremony and imagery is what Bakhtin refers to as *rabaissement* (Bakhtin 83).

1.3.1 "Le franc voleur," from Lorraine

A similar episode can be found in "Le franc voleur," collected by Emmanuel Cosquin from the Lorraine region of France. In this variant, a baron's final order to the thief is to murder his uncle, the priest, and share with the baron the money in the collection box. As in the Grimm's tale, this takes place at the midnight Mass. The tale lacks the motif of placing lighted candles atop live crabs to give the impression of waking spirits as is seen in "Der Meisterdieb"; however, the end result of AaTh 1737 is the same. Franc Voleur places a plate of crawfish on the altar, and then proceeds to convince the

priest to crawl inside a sack in order to be saved from the end of the world. As I have evoked above, this seems to be an incomplete vestige of the crab motif, because its function is unclear. Cosquin himself remarks in his commentary that, "les écrevisses que le voleur apporte dans l'église n'ont aucune signification" (Cosquin 274). While it is true that the narrative function of this (apparently) incomplete motif lacks a correlation with the coaxing of the priest to enter the sack, it does accentuate the notion of *rabaissement* of religious ceremony. The placement of ground-dwelling crustaceans on the most sacred location of the church, where the hosts are transubstantiated into the body of Christ according to the Catholic tradition, emphasizes the subversion of official authority. Such an image corresponds to Bakhtin's observation that "presque tous les rites de la fête des fous sont des *rabaissements* grotesques des différents rites et symboles religieux transposé sur le plan matériel et corporel: goinfrerie et ivrognerie sur l'autel même, gestes obscènes, déshabillage, etc." (Bakhtin 83). It is surprising that these instances of *rabaissement* and satirical representations of religious ceremonies seem to be completely absent from the Louisiana variants, which is curious considering that mockery of religious authority and carnival celebrations, like Mardi Gras, are important in the folklore and popular culture of the region.[95]

1.4 Master Thief Variants in Louisiana

The Master Thief variants from the Louisiana corpus exhibit a number of similarities with the Grimm's "Der Meisterdieb" and Cosquin's Lorraine variant, "Le franc voleur." Although the mocking of religious figures and Christian ceremony do not

[95] For example, in Jean Arceneaux's collection of popular jokes and stories, *Le trou dans le mur* (2010), at least nine out of the fifty stories revolve around comedic representations of priests or religious ceremony (Arceneaux 2010).

seem to be present in the Louisiana tales of this type, the tension between the thief and the rich figure of authority remains a common point shared with the Old World variants. Moreover, a number of other motifs suggest a carnivalesque element to the Louisiana Master Thief tales as will be explored in the subsequent paragraphs.

1.4.1 "Frank Rascal," a Pointe Coupée Variant

Calvin Claudel includes a variant of AaTh 1525 collected in Pointe Coupée Parish entitled, "Frank Rascal," presumably a translation from the French, 'Franc Voleur' (Claudel 54-57). The connotation of 'frankness' is intriguing in this tale as it seems to serve as some justification for the hero's stealing. The mother expresses grief after discovering that her son has chosen to be a thief. Frank Rascal echoes the words of Grimm's Meisterdieb in his attempt to comfort her: "Don't worry, Mama. I am a frank rascal. I don't have to do anything bad" (Claudel 55). 'Frank' as a translation from the French '*franc*' conjures the notion of openness. One who is *franc* can been described as he or she, "qui parle sans détour ni dissimulation, qui ne cache pas sa pensée" ("Franc" *Larousse*). In other words, Frank Rascal means to imply that overtly admitting that he is a thief renders his actions less reprehensible. Is this perhaps in contrast to the established authority figure (e.g. a king or lord) that unjustly 'steals' in a more covert fashion, through taxation or oppression?

Aside from the absence of *The Parson in the Sack to Heaven* episode, Claudel's, "Frank Rascal" bears a number of resemblances to the Lorraine variant collected by Cosquin, although certain motifs are localized to the Louisiana context. As in Cosquin's variant, the thief has two older brothers who each set off to pursue more respectable professions, a baker and locksmith. In Claudel's Louisiana tale, one brother "goes to

college... to be a doctor" and the other goes to law school (Claudel 54). Evidently, the storyteller has adapted these professions to the modern American context in order to maximize the juxtaposition of conventional success embodied by the older brothers and the rejection of those ideals represented by Frank Rascal. During the theft of the king's horses, Frank Rascal does not dress up as an old woman as in "Der Meisterdieb," or as a Capuchin monk as seen in the Lorraine variant. Rather he chooses to "dress himself as an old Negro" and offers the guards a flask of whiskey in order to subdue them (Claudel 55). These instances of localization demonstrate that the salient aspect of this motif is not only the thief's capacity to disguise himself, but that he systematically opts for the opposite of his true appearance. This carnivalesque inversion of the self can be likened to Mardi Gras masks that many consider a means of displaying the contrary of one's real physicality.

An ongoing bet between the king and the Master Thief is an element found elsewhere in the French oral tradition, for example in a variant of AaTh 1525 from the Berry region (Valière and Debiais 115-117). Frank Rascal gains a small fortune by winning at each of his wagers with the king and eventually returns to his family's home. The moral at the tale's end glorifies the actions of the clever thief and denigrates the choices of the older brothers: "When he arrived, he found his town brothers who had finished school. Neither the one nor the other was earning money. The doctor had no practice, and the lawyer spent all his time reading. Of the three brothers, only he who had learned to steal made money" (Claudel 57). The moral meant to be derived from this tale demonstrates an inherent and strong mistrust of formal education and conventional ideas of financial success. Or perhaps more accurately, it could reflect a certain doubt on the

part of the francophone culture of Louisiana of its capacity to integrate into a world that is perceived to belong exclusively to Anglophone American culture.

1.4.2 "Le fin voleur," a Louisiana Variant Told by Stanislaus Faul

"Fin voleur / The Master Thief," told by Stanislaus "Tanisse" Faul, is classified under "Contes merveilleux/Magic Tales" in Ancelet's collection *Cajun and Creole Folktales* (1994) despite the absence of magical elements in this variant (51-59). This is possibly by genre-related association with Old World variants where magic is sometimes an important part of similar tales, like the giant in the English 'Jack' tales (Lindahl 378). However, it could be significant that none of the variants of type 1525 in the Louisiana corpus contain any elements of magic, distinguishing them from many of the Jack tales of Britain and English-speaking America.

Ancelet also remarks on this tale being the longest in his collection (1994, 51). It could be generally said that variants of AaTh 1525 tend to be lengthier in comparison to other types that may be susceptible to being condensed or shortened into more anecdotal forms. Stanislaus Faul, mentioned in the previous chapter for his telling of "Jean Sot," performed another rendition of "Le fin voleur," in 1980 to Canadian folklorist Lauraine Léger.[96] Although I will refer to both versions of this tale in my analysis, I draw primarily from Léger's sound recording for my analysis, and from the commentary provided by Ancelet that precedes the transcription of his recording (Ancelet 1995 51-52).

As can be seen in "Der Meisterdieb" and "Le franc voleur" from Cosquin's collection, Faul's telling of "Le fin voleur" begins by describing, not the thief himself, but his family. In Ancelet's recording, Faul begins: "C'était un homme et une femme. Ils

[96] CEAAC. Reel 57, no. 1909.

étaient beaucoup pauvres et ils avaient trois petits garçons, trois garçons. Il y en a un qui était petit encore" (Ancelet 1994 52 and AN1.179). In the rendition collected by Léger, Faul enters the narrative in a similar fashion: "Y avait trois frères, mais y en avait deux qui étaient moyens, là y en avait un petit. Eux-autres, c'était du monde pauvre" (Léger 1980 57.1909). Far from being insignificant background information, these two different, but similar openings set up a crucial aspect of the tale. Fin Voleur's social standing and familial situation is paramount in justifying the crimes that he will commit later on in the narrative. As in the Lorraine variant collected by Cosquin, there are three brothers (motif P251.6.1.), of which Fin Voleur is the youngest. As the smallest of the three poor brothers, he is at first rejected when the two older brothers decide to leave to learn their respective professions in order to support their family. Eventually, the two older brothers decide to permit the youngest to accompany them on their journey. In both versions, Ancelet's and Léger's, the brothers quickly come to a three-way fork in the road at which point each brother takes his own path, agreeing to meet each other in one year's time at that very spot (Ancelet 1994 52, Léger 1980). This kind of liminal imagery, like M301.12 *Three fates,* symbolized here by three separate roads to take as in Cosquin's variant, is a recurrent motif in the early stages of AaTh 1525 variants and conveys the volatility of the protagonist's upbringing. The motif M301.12 relinquishes to fate an important role of agency in the thief's progression from peasant to outlaw. A similar French variant collected by Michel Valière and Geneviève Debiais from the Berry region, puts the Fin Voleur at a four-way fork in the road (Valière and Debiais 115). In the French American variant "Fin Voleur ou Les Pantoufles d'Or," collected by Joseph Médard Carrière from French-American Missouri, Fin Voleur decides to learn his trade as a thief late in the

afternoon - in between the day and night - when he encounters three thieves who initiate him into their profession. As Seal has noted, "it is generally found that the hero is driven to outlawry through no fault of his own" (Seal *Legends* 6). Moreover, it could be argued that the group of thieves that the protagonist meets early on in the narrative functions as a sort of 'donor' in the Proppian sense. According to Propp, the donor has two functions in the folktale: "la préparation de la transmission de l'objet magique" and "la mise de l'objet magique à la disposition du héros" (Propp 96). In the Louisiana variants, the Fin Voleur's skills can be considered as having the same function as the magic object in the Russian fairy tales analyzed by Propp in that they give the hero the ability to succeed in the tasks assigned to him. In this way, the storyteller distances himself from the negative qualities associated with the hero's questionable profession. The art of theft is learned outside of the community, and it is understood that the Master Thief's victims (e.g. the king) will also be far away.

As in the Grimms' "Der Meisterdieb," Fin Voleur is given several tasks by the king under the threat of death by hanging should he refuse or fail. An interesting distinction here is that, as Ancelet notes, Fin Voleur "attracts the attention of the king by audaciously sending for the king's scales to weigh his wagon full of gold" (Ancelet 1994 52). The first task, stealing the king's guarded horse, is accomplished in the same way as in the Grimms' variant. Fin Voleur succeeds in the next challenge, stealing the king's guarded cattle, by distracting the cattle hands. He does this by 'hanging himself' once, leading the guards to believe another master thief has been caught, and then repeats his trick further down the road. Astonished, the men momentarily abandon the cattle in order to measure the distance between what they believe to be two hanged men, during which

time the Fin Voleur leads the cattle away to his home (Léger, Ancelet 1994 55-56). In addition to succeeding in this second task, it could be said that Fin Voleur effectively anticipates and mocks the punishment that awaits him should he fail.

Despite the absence of the AaTh 1737 or any other sort of mockery of religious themes, a certain element of the carnivalesque can be seen in the Fin Voleur's final challenge of stealing the queen's wedding ring and bed sheet while she sleeps. This episode plays out much like what is seen in "Der Meisterdieb," although instead of lifting a corpse to the king's window, the Fin Voleur fashions a manikin out of a pig, fitted with a spring in order to mimic a human form and incite the gunshots of the king's guards who mistake it for the thief. Once again, disguise is an integral part of the Fin Voleur's trickery, and the use of a pig is found elsewhere in Acadian folklore.[97] When the thief is believed to be shot, the king races down to order his men to bury him fifteen feet deep. Meanwhile, the thief seizes this opportunity to climb up to his room and steal his wife's sheet and wedding ring. This scene symbolizes the reversal of the power structure occurring in the narrative, thus representing on a physical level the 'monde à l'envers' described by Bakhtin (19), a veritable *détrônement* where "le roi est le bouffon" (199). Nevertheless, this tale, like the other Louisiana variants AaTh 1525 is devoid of the sexual and scatological elements found in the French tradition. In some variants of France, for example, the thief takes advantage of this furtive moment in the king's

[97] "Le fin voleur," told by Marcellin Haché, collected in 1957 by Anselme Chiasson, reel 13, number 264. CEAAC.

chamber to have intercourse with the queen (pretending to be the king in the dark), urinate in a bottle on his nightstand, and defecate in his boots.[98]

1.5 Motif K842: The Sack Exchange

One need not analyze in depth the Louisiana variants of AaTh 1525 and similar thief tales to notice the prevalence of motif K842 *Dupe persuaded to take prisoner's place in a sack: killed*. I will address some salient points here concerning the sack exchange motif in the context of Faul's rendition of "Le fin voleur," although these observations are applicable to all of the similar variants in the Louisiana corpus, including "Roclos" (Claudel 59-60), Brandon's "Roclore" (in Dorson 253-256), and Roclore tales 1 and 2 in Saucier's collection (50-54).

This motif invariably occurs at the end of the narrative and consists of the thief, finally trapped by the king and placed in a sack, duping an unfortunate passerby in switching places with him by crying, 'I won't marry the princess! You can drown me, but I won't marry the princess'. In most variants, the two men switch places while the king is distracted. Upon the king's return, he throws the sack into a lake believing that he has finally rid himself of the Fin Voleur. Some time later, the king sees the Fin Voleur on horseback and exclaims in his disbelief to see the rascal alive. At this point, the thief cleverly responds to the king in anger for not having thrown him far enough into the lake, where the best horses were. Upon hearing this, the gullible king then pleads with the thief to throw him into the lake so that he might see the finest horses. The Fin Voleur gladly obliges the king, who never resurfaces. There is an underlying implication of the king's

[98] See Valière and Debiais *Berry* pp. 115-117 and UPCP-Métive reference: DCC00005-003/ CON_CAT_21-029. Collected in Vendée/ Noirmoutier-en-l'Ile (canton de)/ Barbâtre (La Fosse) by Providence Bouteau. Told by Marguerite Morisson.

ignorance about basic matters of rural life and self-sufficiency. Despite his wealth and power, he can be tricked into believing that horses are sold at the bottom of a lake.

