The Representation of Franco-American Identity in Folk Tales

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Introduction

When Lewis and Clark first arrived in the Louisiana Territory, ready to explore the vast wildernesses of America’s west, the French had already been there for decades. St. Louis was the last bastion of Western civilization they encountered before beginning their long journey up the Missouri River, and the small, yet vibrant trading community welcomed the explorers with open arms (Ambrose 121-125). It was here that the expedition rested for the several months before its final depart, surrounded the entire time by the French-speaking citizens of St. Louis who were themselves descended from the traders who founded the city forty years prior (Foley 17). Interestingly, it was also during this stay that the city observed—perhaps a little reluctantly—its formal incorporation into the United States. On March 9, 1804, the humble flag of blue, white, and red that had flown for but a short while since the end of Spanish occupation was replaced by a waving banner of stars and stripes (Ambrose 126-130). Lewis and Clark had arrived in a city populated by the French, but they left one full of Americans.

Although elementary school accounts of westward exploration might ignore it, St. Louis and its majority French-speaking population were by no means anomalies in the American interior. Since their first 17th century explorations, the French had settled throughout the lands surrounding the Mississippi river from Canada all the way to New Orleans, and by the time of the Lewis and Clark expedition, they had created permanent settlements throughout this region and were by all accounts a well-established presence there, with their own unique lives and culture (Creagh 60-64). Yet for all this, today the United States is clearly a country dominated by its English-speakers. From street signs to television to political discourse, English reigns supreme, and despite the lack of a federally recognized de jure status, the language unquestionably remains the de facto means of communication for the majority of Americans. In
short, no more can a traveller stay in a city like St. Louis, where the language, the culture, and the people are wholly French.

My thesis will thus attempt to explore what it meant to be “Franco-American.” This label is one I first encountered when researching the French community in Old Mines, Missouri for a Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF) through the UNC Office of Undergraduate Research. More often than not during this project, the authors I encountered seemed to speak of the people of the Missouri French community as part of a larger, “Franco-American” group. Historians Anna Servaes and Edward Watts, for instance, both use this term or ones like it in contrast with the dominant “Anglo-American” culture of the United States (Watts 2; Servaes 26).

But what does this really mean? It is much harder to give an answer than it appears at first glance, because ultimately the term “Franco-American” comprises a large and diverse body of people. Captured under its umbrella are various “Creoles” who could include any descendants of European colonists in the New World, as well as descendants of their offspring with American Indians, and of the various black inhabitants of the Caribbean and Lower Louisiana Territory (Villerbu 10-11). Meanwhile the “Cajuns” who settled Louisiana after their expulsion from Acadia are an entirely separate affair, often hesitant for racial or cultural reasons to be associated with these other groups, yet similarly labeled all the same (Bernard 66, 142-143). Finally, there are individuals like author Henry Marie Brackenridge, who though born into an Anglo-American home and famous for English prose, was raised in a Franco-American community speaking the French of rural Missouri (Brackenridge, Recollections, 17-24).

It was thus difficult at first to see what linked “Franco-Americans” in the minds of authors such as Watts or Servaes. Although there is of course the contrast that may be drawn with “Anglo-Americans,” this does not really provide much in the way of a concise or even
adequate typological description of the group. Yet as I continued to research, I noticed certain unifying features. In other words, even if “Franco-American” itself is a broad group, I saw that there were aspects of their lives clearly spanning its communities, and it is in fact one of these that will prove essential to my thesis. Like any people, Franco-Americans had their own traditions, and seemingly chief among them was the telling of folk stories. Since the publication of Alcée Fortier’s famous collection *Louisiana Folk Tales* in 1895, a fairly sizable group of academics and enthusiasts have made an effort to collect the many stories told in the dialects and creoles of America’s various French-speaking or French-descendant populations. Of the collected volumes readily available today, the most comprehensive are Fortier’s, as well as Calvin André Claudel’s *A Study in Louisiana French Folktales in Avoyelles Parish*, Joseph Médard Carrière’s *Tales From The French Folk-Lore of Missouri*, and Lafayette Jarreau’s *Creole Folklore of Pointe Coupee Parish*, which together contain among them dozens of folk narratives passed down through the generations.