Although the Louisiana sack exchange motif has been identified as AaTh 1737 *The Parson in the Sack to Heaven* (Dorson 253), I would argue that the function of motif K842 in the Louisiana variants is fundamentally different, despite the superficial similarity involving the placement of a human in a sack. "Der Meisterdieb" contains an exemplary episode of AaTh 1737 of which I have commented on the carnivalesque qualities of mocking elements of religious ceremonies and clergymen. Here, the thief captures the parson and the clerk as part of the final challenge made to him by the earl. Clearly, the goal of motif K842 is different in that it aims to defeat the primary antagonist. Moreover, this motif occurs at the moment of the thief's defeat, and represents a last-ditch effort of survival through wit, much like the briar-patch motif in certain tales of Bouki and Lapin.

1.6 On the Role of Family

In all of the variants discussed thus far, the family occupies an important place, and the thief shows his attachment to his family by keeping his promise to find his brothers, reuniting the family as planned. Family is at the forefront in a structural sense, appearing at the opening of the tales; the reunification of the family conveys a certain humanity in the character and also suggests that theft is not his end goal in life. Moreover, the poverty of the thief's family is evoked in every one of the Louisiana variants in the corpus. It is possible that such strong family ties are representative of a stamp of the French oral tradition, or at the very least a marked difference from the American folk hero described by Daniel Hoffman (1994):

> The American folk hero is startlingly different from most of the great heroes of myths or of Märchen. Unlike them, the American has no parents. He has no past, no patrimony, no siblings, no family and no life cycle, because he never marries or has children. He seldom dies. If death does overtake him, it proves to be merely a stage in his transformation to still another identity. No one has cursed his birth or set him afloat on the sea; neither was he suckled by a beast nor rescued by a cowherd from the fierce elements to which a tyrannous father had condemned him. Although he may wear many disguises, it cannot be usually said that he returns incognito to his homeland, rids his country of scourges, and is recognized as the throne's true heir (Hoffman 78, cited in Lindahl 374).

The emphasis placed on the poverty of the Master Thief's family is an element shared with a number of Acadian variants. Upon analyzing five Master Thief tales collected in Acadian communities of Maritime Canada, one sees a marked emphasis on food, in comparison with the Louisiana variants. In three of these variants, "Le conte du bon voleur,"[99] "Conte du Ti-Jack, le bon voleur,"[100] and "Le fin voleur,"[101] the narratives begin by describing the mother traveling to the king's palace every day at noon to beg for food. The tellers of all five of the Acadian variants insist on the family's poverty. In, "Le fin voleur," Marellin Haché first brings the listener's attention to fact that "i' vivіont pauv'es, de charité. À tous les jours, foulait qu'a' fut su' le roâ pour avoir à manger".[102] Moreover, Petit Jean's first act of thievery is stealing the king's white bread that is fed to his pigs every day, which Petit Jean manages to steal by slaughtering a black sow in the forest and dressing himself in the skin, ears, and hooves.

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[99] Told by Mme. Georges Duguay, collected 1971 by Carmen LeBreton, reel 35, number 5. CEAAC.
[100] Told by Henriette Savoie, collected in 1974 by Laurie Duguay, reel 3, number 19. CEAAC.
[101] Told by Marcellin Haché, collected in 1957 by Anselme Chiasson, reel 13, number 264. CEAAC.
[102] Ibid. Transcription by Anselme Chiasson. "They lived poorly, from charity. Every day, she [the mother] had to go to see the king for food." Translation is my own.

Clearly, there are a number of significant differences between the typical Fin Voleur figure of French and francophone folklore and the image of the (presumably English-speaking) 'American' folk hero described by Hoffman. In the Louisiana variants, the thief's parents are not only present; they are at the foreground of the narrative. The thief's commitment to his family is evidenced by his decision to return home, and by repeatedly reassuring his distraught mother that he will succeed in the king's challenges and avoid execution.[103]

Thus far, all of the AaTh 1525 variants analyzed have featured protagonists that are devoid of any name or basis in real life. In the following section of this chapter, I will discuss a number tales of the same type whose heroes' name are likely rooted in the oral history of France and perhaps related to several figures of the French nobility.

1.7 Roquelaure: Real-life Master Thief?

As mentioned above, variations of the name Roclore or Roclos can be found in a number of folktales in Louisiana of the type 1525 *The Master Thief* or 1535 *The Rich Peasant and the Poor Peasant*, and are found elsewhere in French and Creole oral traditions. There are attestations of a character named Roquelaure (or some variation thereof) cast as a Master Thief figure in Louisiana, New Brunswick, France, and Réunion. Attestations of the name in Master Thief tales seem to be particularly numerous in Louisiana, although it is interesting to note that 'Roquelaure' seems to be nonexistent as a surname in Louisiana. Nevertheless, its association with the Master Thief in Louisiana folklore is quite apparent.

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[103] For a sampling of several variants that begin by mentioning the family's poverty, see appendix B.

In this portion of the chapter, I will explore a probable connection – one previously only hinted at in scholarly writings - between this name and that of a noble family of France. This research aims to shed light on the source of the name, Roclore, in the French Louisiana oral tradition that has yet been unexplained. To go beyond the previous research on the possible link between the Roquelaure family of France and the name associated with Master Thief figure of the francophone oral tradition, I searched for written records of the Roquelaure family in the Bibliothèque nationale de France. I discovered pertinent information from the BNF's scanned documents concerning the dukes of Roquelaure. As I will explain below, there is considerable evidence that events of several dukes of Roquelaure entered into the realm of legend in France as early as the seventeenth century. By comparing episodes described in these sources collected from the BNF with Louisiana variants of the Master Thief tales, this subsection will shed new light on the significance of this name's relation to the AaTh 1525 type.

As mentioned above, there seems to be a general absence of the Roquelaure name in Louisiana. There is, however, an entry in the *Dictionary of Louisiana French* for 'rôquelaure,' a noun meaning "good-for-nothing" (Valdman et al. "Rôquelaure" 561). Donald Haase proposes that the name is perhaps derived "from the family name of the Baron de Roquelaure and his son and grandson, all of whom were known for wit," but goes no further than this interjection (Haase 683). The most serious investigation of a potential connection with the noble family of France is George Reinecke's article, "Louisiana's Roquelaure: The Spanish Soil Trick and *Le momus françois*" (1975). If there does exist a connection between the trickster figure Roclore (Roclos) of Louisiana folklore and a member of the French nobility by the same name (despite the variation in

spelling), the historical reference among storytellers was undoubtedly lost long ago. Nevertheless, I argue that the proximity in the two names as well as certain key similarities with regard to character and similar motifs found in the oral tradition of France merit further investigation of this potential correlation.

Haase is correct in his observation (683) that the several men of this noble family from the Gascony region seem to have been widely recognized for their wit and their closeness to kings Henri IV and Louis XIV. Perhaps much of the family's mystique – and consequently the confusion arising in an attempt to establish a veritable link between the Roquelaures and the clever thief of Louisiana folklore - derives from a considerable array of anecdotes and references from the sixteenth through twentieth centuries and the conflation of numerous references to 'Ducs' and 'Chevaliers' of Roquelaure. Among these historical references, much distinction between the three dukes (Antoine the elder, Gaston, the younger Antoine) and his brother Antoine le Chevalier is lost due to the use of a single reference of 'Roquelaure'. The Roquelaures' Gasconian origins are consistently evoked in historical accounts, seemingly as a source of exoticism, 'otherness', or perhaps an excuse for erratic behavior among other members of the French nobility.

The plausibility of a connection between the trickster figure of French American folklore and the Roquelaure family of sixteenth- through eighteenth-century France is considerably increased by the fact that these historical figures had already become something of 'legends' in France by the time that French emigration to Louisiana was well under way. Gédéon Tallement des Réaux's (1619-1692) *Historiettes*, "which constitute the most lively and scurrilous tales about various figures of his time"

(Burgwinkle et al. 2011 346), give some insight into the reputation of the Ducs de Roquelaure (291-313). The first duke Antoine, Baron de Roquelaure (1543-1625), also known as 'le maréchal de Roquelaure', is most noted for his military prowess although Tallement also notes his humor that was much appreciated by the king Henri IV.

Antoine's son, Gaston-Jean-Baptiste de Roquelaure (1615-1683), became duke in 1652. He later became the subject of T. de Robville's *Histoire curieuse du Duc de Roquelaure, surnommé l'homme le plus laid et le plus gai de France* published in 1861. In the preface to this colorful and pseudo-biographical work, Robville asserts that Gaston de Roquelaure had become a fixture of popular culture: "Gaston, duc de Roquelaure [...] est un personnage populaire; les salons et les ateliers le connaissent au moins nominativement, et on le fêtera comme un ami dont on attend le retour de voyage" (Robville vi). An earlier writing[104] entitled *Le Momus françois ou Le portrait et les aventures divertissantes du Duc de Roquelaure* by a mysterious author by the name of S.L.R., perhaps Sieur Antoine Le Roy according to some scholars, describes in great detail – over two lengthy paragraphs – the physical attributes, odors, and clothing of 'the ugliest man in the world' (S.L.R. 5-6). The 'Portrait of the Duke of Roquelaure begins:

> Ce Duc avait de petits yeux noirs, qu'on nomme vulgairement yeux de cochon; il avait les sourcils épais et larges, le teint brun, c'est-à-dire basané ; le nez plat et écrasé entre ses deux yeux, de manière qu'on aurait eu bien de la peine à le discerner, si deux larges narines, toujours barbouillées de tabac, n'eussent frappé la vue ; enfin on ne peut mieux comparer cet antipode de nez qu'à celui d'un beau chien de Boulogne... (S.L.R. 5).

[104] Perhaps as early as 1727, although the existence of several editions and the obscurity of the text's author render the original publication date unclear. Following his own archival research, Georges Reinecke came to a similar conclusion: "The Grand Larousse ('Roquelaure') authorizes the date 1727, but the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris contains editions ranging from 1739 to the mid-nineteenth century, many of them printed by Marteau at Cologne" (Reinecke 65).

Gaston de Roquelaure's physical singularity is not unlike some portrayals of the trickster figure whose physical appearance is sometimes singular because of some kind of mark on his head, or shoulder, etc. Moreover, a number of variants cast the Fin Voleur as a master of disguises, often dressing himself up as a woman or a pig. The anonymous author also makes note of Roquelaure's humor and wit:

> Pour ce qui est de son humeur, elle était gaie, son esprit satyrique, bouffon et railleur, ses manières civiles, insinuantes, aisées et nobles ; son geste vif et passionné. Il avait la pointe fine et malicieuse ; la répartie prompte, la langue déliée et bien pendu ; il était d'un tempérament fort amoureux et il aimait les plaisirs, même jusqu'à la débauche, et quelquefois jusqu'à l'excès. Il était brave comme un soldat, et généreux comme un prince, chaud au service de ses amis, libre en paroles et Gascon ; mais il était des voisinages de la Garonne, c'est tout dire. Son vice le plus dominant était la satyre ; il la poussait quelquefois si loin qu'elle dégénérait en calomnie. On peut dire que, s'il avait beaucoup de belles qualités, il avait aussi bien des défauts" (S.L.R. 5-6).

Here again, one notes several common characteristics of the Fin Voleur and the Roclore of Louisiana folklore, notably his civil and charming demeanor, particularly toward the king. One of the constant traits of the character in folktales is his ability to maintain his courteous yet sly manners throughout his tense dealings with the king or other figure of authority.

The member of the Roquelaure family that perhaps most resembles the human trickster figure of French and Creole Louisiana folklore, however, is not a duke at all. Duke Gaston de Roquelaure had a young brother, named Antoine after his grandfather. Remembered as one of the "figures représentatives du libertinage" of seventeenth-century France (Houdard 57), he is often referred to as 'Antoine Chevalier de Roquelaure', perhaps to distinguish him from the more respectable reputations of the two Ducs de Roquelaure - his grandfather and nephew, Gaston's son – also named Antoine. Alain

Mothu describes the Chevalier Antoine de Roquelaure as a "gentilhomme d'une puissante famille, blasphémateur et débauché célèbre" (220). It is blasphemy that led to the trials and eventual incarceration of the Chevalier de Roquelaure in 1646 in the Conciergerie de Toulouse, before he escaped from prison by bribing his guard (Mothu 220).

Stories of the Chevalier de Roquelaure's antics were apparently widespread and, as some have argued (Howarth 208, Morel), the Chevalier de Roquelaure was Molière's inspiration for the 'Pauper scene" of Molière's 1682 play *Dom Juan*. In Molière's play, Dom Juan offers a *Louis d'or* to a downtrodden hermit begging for alms in the street provided that he will 'swear' (Molière 3.2). After the man repeatedly refuses to blaspheme, "Dom Juan gives him the money 'pour l'amour de l'humanité': a formula in which we are meant to see a profane version of the conventional 'pour l'amour de Dieu' (Howarth 208). René Pintard describes a nearly identical scenario that became the subject of the Chevalier de Roquelaure's trial in 1646 (Pintard 22).

The apparently strong presence of anecdotes and historical records shows that the name Roquelaure was, at least to some degree, a fixture of popular culture in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France. This observation is supported by Reinecke's discovery that *Le momus françois* "was featured in the celebrated 'Bibliothèque bleue' and thus reached the semi-literate public" (Reinecke 65). The popularity gained by the Roquelaure due to his reputation of being remarkably clever, however fictionalized he may have been, is in line with Seal's observation that "whether in history or myth, the outlaw hero mantle most likely will become attached to those who display some level of wit, style, or sympathy that distinguishes them from the common criminal, or simply

from the crowd" (Seal "Robin Hood" 73). Although this does not definitively prove the historical connection linking the Roquelaure family with the French American folklore hero, it is difficult to ignore certain parallels in the description of the Antoine Chevalier de Roquelaure found in Tallement des Réaux's *Historiettes*.

> Le chevalier de Roquelaure est une espèce de fou, qui est avec cela le plus grand blasphémateur du royaume. On dit qu'il s'est un peu corrigé. À Malte, il fut mis dans un puits, où on le laissa quelque temps par punition. À l'armée navale, le comte d'Harcourt fut sur le point de le faire jeter dans la mer avec un boulet au pied. Cela ne le rendit pas plus sage; car quelques années après ayant trouvé à Toulouse des gens aussi fous que lui, il dit la messe dans un jeu de paume..., baptisa et maria des chiens, et fit et dit toutes les impiétés imaginables. On en avertit la justice. [...] Quelques jours après il corrompit le geôlier moyennant six cents pistoles: le geôlier se sauva avec lui, dont mal lui en prit, car le chevalier lui prit son argent, et le renvoya comme un coquin (Tallemant 309-310).

In this admittedly short description, there are echoes of several motifs commonly found in the Roclore (Roclos) folktales in our Louisiana corpus. The Chevalier de Roquelaure that Tallement describes is an individual that systematically defies authority. Moreover, the text contains multiple instances of escaping from confinement, whether he is placed at the bottom of a well, or in a veritable prison. The image given by Tallement of Roquelaure performing baptisms and wedding of dogs also corresponds to the kind of *rabaissement* of religious rites described by Bakthin. Moreover, Roquelaure is decidedly accustomed to using his wits to regain his freedom in the face of authority. Even the reaction of the count of Harcourt, willing to throw Roquelaure into the sea, is reminiscent of motif K842, or the sack exchange motif, found in so many of the tales of this type.

By no means am I suggesting that one or several members of the Roquelaure family are at the source of the Roclore or Master Thief tales in the Louisiana corpus. Ample evidence attests to the quasi-universality of the AT 1525 type and similar variants throughout the world (Seal 2011 *Heroes* 25, Bolte and Polívka 3: 33). However, in light

of the evidence of specific scenarios in cultural and literary production of France, in folktales, oral tradition, and theatre, it seems very likely that the Roquelaure became loosely associated with a sort of trickster figure in the French oral tradition.[105]

1.7.1 Roquelaure and the Spanish Soil Trick

Further evidence of the Duc of Roquelaure in the collective imagination of nineteenth-century France exists in a vaudeville play debuting in 1836, *Roquelaure, l'homme le plus laid de France.* In the play, Roquelaure is banished from the country by the king (presumably Louis XIV) and is forbidden to set foot on French soil. He manages to return, however, in a small cart ('*charrette*'), filled will Spanish soil, pulled by two men (Leuven et al. 5: 5.1). The choir announces his return to France: "Ah quel bon tour!/ L'heureux retour! C'est encore/ Roquelaure! / Les jeux et les ris, en ce jour, / Reviennent à la cour" (Leuven et al. 5: 5.1). A song composed on the air, *Le curé de Pomponne* relates Roquelaure's clever trick to avoid the king's wrath. Roquelaure sings: Ce sable, en Espagne on l'a pris / Toujours il m'accompagne / Il me sert de tapis / Et je suis / Sur les terres d'Espagne" (Leuven et al. 5: 5.1). Roquelaure's song continues:

> Quoique exilé je ne crains rien
> D'un roi que je révère;
> Je suis toujours, je le maintien [sic],
> Sur la terre étrangère;
> Car cette terre, mes amis,
> En tous lieux m'accompagne...,
> Dans mes souliers j'en ai mis,
> Et je suis
> Sur les terres d'Espagne ! (Leuven et al. 5: 5.1)

[105] See also "Le coups de pied au cul donnés et remerciés," in *Contes à rire, ou Recueil amusant* (D'Avallon 1825 317-319), and "Conte de Raucleau," told by Maurice Motard of La Caillerie, CERDO reference: LA500063, Ct. 100001 (Joceline et al.).

This image of Roquelaure standing proud on a bed of Spanish soil is yet another symbol of the character's precarious status between hero and criminal. Moreover, the striking similarity between this episode and the Roclore tales, both in France and Louisiana, suggest that Roquelaure's adventures and conflicts with authority entered into the popular consciousness of France and left a lasting impression, considering that this play was written at least a century after the lifetime of the last Duke of Roquelaure, Antoine (1656-1738).

Two such examples from the French oral tradition are Roquelaure tales collected by Paul Barrié from the region of Pays de Sault, which can be found in the *Revue d'éthnographie méridionale* (Barrié 1967 11). The storyteller, sixty-six years of age from Carcanières (Ariège), France describes a nearly identical story of an exiled Roquelaure returning to the king's court in a stagecoach ('*carosse*') filled with foreign soil ('*terre étrangère*'). Although the Spanish origin of the soil is not mentioned in this variant, the following tale in Barrié's collection depicts Roquelaure defeating a Spanish general in a sword fight (Barrié 1967 11-12). The Spanish soil trick can even be found in the Creole folklore of Réunion in Marie-Christine Decros's masters thesis (1978), "Contes réunionnais: textes et traductions," which I will return to later in this chapter. "Roklor é le roi," told by Louis Grondin of Grand Coude Saint Joseph in Réunion, is technically not a variant of AaTh 1525, but is nevertheless similar in that it consists of a series of tricks that Roclore plays on the king, his brother-in-law (Decros 295-307). As in the variant collected by Barrié, Roclore is banished from the country, which incidentally is not made explicit, and returns to the king in a wheelbarrow ('*saret la ter*' or '*charette de terre*') filled with Spanish soil (Decros 304-307).

Are these similar episodes reflective of the Chevalier de Roquelaure's exile in Spain? Or is it rather a question of conflating other members of the Roquelaure family, notably the elder Antoine, Le Maréchal de Roquelaure who completed several military campaigns in Spain? Whatever the origin of this scenario involving Roquelaure transporting himself on a layer of foreign soil, it seems that the story had become a sufficiently stable fixture of the French oral tradition to survive in Louisiana through various waves of French and francophone immigration.

Numerous folklorists of the twentieth century have attested tales of Roclore in Louisiana (Claudel 1978, Saucier 1972 and 1977, Brandon 1953). A Roclore tale told by a native of Abbeville in Vermilion Parish, Louisiana, Edgar Boudreaux, was collected by Elizabeth Brandon in 1953 and can be found in Richard Dorson's *Buying the Wind: Regional Folklore in the United States* (1964). Similarly to what seems to be typical of the Roclore variants in Louisiana, the character is not cast as the king's servant, but simply "living with the king" (Dorson 1964 254). After humiliating the king by succeeding in two assigned tasks, Roquelaure is banished from the king's domain that, curiously enough, is in Louisiana. Roquelaure decides to return to Louisiana after a year and aims to do so by filling up his buggy with Spanish soil (Dorson 1964 254), just as is described in *Roquelaure, l'homme le plus laid de France* (Leuven et al. 1836 5: 5.1).

Admittedly, the significance of the earth's Spanish provenance in Boudreaux's tale is ambiguous. One could argue that the motif is merely a holdover from French folklore and is thus insignificant; and several elements would indeed suggest this. For example, transporting soil in a cart from Spain to France is much more plausible than hauling soil from Spain to Louisiana. Would a boat not be more effective in this case?

The notion of king's court being in Louisiana also implies a general transplantation of an Old World tale transposed directly to the Louisiana context. Granted, such direct transposition would contradict Zumthor's theory of false reiterability, which in oral narrative serves to "level off semantic difficulties [...], especially for an ancient tradition: archaic words, ambiguities stemming from the disappearance of defunct cultural context, the apparent arbitrariness of proper names (Zumthor 206). Despite Zumthor's assertions, however, certain vestiges appear to have remained intact. The monarchy could certainly be considered a 'defunct cultural context' in 1950s Louisiana and 'Roclore' had undoubtedly become an 'arbitrary' proper name. At the same time, this variant contains a remarkable degree of *localization*. Like most Master Thief variants seen in this chapter, this tale ends with the sack exchange, motif K842, during which Boudreaux specifies that Roclore's mules are from Kentucky. Furthermore, Roclore's true motivation for returning from Spain is an important football game. Moreover, there exist other Louisiana variants in which Roclore retrieves the dirt from his own land (LaBorde Smith and Orso 1973 27) or from a neighboring parish (Saucier 1977 53). Could the fact that Spain has remained the source of Roclore's soil in some Louisiana variants signify some kind of historical relationship to Spain? After all it was during the Spanish colonial period (1763-1800) that Acadian refugees arrived in Louisiana and were subsequently placed by the Spanish government in "a series of settlements stretching along the Mississippi River from present-day St. James Parish to modern-day Vidalia, Louisiana" (Brasseaux 2005 18). While the Spanish government, eager to populate the Louisiana territory newly acquired from French, did provide refuge to the Acadians, many grew angry because of the Spanish government's practice of strategically placing the Acadians in areas that were

demographically sparse (Brasseaux 2005 18-20). Carl Brasseaux goes so far as to say that the Spanish colonial methods of demographic manipulation were "effectively subjecting the Acadians to a second diaspora" (2005 18). Because Vermilion Parish, where Brandon collected this variant, became home to a particularly large number of Acadians (Perrin 2011 7-24), it is not improbable that the Spanish soil could have maintained a certain connotation as a 'middle-ground' between refuge and place of exile, or home and foreign land.

The attestation of this Vermilion Parish variant discounts one of Reinecke's principal remarks on the Roquelaure tales of Louisiana, which is their "extreme localization" in Avoyelles Parish, "quite unlike Jean Sot, for example, who turns up in all parts of the state, or the song of the Wandering Jew, which is collected both in Avoyelles and on the prairie a hundred miles away" (Reinecke 66). Despite the exception to Reinecke's observation represented by Brandon's Vermilion Parish tale, the limited sources of written evidence do suggest that the Roclore tales were more present in the Avoyelles region.

Jean-Pierre Pichette collected an Acadian variant of the Master Thief tale in Richibucto, New Brunswick, told by prolific storyteller Séraphie Daigle-Martin (Pichette 1992).[106] In this tale, the protagonist is also named Roquelaure and the theft motifs are very similar to the Louisiana variants, including the theft of the queen's ring and bed sheet by raising a sort of scarecrow to the king's window. The tale even ends with motif K842, the sack exchange. The Master Thief of this tale is rather peculiar, because unlike

[106] Séraphie Daigle-Martin also told another version of this tale collected by Ronald Labelle. Sound recording and transcription. "Conte de Roquelaure (fin voleur)." Centre d'études acadienne Anselme Chiasson. Coll. Ronald Labelle. Reel 186, recording 2838.

most variants, where the thief is forced by the king to steal, this Acadian variant depicts Roquelaure as relentlessly plaguing the king of his own accord. Daigle-Martin includes a variation of the 'Spanish soil trick' that is highly reminiscent of the scene from the French play, *Le momus françois*, discussed above: "Roquelore s'en va le lendemain, [...] il garrochait une pelletée de terre puis il marchait dessus, il passait... Le roi a dit : Roquelore, je t'ai t'y pas dit que je voulais pas te voir sur ma terre ? Sire le roi, il dit, c'est pas votre terre c'est la terre d'Irlande, il dit. Il avont comprit là, il pouvait pas le tuer vois-tu c'était pas sur sa terre" (Pichette 2). Although, the name of the thief, the structure of the narrative, and the stolen items are more or less identical to what is found in the French variants, the origin of the soil has been changed to Ireland. Attestations in various regions (e.g. France, New Brunswick, Louisiana) of Master Thief tales featuring a character whose name is Roquelaure, or a variation thereof, completing a variation of the 'Spanish soil trick' strongly suggests a historical connection with one or more members of the noble Roquelaure family of France.

It should be noted that the intermingling of history with myth and fact with fiction is quite common in folklore, particularly with outlaw figures, like the Master Thief. Seal writes:

> One element of the outlaw hero tradition that contributes greatly to the ambivalence of noble robber figures is its ability to inhabit the opposing realms of myth and reality. A few outlaw heroes are totally fictional figures, but the majority are historical persons. In the case of these historical outlaw hero traditions the actual events of their lives rapidly turn into legend (Seal 2001 *Heroes* 25).

Although Seal does not mention Roquelaure by name, he does describe similar cases specifically associated with the Master Thief tales, including French historical figures that passed into the realm of the oral tradition at around the same period, namely Louis-

Dominique Cartouche (1693-1721) and the notorious Louis Mandrin (1725-55) (Seal 2011 *Heroes* 28). If the French tales of Roquelaure are indeed based in, or at the least associated with, a real-life personage, it should be noted that such a character was not seen as a hero to everyone. In the second volume of *Le conte populaire français,* Paul Delarue includes an interesting counter-example from the Burgundy region of France entitled "Roquelaure, voleur de l'enfant du roi" (Delarue and Tenèze 2: 549-553). In this tale, Roquelaure is cast as a villainous thief who steals the king's son, holding him hostage in a secluded cabin in the woods in order to exploit the boy's magical gift of making anything he wishes into reality.[107]

Although the connection between Roquelaure as an historical figure and the numerous folktales found in France and Louisiana cannot be definitively established, a certain degree of permeability of the border between folktales and oral history should be acknowledged. Analyses of several Master Thief tales of Creole oral traditions will demonstrate that this phenomenon is not limited to the isolated case of Roquelaure in French folklore.