Moreover, across these collections are repeated not only many of the narratives themselves, but also distinct textual elements that go beyond just plot. From characters to language to even descriptions, these stories told by French and French Creole speakers share qualities that are not found in stories like the ones that, for example, an Anglo-American like myself would recognize. In fact, despite being told sometimes hundreds of miles apart, it is not difficult to see why they might belong to a single, “Franco-American” tradition. Reading through these collections, for me the similarities gave birth to an idea— namely, that perhaps the folk stories told by the different people who make up this somewhat nebulous cultural and ethnolinguistic identity could reflect who they really were. Although we have histories, analyses, and even some first hand accounts of “Franco-American” life, I felt these stories might reflect
the traits inherent to the identity in such a way that we could understand some of what this means without ever reading a single essay or book. This, in short, is what I will argue in my thesis: that in their unique contents, the folk stories told by Franco-Americans demonstrate the identity of the people who told and heard them.

However, it is also important to lay out some of the clear limitations that must exist in this analysis. First, although my research ultimately crossed past the borders of Missouri, it cannot be said to extend to every individual who might bear the name “Franco-American.” Due to the lack of similar folklore collections, all analysis must be confined to what was usually called the Upper and Lower Louisiana Territories,¹ rather than extending all the way to centers of French culture that existed in places like New England and South Carolina (Creagh 60-64).

Moreover, these collections were all made before 1950, and so although some extrapolations may be made, they can really be said to best represent the people living during this period. While there are certainly still vestiges of the Franco-American identity today (e.g. some of the additional sources found in Appendix B) the salient works we have backing up this analysis often do not cover much after the 1950s. Therefore, to qualify the previous statement, it is really best to say that this thesis is concerned with the way that the Franco-American identity such as it existed in the Upper and Lower Louisiana Territories and before the mid-twentieth century is displayed in its folklore.

Nevertheless, one might ask, what actual theoretical basis is there to suggest that folklore intersects with cultural or ethnolinguistic identity in a meaningful way? It is perhaps a little difficult to accept on face the possibility that the stories Franco-Americans told could possibly provide that much insight into who they are. To this end, the argument made in this thesis can

¹ See Appendix C for a map and brief explanation
essentially be understood through two approaches, both of which are backed up by well-established academic work. The first speaks to the power of folklore to be anthropologically representative, and is best described by anthropologist and folklorist Richard Bauman in his 2008 essay “The Philology of the Vernacular.” This work describes folklore analysis as a kind of “philology”—i.e. rigorous study of written content and meaning—based on “texts” that are rooted in the everyday speech patterns of a given people. From this broad but “prevailing” (29) conception of folklore analysis, he then differentiates between three methodologies that comprise modern folk studies. It is the third that this thesis will attempt to model itself on, which in short suggests that we can see these stories as “reflections—though selected and refracted—of culture” (33-34). By treating the collections of folk stories we have as serious texts with no less academic merit than any other literature, while simultaneously acknowledging that they are written in a voice that has not been standardized by the metropole, we may understand why so much can be said in the pages of what may seem like glorified storybooks.

Having thus established a means of connecting folklore with the definition of ethnolinguistic and cultural identity, the second approach explains exactly what we are trying to produce. In short, there is no perfect Aristotelean categorization of “Franco-American”—rather, it is best described in terms similar to modern ideas of linguistic prototype theory. In his book, *Linguistic Categorization*, John R. Taylor describes a famous experiment by linguist William Labov in which subjects were asked to determine whether a certain image of an object depicted a bowl or a cup. Ultimately Labov found that rather than a concrete dichotomy, the distinction between “bowl” and “cup” was judged using the ranked presence of certain “stereotypical attributes” such as the length of the object’s handle or width of its mouth (Taylor 43-44). Similarly, while most speakers of English probably do not go around saying “Franco-American”
all that often, instead of trying in vain to create a definition that captures all its complexities
discretely, it may be possible to find the meaning of this term in a prototypical sense. This is to
say, not every Franco-American possessed the exact same set of qualities, but nevertheless
considered together there are attributes that produce a fairly good and holistic “prototype” of
what it meant to be Franco-American. Using the kind of “philological” analysis Richard Bauman
describes, we thus may see how the folk tales\textsuperscript{2} in the three major collections of stories listed
above demonstrate these attributes and use them to construct a reflection, albeit perhaps
“refracted,” of this “prototypical” identity.