1.8 The Master Thief in Creole Contexts

The human trickster takes on special significance in Creole societies, particularly in relation to communities marked by the experience of slavery. Levine (1979) discusses the importance of the trickster figure in the American South while exploring the notions of "slave tales as history" and "the slave as trickster" (Levine 83 and 121). Some of these tales blurred the line between fictitious tales and accounts based on true events. In other Creole societies, folklore heroes like Ti Zan of the Indian Ocean islands are cast as the

[107] For an analysis of this tale see Aranda (2011 89-100).

Master Thief. In the following three subsections, I will present analyses of three Creole thief tales from Louisiana, Guadeloupe, and Réunion.

1.8.1 "Jean des Pois Verts," a Louisiana Creole Variant

"Jean des Pois Verts," is a black Creole tale collected by Alcée Fortier, found in his collection *Louisiana Folktales* (1895), that easily lends itself to comparison with the type AaTh 1525. Jean des Pois Verts is a character that exudes some elements of the Master Thief variants that we have examined above. The protagonist's name, Jean des Pois Verts, can be likened to the folk heroes Ti-Jean or Petit Jean found to be abundant in French- and Creole-speaking oral traditions. The characterization of the tale that consists of a king and his servant living in a cabin near his property evokes the basic structure of the Roclore and Master Thief tales.

There are, however, some important distinctions from the AaTh 1525 tale type. Jean des Pois Verts is not recognized as a thief, rather he discretely and regularly steals from the king. Moreover, the objects that are stolen (geese, chickens, and money) are directly related to the character's physical survival, unlike what is seen in much of the French tradition where the thief is challenged to steal objects based on the difficulty in acquiring them (the king's horse, the queen's bed sheet and wedding ring, and so forth). The motif of the theft of food can be likened to the animal trickster stories of slave communities analyzed in the first chapter. Levine observes, "as in the animal trickster stories, the acquisition of food was a primary goal for the slave trickster" (Levine 128).

Another key difference between this variant and the majority of the Master Thief tales of the European tradition is that Jean des Pois Verts is trusted by the king, even to the point of charging him with the task of finding the thief. Despite the neighbors'

warning to the king that Jean is in fact the culprit, the king's faith in his servant is unwavering. This tale corresponds to what Lawrence Levine calls a "slave trickster cycle" often featuring a trickster figure named John to whom I have alluded in the previous chapter. Levine states:

> In John, slaves created a figure who epitomized the rewards, the limits, and the hazards of the trickster. He could improve his situation through careful deception, but at no time was he really in complete control; the rewards he could win were limited by the realities of the system within which he existed, and dangers he faced were great. Time and again the more elaborate schemes of the slave trickster failed, and he saved himself only by last minute verbal facility and role playing – two qualities which these stories emphasized were crucial for all slaves to cultivate (Levine 127-128).

Levine's argument is applicable to a number of black Creole tales like "Jean des Pois Verts," that can certainly be interpreted as slave narratives. In this sense, the motif K842 *Dupe persuaded to take prisoner's place in a sack: killed*, so prevalent in the French and Creole oral tradition of Louisiana can be likened to motif K581.2 *Briar-patch punishment for rabbit.* Essentially, these two motifs share the same function. In both motifs the protagonist, unable to free himself through force, uses his wits and especially his words, to dupe his captor into freeing him through a changing of places. It is entirely plausible then that the sack exchange motif could have been employed by storytellers in slave communities much like a human trickster version of the briar-patch trick that Compère Lapin plays on Compère Bouki. It is worth noting that in slave communities, both animal trickster and human trickster tales had a number of commonalities. Survival tactics of physically small or weak protagonists often revolve around outwitting the stronger oppressor (Levine 131).

1.8.2 Maît'e Volé', a Guadeloupian Variant

As mentioned above, Fortier's, "Jean des Pois Verts," does not strictly correspond to type AaTh 1525 and surviving variants of this type collected in black Creole communities of Louisiana seem to border on nonexistent; however, this may be simply due to a lack of attestations from folklorists. Ancelet goes into some detail with regard to other Creole variants in the West Indies and Caribbean (1994, 51). Elsie Clews Parsons collected two similar Creole variants from Guadeloupe that she includes in the second of her three-volume work, *Folk-lore of the Antilles* (1936). Both tales are told by the same storyteller, Jean Noël Stanislaus Priméon of Trois Rivières, Guadeloupe (Parsons 2: 187-189).

Of all the variants in our corpus, the first of these two Guadeloupian tales most closely resembles the Grimms' "Der Meisterdieb" on a structural level. In both variants of "Maît'e Volé'" collected by Parsons, the thief's name is Félicien, who leaves home and learns the trade of thievery in Egypt. The village abbot, Félis, is cast as the thief's opponent and, similarly to "Der Meisterdieb," he is also godfather to the thief. This variant only consists of two challenges: 1) stealing three horses from the abbot's stables while they are guarded by three soldiers, and 2) kidnapping the abbot's clergyman and sacristan. It is interesting to note the intermingling of figures of authority in this narrative, in that the abbot has the power to order soldiers to guard his horses. Félicien completes the first task by getting the soldiers intoxicated with rum, similar to what we have seen thus far in other variants, although here the motif is localized to include rum, instead of whisky or Hungarian wine. The second challenge is played out almost exactly as in the Grimms' "Der Meisterdieb." Félicien acquires a sack filled with crabs, which he releases

in the cemetery with candles on top. This episode, so strongly resembling AaTh 1737 *The Parson in the Sack to Heaven*, demonstrates a greater resemblance with the European tradition, as evidenced by "Der Meisterdieb" and Cosquin's Lorraine variant of "Le franc voleur." Félicien's cry to the abbot is practically a direct translation into Guadeloupian Creole of the text found in the Grimm's collection: "Tous les jours yo ca pa'lé la fin du moune, la fin du moune, regardé au cimitière pou' vwé comment la mort ca broulé. Ci la qui vlé rentré en Pawadis avec moin, rentré dans mon sac!" (Parsons 2: 188).[108] It is curious that AaTh 1737 *The Parson in the Sack to Heaven* should have survived in the Creole tradition of Guadeloupe, but not, at least according to the resources available, in Louisiana. Conversely, the Louisiana corpus of folktales shows a remarkable affinity for the sack exchange scene of motif K842. Might this be the result of a certain reluctance to satirize church ceremony and members of the religious orders in Cajun and Creole communities?

As mentioned above, the concept of thievery as a profession seems to exist in all of the regions concerned in our corpus. These Guadeloupian variants truly take this notion to another level; out of admiration for Félicien, the abbot gives him a monetary award for each successful trick, progressively increasing each time from three thousand to five thousand francs. In these variants, there is no princess awaiting Félicien; money is the thief's only motivation and his only reward. Nevertheless, we discover at the end of this second variant that the thief has been a moral character all along, and that he was only stealing out of poverty. The abbot's generous reward money allows Félicien to buy a

[108] 'Everyday you hear talk of the end of the world, the end of the world! Look at the cemetery and see how the dead are burning. Whoever wishes to go to heaven with me, crawl into my sack!' (Parsons 2: 188). Translation is my own.

house and get married. Although one cannot point to any evidence of the character being inspired by a real-life person, the narrative is nevertheless anchored in reality by the storyteller at the end of this second variant: "C'est là Félicien marié, i quitté état volé', i renni un n'homme honnête. Yo fai un grand déjeuner, yo invité Mesieu' Jean Noël [the storyteller]. Yo ba moin un pitit coup de pied, moin vini conté ça à ou" (Parsons 2: 189).[109]

1.8.3 Ti Zan: The Creole Master Thief of the Indian Ocean

Ti Zan (Ti-Jean) is one of the central figures of the Creole folklore of the Indian Ocean. In a way, the character's presence in the region's folklore is not surprising considering the strong French influence in Creole society. Like the oral tradition of Louisiana, the repertoire of folktales in La Reunion is the product of a convergence of cultures including African, Malagasy, French, and Indian (Peek and Yankah 365). Lee Haring suggests that this human trickster figure is "born within a double frame of dyadic conflict – between a youthful hero and an elder creator, and between inherited traditions and new oppression" (Haring "African" 188). Haring argues against earlier conceptions of Ti Zan as being "creole in the old sense, a European character transplanted to the islands," or rather "novelizing the many boys using this name into a single character" ("African" 188). "In fact," Haring posits, "Ti Zan is that other sort of creole, a boy of African and mixed ancestry" whose tales attest to this variability; he goes on to note, "Ti Zan's identity is particularly, inherently variable, and situationally specific. In linguistics, these are the characteristics of creolization most readily transposed on to expressive

[109] 'That's when Félicien got married and he stopped stealing. He was reborn as an honest woman. They made a grand dinner, and they invited Mr. Jean Noël [the storyteller]. Then they kicked me out, and I came here to tell the story to you' (Parsons 2: 189).

culture" (Haring "African" 189). Therefore it should be noted that Ti Zan is not always cast as a Master Thief figure; however, he is normally portrayed a clever protagonist, pitted against the evil ogre Gran Dyab ('Great Devil') in many tales (Peek and Yankah 365).

"Ti Zan the Master Thief," a variant of AaTh 1525 included in Lee Haring's *Stars and Keys: Folktales and Creolization in the Indian Ocean* (308-310) is a translation of Reunionese Creole tale, "Lov," collected by Marie Christine Decros in her thesis, "Contes réunionnais, textes et traductions" (5-13). The narrator of this tale, Alfred Picard of Plaine des Cafres, Reunion, appears to conceive the tale as part of a series of episodes, as evidenced by the opening words, "Ti Zan again," and internally directed hesitations such as, "I've skipped something – yes, it is Lov's bell" (Haring *Stars* 308). Here Ti Zan is already courting the king's daughter and it is only upon his asking for her hand in marriage that the King Lov challenges Ti Zan to steal. Although, one could consider the series of thefts completed by Ti Zan as instances of the H335 motifs, *Tasks assigned suitors*, the notion of the protagonist being forced by the figure of authority to steal still applies here and seems to be almost universally present in the corpus.

This Reunionese tale includes several motifs that are reminiscent of the variants from France and Louisiana seen above; however, they manifest themselves differently. For instance, the motif of stealing the king's wife's pillow while she is asleep, comparable to H1151.3, *Tasking: stealing sheet from bed on which person is sleeping*, is present in most variants examined in this corpus. A key difference, however, lies in the manner in which Ti Zan enters the king's room. In the majority of the French and Louisiana variants he enters through the window, often by creating a sort of manikin

tricking the king into shooting at the thief and burying him thereafter. Ti Zan enters the room through the keyhole of the bedroom door, like a *grélé* ('cricket'). Similar motifs have been attested in Europe (see Bolte-Polívka Vol. 2, 416), recognized by Stith Thompson as motif F535.1.1.11.1. *Thumbling steals by entering keyhole*, and the image is indeed suggestive of the 'Tom Thumb' character in the Grimms' tale no. 37 "Daumesdick" (Grimm 228-233) and no. 45 "Daumerlings Wanderschaft" (Grimm 250-257). Unlike the motif found in the Grimm tales however, Ti Zan magically shrinks himself in order to enter through the keyhole. Coincidentally, this episode constitutes the only instance of magic in the entire corpus of Master Thief tales used for this study. Ti Zan transforms himself in a manner similar to the *dorlis* creature found in African and Caribbean popular belief and folklore. It has been said that "le but d'un dorlis est d'assouvir ses désirs sexuels sur des hommes ou des femmes durant leur sommeil" and that "la priorité d'un dorlis est d'ordre sexuel avant tout" (Gagner-Albert). This could be an instance of localization, incorporating an element of popular beliefs that manages to convey the underlying sexuality evoked in some French variants. Ti Zan succeeds in stealing the pillow while convincing the half-asleep queen that sensations she is feeling are only *pinèz* ('bedbugs').

Strangely, following this initial demonstration of magic, the other instances of theft are accomplished in much less remarkable ways compared to other Master Thief tales. For example, Ti Zan steals the king's horse, not by disguising himself as a woman and tricking the guards into intoxicating themselves, but simply by hiding behind the hay until he is alone in the stable. He later pilfers the king's bell simply by unbolting it and carrying it away while it is unguarded. Like many of the other variants from France and

Louisiana, this tale also includes motif K842 *Dupe persuaded to take prisoner's place in a sack: killed*, although played out in a different fashion with quite an unexpected outcome. Here it is Ti Zan who places himself in the sack of his own accord and begins yelling, "Larg a moin in pti pé avan k-Lov i ti amoin,"[110] drawing the attention of the queen (Decros 8). When she opens the sack, Ti Zan pulls her in and switches places with her. King Lov, believing Ti Zan is still in the sack, returns with a stick to beat him, but instead inadvertently beats his own wife to death. The function of motif K842 in this tale is peculiar on a structural level in several aspects: 1) it occurs in the middle of the narrative, contrary to the motif's habitual function as the thief's final trick, 2) the sack exchange is *not* the thief's response to being placed there by the king, but is Ti Zan's own idea, 3) the sack exchange does not directly affect Ti Zan's opponent, but rather his (presumably innocent) wife. The storyteller is likely manipulating familiar motifs, freely reformulating them to create surprise or augment the tale's comedic value. As Haring remarks, "M. Picard is loyal to French tradition; he responds to majority culture; he projects ambiguous or ambivalent attitudes to authority; he unites creativity and imitation. Is this mixing not the creole aesthetic?" (Haring *Stars* 309).

Finally, King Lov challenges Ti Zan to kidnap him without his knowing. The clever protagonist accomplishes this last feat by dressing up 'like a rich man' and offering a ride in his car to the king mournfully meandering down the road in the wake of his wife's unfortunate demise. In this final jest, Ti Zan effectively makes a mockery of the superficial nature of the prejudice between classes. Moreover, he is capable of

[110] 'Let me out before Lov kills me' (Decros 9). Translation is my own.

disguising himself and impersonating a figure of higher social stature just as Félicien does when deceiving the clergyman and sacristan in "Maît'e Volé'."

Having explored various representations of the Master Thief in the folklore of Louisiana and a number of other French- and Creole-speaking oral traditions, including two instances where such tales may possess a connection with historical figures, it is now possible to consider the Master Thief figure as an 'outlaw hero'.

1.9 The Social Bandit and the Robin Hood Principle

A number of parallels can be drawn between the Master Thief of the French and Creole tradition and certain figures that inhabit the border between myth, legend, history, and folklore. The cases of Roquelaure in the folklore of France and Louisiana and the 'John stories', slave narratives found in the American South, have demonstrated this phenomenon. There is no shortage of examples of real-life 'social bandits' or 'outlaw heroes' who have passed into folklore and urban myth.[111]

The first serious study of the outlaw hero was Eric Hobsbawm's book *Bandits* (1972), [112] although historians, anthropologists, and political scientists have since critiqued many of his arguments (Seal "Robin Hood" 67). Nevertheless, Hobsbawm's original assertion still rings true: social bandits are distinguishable from common criminals in that they are peasant outlaws regarded as criminals by the established authority, but they remain in peasant society and are considered as heroes and admired by the people (Hobsbawm 1972 17). It is no stretch of the imagination to place such an observation in relation with the Master Thief tale figure. Invariably, the Master Thief

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[111] See Hobsbawm 1972, and Seal 1996 and 2011.
[112] Originally published in 1962 by Weidenfeld and Nicolson under the title *Social Bandits*.

comes from a poor family and learns the trade of thievery elsewhere. It is upon returning to his humble origins that he encounters the king who challenges and threatens him shortly thereafter. Although few tales explicitly mention the Master Thief sharing his wealth with his fellow peasants, the fact that the tale genre itself is so widely prevalent and celebrated among rural communities is evidence of the admiration for this folk hero. Moreover, with regard to social bandits who may have some grounding in real life, stealing from the rich and giving to the poor is not necessarily a prevalent trait. Hobsbawm states: "As in so many other respects, Robin Hood, though in most ways the quintessence of bandit legend, is also rather untypical" (Hobsbawm 127).

In his article, "The Robin Hood Principle: Folklore, History, and Social Bandit," Graham Seal remarks on the general criteria for the making of an outlaw hero, based on approximately one hundred case studies (67). This observation, which Seal coins as The Robin Principle suggests: "Wherever and whenever significant numbers of people believe they are the victims of inequity, injustice, and oppression, historical and/or fictional outlaw heroes will appear and continue to be celebrated after their deaths" (Seal "Robin Hood" 83). Clearly, the social and economic state of French- and Creole-speaking Louisiana of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries corresponds to the conditions described by Seal above.

Furthermore, Seal offers twelve characteristics of the outlaw hero narrative structure (Seal "Robin Hood" 74-75), which I will mention here for purposes of comparison with the Master Thief figure.

1. The outlaw hero is forced to defy the law - or what passes for it - by oppressive and unjust forces or interests (usually governments and/or local power-holders).

2. The outlaw hero has sympathy and support from one or more social groups who form a resistant community.
3. The outlaw hero rights wrongs and perhaps settles disputes.
4. The outlaw hero kills only in self-defence or justified retribution rather than wantonly or capriciously and does not attack or harm women or the otherwise vulnerable.
5. The outlaw hero may be kind and courteous to his victims.
6. The outlaw hero distributes loot among the poor and deserving and/or is otherwise sympathetic to their plight and helpful to their circumstances.
7. The outlaw hero outwits, eludes, and escapes the authorities, usually with flair, often in disguise.
8. Outlaw heroes frequently employ some form of magic that confers invulnerability, invisibility, superhuman speed, or other useful attributes.
9. The outlaw hero is brave and strong or, if not strong, especially skilled in some ability useful to the outlaw life
10. The outlaw hero is ultimately betrayed by a member of his gang or other supporting social group.
11. The outlaw hero dies bravely and defiantly, whether by rope, axe, sword, or bullet.
12. The outlaw hero may be said to have escaped the showdown, execution, or other manner of death and to have lived on elsewhere in secure obscurity (Seal "Robin Hood" 74-75).

Seal notes that all of these narrative elements need not be present in a given narrative, and the order in which they might appear is variable (Seal "Robin Hood" 75). Of the twelve functions of the outlaw hero narrative, four of them directly apply to the corpus of Master Thief tales in this study's corpus.

It is clear in most variants that the thief is forced to steal, mentioned in the first feature, as he is often threatened to be hanged otherwise. The fourth narrative function can be applied to the sack exchange in motif K842, where the thief kills an innocent passerby but in order to preserve his own survival. Invariably, he finishes by killing the tyrannical king by making him believe that there are fine horses or sheep in the bottom of the lake. Seal's fifth narrative function is also applicable in the variants found in the corpus. Particularly pertinent to the Master Thief genre as evidenced in this chapter's analyses is the seventh narrative function, whereby "the outlaw hero outwits, eludes, and

escapes the authorities, usually with flair, often in disguise" (Seal "Robin Hood" 74). Escaping from authority, be it through the sack exchange motif or the real-life jailbreak of Roquelaure, is a marked trait of the Master Thief genre. Moreover, not only is the use of disguise critical to the success of the thief, but it also functions within the carnivalesque mode, which means to subvert the established power structures.

1.10 Conclusions

Examination of Master Thief tales from a number of French- and Creole-speaking oral traditions has demonstrated that poverty is consistently evoked as an implicit justification for theft. Upon analyzing five Master Thief tales collected in Acadian communities of Maritime Canada, one notes a marked emphasis on food, in comparison with the Louisiana variants. In three of these variants, "Le conte du bon voleur,"[113] "Conte du Ti-Jack, le bon voleur,"[114] and "Le fin voleur,"[115] the narratives begin by describing the mother traveling to the king's palace every day at noon to beg for food. The tellers of all of the five variants insist on the family's poverty. In "Le fin voleur," Marellin Haché first brings the listener's attention to fact that "i' vivіont pauv'es, de charité. A tous les jours, foulait qu'a' fut su' le roâ pour avoir à manger".[116] Moreover, Petit Jean's first act of thievery is stealing the king's white bread that is fed to his pigs every day, which Petit Jean manages to steal by slaughtering a black sow in the forest and dressing himself in the skin, ears, and hooves. Although poverty seems to be a

[113] Told by Mme. Georges Duguay, collected 1971 by Carmen LeBreton, reel 35, number 5. CEAAC.
[114] Told by Henriette Savoie, collected in 1974 by Laurie Duguay, reel 3, number 19. CEAAC.
[115] Told by Marcellin Haché, collected in 1957 by Anselme Chiasson, reel 13, number 264. CEAAC.
[116] Ibid. Transcription by Anselme Chiasson. "They lived poorly, from charity. Every day, she [the mother] had to go to see the king for food." Translation is my own.

justification of the character's theft in nearly all of the variants across regions, only one instance of the theft of food can be found in the Louisiana corpus, the black Creole tale, "Jean des Pois Verts" (Fortier 88-89). On the contrary, several variants, like that of Stanislaus Faul, describe the thief systematically returning the stolen objects to the king. In other words, even if poverty can justify theft, it is not *what is stolen* that directly presents the solution to a larger problem of inequality. Rather, the fact of showing one's capacity for outwitting the king is in itself an act of defiance.

Another element that seems to be present in all of the Master Thief tales no matter the region, is that the thief learns his trade away from his community. In the "Le fin voleur" told by Marcellin Haché in Chéticamp, New Brunswick, Petit Jean is the only one of the three brothers who continues far from the village to learn his trade. It is interesting to note that when he first knocks at the band of thieves' door, they answer, "Come in." (Haché 2). This sudden linguistic shift implies that Jean had traveled outside of his Acadian community. In all of the variants, the thief learns his trade *elsewhere*. This has been shown in the Guadeloupian, "Maît'e Volé'," who learns to steal in Egypt (Parsons 2: 187), and Valière's Berry variant, where Fin Voleur acquires his trade in Paris (Valière *Berry* 115).

Certainly, a level of universality should be recognized in the Master Thief figure that, upon consideration of Seal's findings, bears significant resemblances to an outlaw hero. Even though representations of the Master Thief vary from one oral tradition to another, his remarkable presence across regions hints at an almost universal human need for the social bandit. As Gabriel Cavaglion would suggest, "every normal culture needs at least one outlaw hero whose transgression breaks through boundaries, to stand outside of

the existing rules, regulations and rhythms of the social world, and to challenge and shock the existing social order" (Cavaglion 256).

In his study of structurally similar English-language 'Jack' tales entitled "Who is Jack? A Study in Isolation," Carl Lindahl remarks on the wider cultural significance that AaTh 1525 exhibits by providing a particularly intriguing insight into the culture wherein respective variants are found because it is "an amoral tale with a moral hero" (Lindahl 380). The casting of an otherwise 'good' character, invariably of lower social status, in the role of a thief results in a moral tension that is sensed by narrators. Lindahl observes that "variants of AaTh 1525 contain a greater number of subjective statements and narrative asides" and that "this interpretive imperative helps make the tale more volatile, and cultural differences emerge more quickly and clearly in *The Master Thief* than in other tales" (Lindahl 380). It seems that it in most cases, the hero's theft is justified by class struggle or the wickedness of the king or other authoritative figure. Seal remarks that the poor, from whose ranks the outlaw hero has usually arisen, generally sympathize with and support him. Poor and oppressed communities can find the outlaw's activities appealing and see his actions as "justified revenge" against forces of oppression (Seal *Legends* 5)." Perhaps the underlying message in the Master Thief genre means to imply that the thief, a product of a lower-class upbringing, is *not* the true criminal, but that the king is the true thief. In this way, theft is justified because it results in the supplanting of an oppressive power. The universal need for an outlaw hero, combined with the particularity of each individual culture's condition, generates a genre capable of displaying a high degree of homogeneity across regions, but also much opportunity for localization. Seal writes:

> Outlaw heroes are often related to powerful notions of national, ethnic, and regional identity and their legends are familiar to all who belong to their environing groups. They form a fundamental cultural paradigm or knowledge set crucial to the invocation of the other elements of the outlaw hero process" (Seal "Robin Hood" 69-70).

Seal's argument for an outlaw hero being anchored in 'national, ethnic, and regional identity' is certainly applicable to the Master Thief genre. It is arguably for this very reason that folklore heroes, usually found in a variety of roles, are so frequently cast as the Master Thief. I have shown this to be the case with Roclore in Louisiana, Ti Zan in the Indian Ocean Creole traditions, Jack in English-speaking folklore, and 'Tit Jean in many francophone oral traditions.

In each of these contexts, whether or not it is made explicit, the audience understands that the hero will not steal from his own community. Cavaglion would argue that it is for this very reason that he can be considered a hero at all (255). This essential aspect of the Master Thief genre also represents a parallel with the slave narratives of the American South. Levine notes how "slave tales document the distinction many slaves made between 'stealing', which meant appropriating something that belonged to another slave and was not condoned, and 'taking', which meant appropriating part of the master's property for the benefit of another part" (Levine 131). One can imagine how the Master Thief figure has maintained a prominent status in the French and Creole folklore of Louisiana, as it has in other regions. If Seal is correct in his assertion that such figures emerge when "social, cultural, ethnic, or religious groups believe themselves to be oppressed and unjustly treated by one or more other groups who wield greater power," (Seal "Robin Hood" 70), the Master Thief's appeal would make sense in the cultural context of French and Creole Louisiana that identifies itself to a large extent in opposition

to Anglophone America (Griolet 109).[117] Therefore, the Master Thief tales represent a way to place the oppressed culture on equal footing with figures of authority or oppression. Much like in the tales of Bouki and Lapin, this is accomplished through cleverness, adaptability, and wit.

[117] "Société hétérogène sur le plan ethnique (Cadjins, Indiens, Noirs cadjins ou créoles, métis) et linguistique (français classique, cadjin, parler 'nègre'), cette population se définit surtout par opposition aux 'Américains', c'est-à-dire aux Anglo-saxons protestants" (Griolet 109).

Conclusion

1.1 Results of the Study

In this study, I have chosen to focus on three essential figures of the folklore of French and Creole Louisiana: the animal trickster, the fool, and the Master Thief. Each of these three figures is found to be prevalent in the oral traditions of other regions. I have argued that folktales can be seen as reflections of social and cultural realities, as well as collective experience. By applying the theories of Paul Zumthor to Louisiana's folklore, I have demonstrated to what extent French and Creole Louisiana can be considered as an oral culture. Based on these criteria, I proposed the notion of folklore as an effective barometer for social and cultural adaptation in Louisiana. To further refine the approach of this study, I have drawn from Zumthor's theory of *false reiterability* to show how and why oral narratives are adapted to maintain relevance in oral cultures.

In order to better understand the representations of the animal trickster, the fool, and the Master Thief figures in the oral tradition of Louisiana, I proposed comparative analyses of similar variants in other francophone and creole traditions. The selection of these regions was not arbitrary; historical and demographic sources were used to identify salient regions that have contributed to the ethnic and cultural makeup of French and Creole Louisiana. Namely, the work of Gwendolyn Midlo Hall and Carl Brasseaux were consulted to shed light on some of the major immigration patterns over the past three centuries. The slave trade, the Saint-Domingue Revolution and the several waves of Acadian immigration into the region were among the most significant population movements that contributed to the folklore of French and Creole Louisiana. The impact

of these regions on Louisiana's past and present regional identity are reflected in the corpus of folktales analyzed in this study. Western France, notably the area corresponding to the Poitou-Charentes-Vendée region; West Africa, specifically the Senegambia region; and Acadian communities of Maritime Canada represent a large portion of the corpus. Nevertheless, variants from other areas proved to be pertinent for comparison, including francophone Missouri, the Indian Ocean islands, the Congo, and others.