Together these two parts describe how this thesis will proceed methodologically. The
first chapter will further explain why folk tales are effective means of cultural analysis, building
upon the theoretical framework already established while focusing more on why these particular
collections are important for these particular people. From there, the second chapter will begin
the process of identifying attributes of these stories that demonstrate a “prototypical” Franco-
American identity through an analysis of their diverse origins, while the third and fourth will
continue this with in depth discussions respectively of the protagonists, as well as the morals, of
Franco-American folklore. Appendix A contains a corpus of the five stories I will reference most
often, Appendix B lists alternate sources for exploring the Franco-American identity that I found
over the course of my SURF and thesis research in the fall, while Appendix C provides a map of
the geographic area that comprises the scope of this thesis. In short, as we will see in these
chapters to come, although ultimately it will probably be impossible to ever perfectly recreate the

\textsuperscript{2} For clarity’s sake, for the purposes of this thesis “folk stories” and “folk tales” interchangeably refer to
the narratives themselves, while “folklore” refers to the whole institution of “folk” art like stories, songs,
and other traditional creative outputs.
world that Lewis and Clark first encountered over two hundred years ago, through the folk tales we still have, an interesting, if imperfect, image emerges.
Chapter One

Analyzing Folk Tales: A Theoretical and Practical Basis

Before a good faith effort can be made at producing any general claims about Franco-American folklore, however, we must first ask why such stories are a good means to judge them by. In other words, it is important to explore the reasons that folklorists like Richard Bauman believe that folklore can serve as a documentation of cultural identity, because throughout this thesis textual evidence from Franco-American folklore will be provided, and it is these texts that form the basis of its analysis. In order for this analysis to work at all, there must a clear and existent relationship—one that Bauman actually calls “thematics”—between the real-world context that folk stories were told in and their narrative content. To him, as opposed to the “form” or “pragmatics” of stories, thematics comprises “the referential or propositional content” that make them suitable mirrors for cultural, social, or linguistic conditions (30-31). For this analysis then, in exploring both how the telling, as well as recording, of these particular folk stories was a component of the identity of the Franco-American people, we can understand why it is through this medium that so much of who they were is then represented textually. We will see that in both a theoretical and practical sense, the Baumanian connection between folk story and people is as valid as it is powerful.

The following chapter will consequently work to affirm the theoretical basis under which the remainder of this thesis will operate, while at the same time relating it more closely to conditions specific to Franco-American culture. First, though, it is important to begin by discussing what a folk story really is, because while it would exceed the scope of this thesis to delve into any modern theoretical debates, well-established ideas can still help clarify this thesis’ approach. To this end, in the 1972 collection Toward New Perspectives in Folklore, folklorist
Dan Ben-Amos describes the difficulty in defining folklore, which he states can include songs, traditions, lessons, and, of course, folk tales. For Ben-Amos, folk tales comprise those narratives that are shared in some way by a group of people, or in other words, are unlike novels, which are the creative products of a definite number of authors. Instead, they owe their existence to a broader, non-discrete “collective” (6-7). For example in Appendix A there is a story, Cendrillon, that was told by a Ms. Roberta Roy (Claudel 177-80). Despite the fact that this particular version is attributed to specific individual, because it is a folk story, the narrative itself was not her original creation— it is only her own “take” on it, so to speak. This is why even within Claudel’s volume alone there are three different versions (Claudel v-vi). In this sense, folk stories can be seen as literature with ties to the creative forces of an entire culture.

But then what kind of “collective” narrative is not a folk tale? Using the definition above, it is easy to see how a work like Faulkner’s The Sound and the Fury would not fit the bill, since despite having its own merits as a reflection of culture, it was developed primarily by a single author. Yet it is less clear if the same can be said for traditional narratives like those found in Andrew Lang’s The Violet Fairy Book or even Perrault’s Contes de fées. Folklorist Jack Zipes believes that one distinction lies in what he chooses to call the “bourgeoisification” (129) of narratives that occurred in the modern era, whereby in order to make folk tales palatable to middle and upper class audiences, they were scrubbed of the elements that would otherwise permit Bauman’s aforementioned “philology of the vernacular.” He paints Lang and Perrault both with this brush (119), as well as the “Walt Disney monopoly” (118) that has left so many stories sanitized and almost useless as reflections of “folk” culture. Unlike folk versions of Cendrillon, to Zipes, even Perrault’s retelling probably represents the perfidious influence of the standardizing bourgeoisie, while Disney’s Cinderella would be beyond consideration. In the end,
however, while Jack Zipes may be but a single voice, speaking with a strong and readily admitted Marxist tenor (118), the core of what he says is important: in contrast to the “fairy tales” many modern audiences grew up with, as we will see in this thesis, the “folk tales” of Franco-America represent the un-scrubbed artifacts of their oral tradition.