In the first chapter, my analyses of the animal trickster tales of Louisiana focused primarily on the characters of Bouki and Lapin. Several instances of vestiges from the African oral tradition can be observed in this tale genre. The Wolof origin of the name 'Bouki', meaning 'hyena', seems to have been completely lost among storytellers. 'Lapin', the rabbit, is an example of the same characterization found in the African tradition. Similar tales are also found in modern day Haiti as tales of 'Bouki ak Malis', or Bouki and Malice. Here again, the Wolof meaning of hyena is generally not known, although these tales are still very common among the youth of Haiti. Of particular importance in this first chapter is the change of status of the trickster figure, exemplified by the Tarbaby motif.

By examining a number of variants from May Klipple's collection of African tales and their analogues, I was able to demonstrate the fundamental shift between the African and Louisiana variants, both in the portrayal of the trickster and his fate. Whereas the typical African tale depicts a malicious trickster who receives his just punishment, being killed or left to die, the black Creole tales of Louisiana featuring Lapin end in a very different manner. Similar to what can be observed in black folklore from elsewhere

in the American South and the creole tradition of the Indian Ocean islands, the trickster is victorious at the end of the narrative. Lapin's escape is entirely due to his cleverness and ability to overturn his more powerful adversary through his words. Several animal trickster tales from the Senegambia region further demonstrated the didactic nature of animal trickster tales from the African oral tradition as what one might call a 'cautionary tale' (Magel 1984, Bojang and Bojang 2009, 2011), warning their audience of the wiles of the trickster. This forms a sharp contrast to the black Creole tales of Louisiana, where the morals of these tales clearly encourage trickery and cleverness, not as criminal acts, but as a means of survival. Lawrence Levine and Lee Haring have shown this similar shift in moral structure in other creole societies, the American South and Indian Ocean islands respectively. Lee Haring observes this shared trait among creole societies and states that the "trickster, the master of ambiguity, became a guide for their real-life behavior, especially for coping with authorities who were plainly bigger than they were. Africa provided the pattern, for instance in the worldwide tale of Tarbaby, which has been told and heard in nearly every place to which African slaves were exported" (Haring "African" 185).

In order to better understand these mutations of folk narratives, I ventured to employ social theories of a relatively new branch of trauma studies, cultural trauma. Jeffrey Alexander argues that the cultural trauma is indirectly related to the violence inflicted on cultural groups. In other words, cultural trauma is above all a discursive phenomenon. The degree to which cultural trauma occurs within collectivities is not guaranteed by whatever atrocities it has endured. It is "cultural work" accomplished by members of the collectivity itself and is done through "storytelling of all kinds"

(Alexander 2012 4). Although the application of cultural trauma has not previously been applied to folklore, I feel that it is an effective way to understand the narrative evolutions and adaptations that I explored in my analyses.

Cultural trauma theory has also informed my analyses of the 'fool' figure in French and Creole Louisiana compared to other attestations of the Jean-le-Sot figure elsewhere in French and creole oral traditions throughout the world. In the second chapter of this study, I have shown that this figure is extremely prevalent in French and Creole folklore, as attested by Gerald Thomas (1972). Of particular interest in this second chapter were discrepancies between the French and Louisiana variants. I proposed that one can conceive of a continuum of tale types associated with Jean-le-Sot, ranging from the heroic fool who succeeds at saving his family from bandits or marrying the king's daughter despite his reputation for being a fool, to the depictions of Jean-le-Sot as a complete and utter fool devoid of any redeeming features. With regard to AaTh tale types and motifs, I showed that these portrayals are carried out using several tale types (1696 *What Should I Have Said (or Done)?*, and 1291B *Filling Cracks with Butter*) and motifs (J2460, "Literal obedience," and J2259*(p), "Fool's action based on pun"). Significantly, representations of Jean-le-Sot in the Louisiana variants are relatively mono-faceted compared to the wider variety of tale types and representations of Jean-le-Sot in the French oral tradition. I used Alan Dundes system of recognizing motifeme patterns in order to more clearly demonstrate that the Jean Sot and Jeansotte tales of Louisiana seem to invariably correspond to a [L + LL + L + Conseq.] structure. The French variant, "Jean le Sot, Jean le Fin, Jean le Rusé" (Valière et Pintureau 149-154) told by Marie Vidaud, is an example of AaTh 513B *The Land and Water Ship* whose protagonist is cast as a heroic

figure. I observed that attestations of this same tale like “Jean l’Ours et la fille du roi” told by Elby Deshotels of Reddel (Ancelet 1994 37-42), and other *contes merveilleux* in Louisiana suggest that such tales did not lose their social relevance, but that Jean-le-Sot would not have been a suitable character to be cast as the protagonist.

This fundamental difference in the representation of Jean-le-Sot in France and Louisiana could be explained by taking into account the punishment endured by at least an entire generation of Louisiana French- and Creole-speakers following the institution of the 1921 constitution that made English the only language of instruction in Louisiana’s public schools. Verbal and physical punishment and humiliation of monolingual francophone schoolchildren created a sense of linguistic inferiority and stigmatization of the French language and consequently the linguistic and ethnic identity associated with French and Creole. Moreover, these events have truly entered into the kind of cultural trauma discourse of which Alexander speaks. Beyond the possible underlying shift of structure in the Jean-le-Sot tales, I have cited more direct examples of reactions to the psychic wounds following the 1921 constitution in popular discourse, including jokes (Ancelet 1991), poetry (Arceneaux 1980), and music (Castille 1991). I have argued that this cultural trauma linked to the experience of formal education and the implicit myth of education as an Anglo-American property, combined with the difficult conditions of rural life in Louisiana in the early- to mid-twentieth century would have made Jean-le-Sot, who is continuously wasting food and accidentally killing farm animals, an undesirable vehicle for any kind of heroic traits.

In these two first chapters, I have argued that differences in the depictions of the trickster and the fool are likely related to differences in collective experience, most

notably cultural trauma. Mutations in narrative at the cultural community level, however, would not be possible without the conscious or unconscious decisions made by individual storytellers. Those who tell stories construct narratives that reflect their own experience, both as individuals and as members of one or more communities. This notion is expressed in my earlier proposal of the term *cultural prisming*, which, in many ways, is complimentary to Zumthor's theory of false reiterability.

The third and final chapter of this text was devoted to the human trickster figure, more specifically the Master Thief. Analyses of numerous variants of AaTh 1525 and similar tale types demonstrated a high degree of shared features among variants from Louisiana, France, Acadia, and other Creole traditions. My analyses drew from Carl Lindahl's observation that the Master Thief tales consist of an 'amoral tale with a moral hero' (Lindahl 380). The nature of this genre creates a volatile narrative space wherein the storyteller is effectively forced to justify the otherwise immoral actions of the protagonist. Moreover, the Master Thief figure is often represented by iconic figures of regional folklore, such as Ti-Jean, or Ti-Jack in Acadia or as was seen in the Reunionese tale, "Ti Zan." Poverty was shown to be the most common way to justify the actions of the thief, whose victim is invariably a wealthy figure of authority. Some particularities were nevertheless observed in the Louisiana variants. For instance, the hero's familial origins are consistently cited, often in the opening lines of the narrative. I have suggested that this represents a key difference from the American 'Jack' hero who, as described by Daniel Hoffman, has no parents, "no past, no patrimony, no siblings, no family and no life cycle" (Hoffman 1994 78).

I have explored a probable connection between the Master Thief figure of Louisiana folktales, Roclore (with varying spellings), and several members of the Roquelaure family of France. My research of primary sources from the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries included Tallemant's *Historiettes*, French folktales, literature, and theatre. Similarities between the descriptions of several members of the noble family, most notably Antoine Chevalier de Roquelaure, go beyond the simple descriptions of a man known for his wit. The motif that George Reinecke refers to as 'the Spanish soil trick' has been attested in the oral tradition of Louisiana (Brandon 1953 in Dorson 1964 254), France (Barrié 1967 11), Reunion (Decros 304-307) as well as in the 1836 French play, *Roquelaure, l'homme le plus laid de France* (Leuven et al. 1836 5: 5.1). Finally drawing from the writings of Eric Hobsbawm (1972) and Graham Seal (1996, 2009, 2011), I have raised the question as to whether or not the Master Thief figure could be considered as a 'social bandit' or 'outlaw hero'. Analyses of the corpus of folktales have shown that only four of the twelve functions prescribed by Seal of the outlaw hero narrative are typical in the Louisiana variants of AaTh 1525. I have nevertheless argued that the Master Thief figure can be seen as an outlaw hero because the conflict in these tales is overwhelmingly one of power and class struggle. Moreover, several variants, notably "Le fin voleur" told by Stanislaus Faul, show the thief consistently returning the stolen goods to the figure of authority. In other words, he is defiant, not by forcibly acquiring what belongs to the king, but rather by showing that he is capable of doing so.

An overall trait of all the tales from the Louisiana corpus is the mixing of African and European influences, as well as elements born in the Louisiana context. In the

following paragraphs I will propose the adoption of linguistic theory in order to conceive of the oral tradition of French and Creole tradition, not simply as a 'mixing' of diverse elements, but rather as a 'nativization', resulting in a unique and hybrid repertoire of tales that has responded to similar sociocultural factors in other creole societies.

1.2 Creolization of Folklore: Understanding Folklore through Linguistics

In the introduction to this study, I briefly discussed the origin of the word 'Creole' as a qualifier and the problematic nature of defining Creole identity or ethnicity in Louisiana. Equally complex and numerous challenges to a uniform definition of the term are present in other creole societies (Chaudenson 1979 9-23). In the following passages, I will consider the development of Louisiana's French and Creole oral tradition by adopting an approach that is partially informed by linguistic theory, although it should be noted that the definitions of 'creole' and 'creolization' are matters of debate among linguists today.

What do linguists generally understand by 'Creole' languages and the process of 'creolization'? I his earlier work, Robert Chaudenson shows some agreement with Robert Hall's distinction between pidgin and creole languages:

> R. Hall (1962) a proposé une définition généralement admise selon laquelle un pidgin est un système linguistique à structures rudimentaires (*lexique réduit*, structures grammaticales élémentaires) et à fonctions limitées qui n'est la langue maternelle d'aucun des locuteurs qui en usent. Un créole apparaît lorsque ce pidgin devient la langue maternelle d'une partie ou de l'ensemble de la communauté linguistique où il est en usage ; cette '*nativisation*' s'accompagne d'une stabilisation et d'une complexification du pidgin ainsi que d'une *diversification* et d'une extension de ses fonctions puisqu'*il devient la langue maternelle* des individus nés dans les conditions sociolinguistiques définies (Chaudenson 1979 19).[118]

[118] Italics are my own for emphasis.

Several elements of Hall's understanding of 'creole' language are particularly applicable to the oral tradition of Louisiana. For instance, a pidgin language is formed from contact between two or more languages (e.g. French and a variety of African languages). This phenomenon that Ancelet has called a "confluence of European and African traditions" is reflected clearly in the characterization of animal tales in Louisiana (Ancelet 1994, xxix). The 'lexique réduit' can be likened to the shortening of tales, which occurred for a variety of reasons, or to a reduction in characterization. I have suggested that the Louisiana black Creole animal tales analyzed in this study feature relatively few characters (often only two or three) compared to their African counterparts.[119] Most important is the process of nativization: Louisiana's French and Creole oral tradition cannot simply be described as a mélange of diverse elements and influences. The region's folklore has undergone extensive adaptation to changing social and cultural realities, rendering this oral tradition positively 'native' to Louisiana.

The application of linguistic theory to the study of cultural contact and cultural renegotiation is not without precedent. As early as 1979, Chaudenson argues that creolization is not only a linguistic phenomenon, but also a social and cultural one, and that all research should be based on a socio-historical perspective (Chaudenson 1979 37). Around that same time, John Szwed urged literary critics to re-examine their interpretations of movements born out of cultural contact and to see such literary production as a kind of creolization:

> In short, instead of seeing all literatures as genetic products or divergences of other, older literatures, against which the offspring is to be measured, we need to find and assess those that were formed by the meeting and admixture of different

[119] I will return to the notion of 'reduction' below.

> languages and literary traditions. At the very least we are likely to find that in the latter literatures the product is a totally new thing, with new features and functions, and thus not properly understandable exclusively in terms of one or the other of its 'parent' sources" (Szwed 498, in Haring *Stars* xii).

I would argue that the creation of 'new features and functions' that Szwed observes in literature is part of the same phenomena of creolization and nativization that can be observed in language and folklore. These new creations are formed out of what Lee Haring calls a "renegotiation of culture" that often occurs "where societies come into a colonized, multiracial existence" (Haring "Techniques" 19).

Although the notion of applying linguistic theories of creolization to understand folklore has not been undertaken in the context of Louisiana, it has been proposed by Lee Haring regarding the folklore of the Indian Ocean islands. I will consider here several phenomena that Haring has observed in the Creole folklore of the Indian Ocean islands in his article, "Techniques of Creolization" (2003). Haring makes the case for this cross-disciplinary approach saying:

> Out of creole linguistics comes a theoretical challenge to folkloristics. Pidgin and creole languages may be regarded as something entirely new. They seem to manifest a break in that continuity of development that traditionally characterized linguistic history. Such languages are new mixtures; explaining them through genetic relations is unfruitful (Haring "Techniques" 32).[120]

Haring identifies and illustrates through examples a number of techniques in storytelling that he believes to have been 'intensified' by creolization. Even though, as Haring notes, certain techniques are universal, "the violence and oppression of creolization gives them a special energy: language-mixing, quotation, parody, shifts of

[120] It should be noted that linguists do not universally share this view. For example, Salikoko Mufwene examines the evolution of language through the lens of biological sciences in *The Ecology of Language Evolution* (2001) and offers an opposing viewpoint to that of Haring in his article "Les créoles. L'état de notre savoir" (1999).

content and scene, reduction, allusion, augmentation, framing, mixing channels and narrative lexicon, and 'signifying'" (Haring "Techniques" 19). I will focus here on three of these devices that I believe to be particularly salient in the context of Louisiana folklore: reduction, allusion, and augmentation.

1.2.1 Reduction

In the context of Réunion or Mauritius, Haring suggests that reduction of tales' length may well have been necessary during times of slavery, although he admits that nowadays, "reducing a story may reflect no more than a sense of distance from it" (Techniques 22). Ancelet makes a similar observation with regard to modern Louisiana, specifically concerning magic tales and tall tales. These tales "flourished in the days before radio and television," although today, Ancelet notes, "it is rare that one has or takes the time to listen to one of these oral masterpieces" (1994 xxxi). In a recent interview conducted for this study, Ancelet asserts that longer magic tales are a sort of "tradition de mémoire," which are only aroused when requested by folklorists (Ancelet 2015). In the second chapter of this study, it was shown that reduction could also be a form of adaptation in certain tale genres. Whereas a relatively large variety of tale types feature Jean-le-Sot in the oral tradition of France, such as AaTh 513B, the Jean-le-Sot 'genre' only survived in Louisiana in a very limited form, even if attestations of this restricted [L + LL + L + Conseq.] structure abound. Reduction, intensified by creolization, can therefore be observed not only in individual narratives, but also in tale genres.

1.2.2 Allusion

In other instances, reduction is compensated for by another device, allusion. Allusion can be employed to refer to a motif, a character, or other narrative dynamics that do not need to be made explicit to an informed audience that already understands certain references. Trickster tales are good examples of this device because they are often told as tale cycles and include internal references to other episodes. Haring argues that "any performance of (for instance) 'The Tarbaby and the Rabbit' (AT175, motif K741), the best-known of all African-derived tales, depends on allusion to the depredations of trickster that were narrated in other tales, for which the other animals seek revenge" ("Techniques" 23). In the animal trickster tales analyzed in the first chapter of this study, allusion can consistently be seen in the openings of tales that refer to the relationship between Bouki and Lapin. Storytellers do not need to supply long descriptions of the characters or explain how they came to know each other; it is assumed that the audience is familiar with the trickster-dupe dynamic.

1.2.3 Augmentation

According to Haring, "augmentation is no less important than reduction," and he cites the example of Reunionese storyteller Daniel Fontaine, who lengthens his version of "The Three Stolen Princesses" (AaTh 301) in order to feature a loquacious hero. The storyteller's motivation for doing so is imagined by Haring, who suggests, "when, like Mr. Fontaine, you are economically deprived and politically powerless, a loquacious hero personifies the residual kind of power you have left" (Haring "Techniques" 23).

A possible parallel of 'residual power' could be made here regarding the augmented prestige ascribed to the quality of wit in Louisiana folklore. The analyses of

folktales from this corpus have shown that the trickster figure seems to be invariably cast as the protagonist of the narrative. This is in contrast to the kinds of cautionary tales found in the African tradition. Moreover, the ability to disguise oneself (literally or figuratively) in order to disturb or subvert power structures is particularly prevalent in the Master Thief tales explored in chapter three. Arguably, the carnivalesque nature found in European oral tradition has been augmented in the Louisiana context.

Because it exemplifies several narrative devices studied by Haring, it is worth returning to an example already seen in the first chapter, "Jean Sotte," collected by Alcée Fortier in his 1895 publication *Louisiana Folktales* (62-69). The influence of the French oral tradition is evident in the name of the tale's protagonist, Jean Sotte, and elsewhere in the tale's characterization that includes a king, the members of his court, and the princess. However, it is difficult to ignore the African or Caribbean influences in the tale. For instance, the name of the king, Bangon, does not suggest any French origin. Moreover, the tale includes an interior narrative featuring Bouki and Lapin. This device is typical of creolized folklore forms and constitutes what Haring calls "framing" ("Techniques" 25). Beyond the fusion of European and Afro-Caribbean character names and motifs, it can be seen that the entire narrative universe of the tale, one that includes archetypes of diverse origins, is a new creation with altered values assigned to these characters. This can be seen in the fact that this black Creole tale is the only variant of Jean-le-Sot in the Louisiana corpus that portrays Jean Sotte as a clever hero, only appearing to be dimwitted to others. Jean Sotte's heroic qualities hinge particularly on his ability to manipulate those in power through his words and cleverness. That is to say, his affinity for verbal

expression and effectively disguising himself as a fool are 'augmented' in this tale, much like in the animal trickster tales.

It is worth reiterating the fact that reduction, allusion, and augmentation are naturally occuring phenomena in all oral narratives. Haring, however, hypothesizes that these processes are strengthened or made more apparent in creole socieites.

Up until now, I have advocated an interpretation of Louisiana's French and Creole oral tradition, particularly the folktale, as a reflection of a social and cultural reality. According to such an interpretation, the evolution of motifs, characters and plot structures are acclimatized in order to react to collective experience and to remain relevant in a changing society. However, the corpus of tales analyzed in this study does not extend to the present day. Rather, the 1980s mark the end of the period during which the majority of the tales were collected. It has not been my intention here to study the decline of the folktale or changes in its transmission today. Nevertheless, I would like to conclude this study by raising the question of whether folktales can still be considered as reflections of collective experience and cultural identity today.

1.3 The Folktale Today

In order to understand the role of the folktale in the regions implicated in this study, I have conducted several interviews, from which I will draw here, with individuals professionally and artistically invested in the folklore of their respective regions.[121]

The role of the folktale and its place in society has changed dramatically over the past century. Storytelling by the fireplace at home, breaks during laborious agricultural

[121] The questionnaire used and brief biographies of the informants can be found in appendices D and E respectively.

tasks, or at the *veillées* of long ago, exists only in a nostalgic memory.[122] Storyteller and author of Loudun, France, Marie-Hélène Coupaye, explains that the importance of the folktale in years past has been completely lost (Coupaye 2015). As in Louisiana, however, remnants of the earlier importance of the folktale live on among older storytellers, especially when interrogated by conscientious folklorists. Nevertheless, it is clear that the folktale no longer occupies the central social function like years ago. Academic interest in the social and cultural significance of the folktale has arguably increased in recent years.

Barry Ancelet notes that more and more scholars are interested in folktales as a way to understand "la motivation, l'identité et la vision, l'imaginaire d'un peuple" (Ancelet 2015). He goes on to note that the folktale has an acute capacity to expose the inner workings of a group's society:

> Ça qui nous fait rire est très important, ou peut être très important dans notre identité parce que ça expose qui on est, ça expose nos préjugés, ça expose nos attentes, nos motivations, toute sorte de choses. Il y des gens qui ont découvert que dans le conte, si on l'étudie soigneusement, autant que dans la poésie et le théâtre ou une nouvelle ou un roman ou n'importe quoi (Ancelet 2015).

Professional storyteller from the Poitou region of France, Yannick Jaulin, detects a similar rise in academic interest in the oral tradition. However, he sees a fundamental rupture in the continuity of the folktale, not only in its function, but also with regard to where the folktale is found in today's society. Jaulin observes a "renouveau du conte qui est passé du stade de la veillée du village, d'un outil de communication et d'apprentissage au sein d'une communauté villageoise, aux lieux de diffusion de la culture, les

[122] Yannick Jaulin suggests that the disappearance of the folktale's prior importance is directly linked to the agricultural decline in rural France: "La notion même du village est une notion qui a disparu avec la disparation de l'agriculture [...] donc ça veut dire que la fonction du conte est obligée de se décaler" (Jaulin 2015).

bibliothèques, les centres culturels, des fêtes, des animations, et aussi les scènes de théâtre" (Jaulin 2015).

The folktale's transformation, from a popular form of entertainment typically prevalent in rural areas, to a performance art is best exemplified in France. Jaulin remarks that France is one of the few places in the world where it is possible to make a living professionally as a storyteller, even if he is one of only about ten artists who are able to do so (Jaulin 2015). Storytellers who do not have professional ambitions are also more likely to find an audience on the stages of France's numerous storytelling festivals, including *Quand on conte*, *Festival interculturel du conte de Vassivière en Limousin*, *Festival du Conte en Uzège*, and *Au fil des contes* in La Rochelle, to name just a few.[123] Festivals that revolve around storytelling can be found throughout France, although Jaulin notices a particularly strong interest in oral culture in the Poitou region (Jaulin 2015). In Louisiana, the francophone oral tradition has not attained the same presence on the public stage, although Ancelet notes the rise in popularity of Cajun stand-up comedians, citing artists like Dave Petitjean, Ralph Begnaud, A.J. Smith, Thelma Daigle among others (Ancelet 2015). According to Ancelet, Cajun and zydeco music has gained more popularity, in part because these musical genres are "facilement consommables" by audiences who do not necessarily understand the lyrics in French or Creole (Ancelet 2015). Ulysse Dubois notes a similar trend in France whereby traditional forms of music enjoy a wider popularity among today's youth compared to the *conte populaire* (Dubois 2015).

[123] See appendix F for more information about these and other festivals.

In addition to the kind of 'spectacularization' of the folktale, the source of inspiration for storytellers has changed, further representing the rupture with the oral transmission of folktales. Increasingly, those interested in folktales are directed to archives, digital libraries, and printed collections to find the closest thing to primary source material. In the context of Western France, much of this material was collected in the 1970s during an important popular movement to preserve and promote the oral culture and regional customs of the Poitou-Charentes-Vendée region and beyond. Collaborative efforts of storytellers, cultural activists, and ethnologists resulted in a number of significant projects and associations aimed at promoting the region's popular culture. The UPCP-Métive in Parthenay, a conglomeration of associations founded in 1969 by Michel Valière and André Pacher, possesses a large disposition of field recordings at the Centre d'Études, de Recherches et de Documentation sur l'Oralité (CERDO) which I have drawn from in this study. The Fonds Michel Valière at the Université de Poitiers is another important reserve of field recordings and an essential source for studies in the folklore and traditional music of Western France.

Parallels can be drawn to other important archival institutions in francophone North America that have been vital in assembling the corpus of this study. The Archives de folklore et d'ethnologie at the Université Laval in Quebec and the Centre d'études acadiennes Anselme Chiasson at the Université de Moncton in New Brunswick represent indispensable resources for study of the folklore of francophone communities of North America. The Archives of Cajun and Creole Folklore, part of the Center for Louisiana Studies, at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette houses sizeable collections of folklorists like Barry Ancelet, Harry Oster, Alan Lomax, and many others.

The increased importance and accessibility of archival resources in the aforementioned regions have resulted in a sort of mediatized centralization of folklore, and consequently a disconnection with regional specificities. Lee Haring discusses this phenomenon in his study of archival undertakings in the Indian Ocean islands ("Techniques" 30-31). For Haring, the more recent role of recorded speech and transcriptions as primary source material for new storytellers is yet another level of 'creolization'. He explains:

> So it is with collectors too: they continually report the speech of others. The devices of quotation I mentioned earlier [replication, elaboration, invention, and simulation]-the use of quoted dialogue to advance and contextualize the narrative and the 'quoting' of episodes from disparate sources are forms of what Volosinov, in his celebrated essay, calls reported speech (1971).[124] In the editorial practices of collectors as much as in the performing of storytellers, we again see the renegotiation of cultures" (Haring "Techniques" 30).

This relatively new and mediatized form of 'creolization' corresponds to what Yannick Jaulin calls a certain "déterritorialisation du conte" (Jaulin 2015). In his own performances of original stories and adaptations of traditional narratives, Jaulin battles with the question of attaining a level of specificity vis-à-vis regional identity after the loss of the rural attachment of the folktale's past. Jaulin asks, "comment faire aujourd'hui pour raconter des contes d'aujourd'hui qui ont une singularité, qui parle de quelque chose de vraiment particulier, alors que le conte n'a plus de racines?" (Jaulin 2015). For Jaulin, his storytelling performances consist of two dimensions. He explains:

> C'est-à-dire, toujours j'ai une écriture qui est en-dessous du plancher et une écriture qui au-dessus du plancher. [L'en-dessous du plancher] est ce qui se promène dans nos intérieurs depuis le début des temps... tout ce qui travaille avec l'inconscient, et les contes sont là pour répondre à ces grandes peurs. Et puis le dessus du plancher, c'est vraiment la capacité du conte à prendre les avis d'un

[124] Volosinov, V.N. "Reported Speech." in *Readings in Russian Poetics*. Ed. L. Matejka and K. Pomorska. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971. pp. 149-175.

> pays pour que celui qui écoute dans ce pays-là puisse vraiment entendre cette chose intérieure (Jaulin 2015).

In a sense, the double-dimension of storytelling performance that Jaulin describes joins Delarue's description of regional and cultural specificities of the folktale projected on a sort of *fond universel*, or a set of structures and archetypes that seem to be universal among human cultures. While the universal dimension remains constant, the vehicles that make the narrative effective are in a constant state of what Haring might call 'cultural renegotiation'. In future research, folklorists may be tasked with examining how, or if, the folktale continues to serve as an effective vehicle to express the collective imagination, sense of humor, and psychic needs of the cultures that they study. At the present time, however, the study of folklore, made more pertinent and dynamic through a growing amount of archival resources, remains fertile ground for exploring the evolution of tradition in an ever more rapidly changing world.

There exist many possible avenues for continued research on the folklore of French and Creole Louisiana and its relation to other francophone and/or Creole oral traditions. Magic tales, largely excluded from the corpus of tales used for this study, seem to grow harder and harder to find among storytellers today; however, an examination of how supernatural elements in the oral tradition have adapted to the New World context would be a useful addition to the scholarly work on French-American folklore. Moreover, I would suggest that the consideration of the social theory of cultural trauma has much to offer in refining our understanding of many aspects of Louisiana's history and contemporary social issues. How do trauma narratives affect notions of identity and race relations among Louisianans today, or how should they?

On another note, the more recent renewal of interest in storytelling as a more public performance art is evident in France, Acadia, and Quebec. The social or cultural needs to which this phenomenon responds merit further investigation, which in turn could suggest the possibility of instituting similar performances in Louisiana. Finally, the increasing size and accessibility of digital archival resources will certainly provide researchers with new tools for identifying pertinent themes and more effectively carrying out comparative and cross-regional studies by using digital databases.

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APPENDIX A – AaTh 1628 The Learned Son and Forgotten Language

Below are the full texts of the two variants of AaTh 1628 *The Learned Son and Forgotten Language* discussed in the second chapter. These two tales show the situation of diglossia that is shared between French-speaking Louisiana and the Poitou region of France. Both variants consist of a subversion of formal education and a defense of a rural lifestyle that maintains the community's linguistic identity.

"Jean Sot à l'école," told by Clotile Richard, excerpt from Barry Ancelet's *Cajun and Creole Folktales* (1994), page 82.

Jean Sot avait été à l'école pour apprendre l'anglais. Ça fait, il a revenu *back* pour visiter son père et sa mère et il faisait comme s'il comprenait plus le français.

Ça fait, il a été au jardin (son père et sa mère faisaient jardin) pour visiter. Et puis, il voit les râteaux et la pioche. Ça fait, il voulait demander à sa mère ce que c'était cet outil, pour travailler le jardin. Et puis, en même temps, il met son pied sur le râteau. Le râteau a revenu *back*, l'a frappé sur la bouche. 'Ah !' il dit. 'Mon fils-de-putain de râteau !'

'Ah,' elle dit, 'mon garçon, je vois ton français commence à te revenir !' (Ancelet 1994 82).

"Le rata," told by Baribeaux Marcelle, excerpt from Éric Nowak's collection, *Les contes traditionnels du Poitou* (2011), p. 61.

Ils avaient un voisin qui était parti à Paris. Au bout de quelque temps il est revenu au pays. Alors il a rendu visite à ses voisins. Et il faisait du chiqué, il voulait épater.

Mais un de ses voisins n'était pas chez lui, il était dans les prés, en train de râteler du foin. Alors il y va, et il dit tout à coup :

- De quoi te sert tu là ? C'est bien une « rastelle » ?

- Une rastelle ? dit le vieux.

-Et bien oui !

Il se retourne, il marche sur les dents du râteau. Il lui revient par le nez. Il se retourne, il dit :

-Sacré fils de pute de râteau ! Il m'a fait du mal ! (Nowak 2011 61).

APPENDIX B – Master Thief Openings

Several openings from Master Thief variants show the importance of the family and poverty in justifying the thief's actions.

Louisiana:
"Le fin voleur," told by Stanislaus Faul, collected by Lauraine Léger.

"Y avait trois frères, mais y en avait deux qui étaient moyens, là y en avait un petit. Eux-autres, c'était du monde pauvre" (Léger 1980).

Frank Rascal from Claudel's *Fools and Rascals* (1978)

"Once there was an old man who had lots of money. He died when his three sons were just ready to go to college. They were not earning money, and they wished to learn a profession" (Claudel 54).

Missouri:
"Fin Voleur ou Les Pantoufles d'Or," collected by Joseph Médard Carrière.

"C'étaient ein vieux pis eune vielle. Sontaient pauv's. 'L ontvaient ein garçon" (Carrière 285).

Acadia:
"Le fin voleur," collected by Anselme Chiasson in 1957.

"Le conte du fin voleur ça, c'tait une veuve qu'avait trois garçons. Son plus vieux garçon s'app'lait Henri, l'deuxième s'appl'ait Georges et l'troisième Jean. I' l'appeliont p'tit Jean. I' vivіont pauv'es, de charité" (Chiasson 1957).

France:
"Le franc voleur," collected from the Lorraine region by Emmanuel Cosquin.

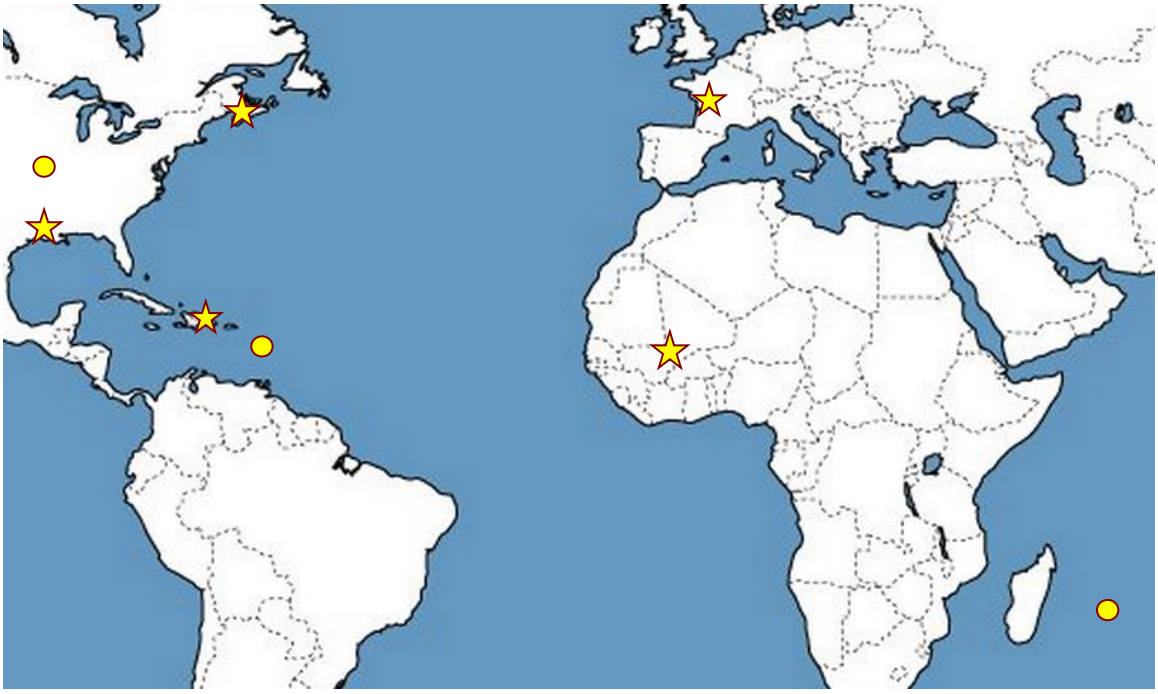
Pierrot, Jeannot et Claudot étaient trois frères, fils d'une pauvre veuve. Devenus grands et ne sachant que faire à la maison, ils voulurent aller chercher fortune ailleurs" (Cosquin 271).

Germany:
"Der Meisterdieb," from the Brothers Grimm's collection.

"Eines Tages saß vor einem ärmlichen Hause ein alter Mann mit seiner Frau, und wollten von der Arbeit ein wenig ausruhen" (Grimm 775).

APPENDIX C – Corpus Map and Archive Information

Map representing the geographic origins of the corpus of folktales used for this study.



Legend:

★ Principal area of study
● Minor area used for comparison

Description of archival resources:

Centre études acadiennes Anselme Chiasson
Université de Moncton, New Brunswick, Canada
http://www.umoncton.ca/umcm-ceaac/node/11

Created in 1970, the CEAAC's archives of folklore and ethnology contain approximately 1,450 collections that include testimonies of intangible cultural heritage, past and present, from every corner of Acadia and Acadian communities in Quebec.

Delivered by over 250 storytellers, from 1941 to 1998, essentially Acadia and Atlantic Canada, and in lesser numbers from Quebec (Magdalen Islands), Maine (U.S.A.) and Louisiana, the researchers gave special priority to analog audio and audiovisual equipment (primary source) to preserve this intangible heritage. Elsewhere, conserved in archives of folklore and ethnology at the Université Laval (Quebec), the CEAAC obtained in 2006 digital reproductions about 400 hours of audio recordings from oral field interviews carried out for the most part by folklorists from Quebec from the 1940s to 1980s among Acadians in the maritime provinces of Canada. In these copies, one finds around 2,000 variants of oral folktales.

Center for Cajun and Creole Folklore
Center for Louisiana Studies
University of Louisiana at Lafayette
http://ccet.louisiana.edu/tourism/cultural/archives.html

Housed in the Center for Cultural- and Eco-Tourism, the Center for Cajun and Creole Folklore is the largest depository of collections pertaining to Louisiana's oral tradition. For recordings and documents that are particularly relevant to topics discussed in this study, see the collections of Barry Jean Ancelet, Elizabeth Brandon, Harry Oster, Ralph Rinzler, Codofil Radio Show, Alan Lomax, Revon Reed Radio Show, Projèt Louisiane, Joseph Médard Carrière, Catherine Joliecoeur, and Corinne Saucier.

UPCP-Métive/CERDO
Parthenay, France
http://www.cerdo.fr/

Created in 1993, the Centre d'Études, de Recherche, et de Documentation in Parthenay contains documents and sound recordings that cover the oral tradition and music of much of Western France. An online search engine gives access to some digital recordings. Collections from Michel Valière and Michel Gauthier were consulted in the preparation of this study.
http://www.cerdo.fr/dyn/portal/index.seam?page=search&req=11&menu=

APPENDIX D - Questionnaire Used for Interviews

1. Quel est le rôle que joue le conte aujourd'hui dans votre région ?

2. Comment sa fonction a-t-elle changé à travers les dernières décennies (voire encore plus longtemps) ?

3. Si l'on considère le folklore comme étant la musique et la danse traditionnelles, et le conte ensemble, est-ce que le conte se transmet ou se maintient de la même façon que la musique et la danse ?

4. Est-ce que le conte voit un regain d'intérêt actuellement ou plutôt le contraire ?

5. Si vous pensez que les contes ne jouissent plus de la même importance qu'auparavant, qu'est-ce qui a rempli ce vide, d'après-vous ?

6. Que pensez-vous de la mise en spectacles du conte (e.g. les festivals du conte) ?

7. Quel est l'intérêt de travailler sur le conte aujourd'hui ? Comment peut-on mieux valoriser les collectes importantes (archives, etc.) qui existent déjà ?

8. Comment faire vivre le conte en lien avec la modernité ?

APPENDIX E - Description of Interviewees

Yannick Jaulin is an internationally renowned professional storyteller from the Poitou region of France. He has conducted extensive field research in the oral tradition of Western France.

Marie-Hélène Coupaye is a storyteller and published author from Loudun, France. Her experience as a storyteller has been particularly in the domain of education. She is an active member of the Club de langues régionales in Poitiers.

Barry Ancelet is the foremost scholar of Louisiana's French and Creole oral tradition. He has collected many tales included in this study's corpus. He has recently retired from his poisition of Professor of Francophone Studies at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

Ulysse Dubois is an actively performing storyteller and singer currently residing near Melle, Poitou-Charentes, France. He was heavily involved in the popular movement for the promotion of France's regional customs and language throughout the latter part of the twentieth-century.

APPENDIX F - Current Festivals and Organizations for Storytelling

Below are just a few examples of festivals and organizations dedicated to *le conte* and storytelling in francophone areas.

Western France

The **Quand on conte** festival takes place every March in Canton de Villedieu du Clain, Poitou-Charentes.
http://quandonconte.free.fr/

Festival Interculturel du conte de Vassivière en Limousin takes places in April each year.
http://www.paroles-conteurs.org/

Les Amuse-gueules presents the festival **Au fil des contes** in La Rochelle each April.
http://www.amusegueules-conteurs.fr/festival.php

Quebec

Le Regroupement du conte au Québec organizes and coordinates activities with various speakers and storytellers from Quebec, both amateurs and professionals.
http://www.conte-quebec.com/

Éditions Oui-dire specializes in publications of *contes* for adults and children and sponsors, myths, *récits de vie* and other genres.
http://www.oui-dire-editions.com/
See also *Nuits du conte à Montréal*: http://www.oui-dire-editions.com/Nuits-du-conte-a-Montreal.html

Festival interculturel du conte takes place every two years in Montreal.
http://www.festival-conte.qc.ca/wp/

BIOGRAPHY

Born in Eunice, Louisiana, Nathan Rabalais received bachelor degrees in Music Theory/Composition and Guitar Performance from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette in 2007. He then pursued graduate studies in Musicology at Université de Strasbourg on an Ambassadorial Scholarship offered by the Rotary Foundation. Nathan later returned to Louisiana, where he obtained an M.A. in French at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, specializing in the language, literature and culture of Louisiana and North American francophone literature. He completed his doctoral dissertation in joint-direction with Tulane University and Université de Poitiers on a Chateaubriand fellowship from the Franco-American Commission. His current research interests include French and Creole Louisiana, folklore and oral tradition, North American francophone literature and culture, early modern transatlantic studies, popular and community theatre among francophone minorities, adult literacy for Louisiana French speakers and dialect pedagogy.