Next then, it is equally important to understand why such an “oral tradition” exists. Rather than trying to generalize too broadly, it is probably best to begin by simply jumping into things and attempting to lay out all the reasons that folk storytelling would have been important to Franco-Americans, with no particular heed given to any kind of order. The first reason is probably the most practical, but it speaks to a distinct difference between Franco-Americans and their neighbors. In Anglo-American culture, stories from the Bible often took (and continue to take) on a role as important shared narratives for a community. Particularly, as a tool for moral instruction it is very easy to recollect English-language clichés such as striving for the “patience of Job” or looking to “turn the other cheek” that have their basis in well-known biblical passages. However among Franco-American populations during the 18th and 19th century, Bibles were extraordinarily uncommon, and this, compounded with the fact that their predominantly Catholic religion does not permit the reading of the Bible by lay followers—as well as a concurrent lack of clergy—meant that for most of their early history, the French-speaking inhabitants of the American continent had very little direct contact with religious stories (Croxall 67-74). Folklore may thus have in this way been continued as an easy replacement or compensation for one kind of storytelling unavailable to the Franco-American people in the first days of their American existence.

Moreover, there are other realities of later Franco-American life that made folklore best suited for their storytelling. Recalling for a moment some of the various descriptions of Franco-
Americans we have seen thus far, it is not too difficult to imagine why historian Edward Watts would ascribe to them a “peasant” culture, with a certain “pastoral non-competitiveness” distinguishing them from their more competitive, “enterprising”—to use a word employed by one observer (Atwater 54)—Anglo-American neighbors (Watts 60-61). Even Carrière repeats similar observations, well into the “modern” 20th century (Carrière 13-14). This connects directly with their use of folk stories. As a “collective” medium of expression, folklore relies upon continuous contact with friends and extended family; a folk tale cannot survive if there is no way for it to be passed on. Rather than the Manifest Destiny, westward-ho spirit of Anglo-Americans that caused their lands to eventually stretch from Atlantic to Pacific, observers describe Franco-Americans since the 18th century as being “closely knit together in community life” (Claudel 14) or even as having a certain “atavistic inertia” (Carrière 14). At the very least, the literally closer relationships this allowed for meant that perpetuating an oral tradition was a much easier task for Franco-Americans who, unlike contemporaneous Anglo-Americans, rarely attempted to venture thousands of miles away from home (Stone 232). This, coupled with the strong social component to folk storytelling in Franco-American culture (Carrière 7; Claudel 36-37), produces an environment perhaps as rich for the telling of folk tales as any that may have existed in the American continent.

This explains why folklore worked so well, but then what caused it to be a dominant means of storytelling? Folklorist Kay Stone writes that “Western, urbanized adults” no longer listen to folk tales because they have other, ostensibly more interesting forms of entertainment to consume (232). For rural 19th and early 20th century Franco-Americans, isolated as we have seen from the wealth and “progress” of other parts of America, telling folk stories may have simply been the only form of entertainment available. Supporting this point is the fact that the
collections we have, such as those by Carrière, Claudel, or Jarreau, come from places like Old Mines or the Avoyelles Parish, not urban centers of Franco-American life like New Orleans or St. Louis. Perhaps in these latter places folklore commanded less sway, though besides Claudel’s suppositions (xv-xvi) there is not much conclusive evidence one way or the other, but it is clear that this is not the case for those who lived in the less developed, poorer parts of Franco-America. Carrière describes stories being by workers in the mines, as a break from the tedium of the day’s labor (7-8). It is maybe hard to imagine a world without portable music, but for these laborers in an even pre-radio world, the only entertainment they reasonably could have brought to the mines would have been that which they themselves could produce. Oral storytelling was almost by necessity their chosen form of entertainment.

As an institution, folk storytelling would thus have clearly been significant in Franco-America. However, it is equally important to discuss how the act of telling such stories is connected with the cultural and ethnolinguistic identity of the Franco-American people. In a broad sense, what Richard Bauman describes as the “philology of the vernacular” begins here, when a Franco-American storyteller—often called a conteur (Carrière 7) or raconteur (Claudel 36)—produces the discourse that will become a folk story. For literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, the novel stands as a superior art form because it is “a phenomenon multiform in style and variform in speech and voice” with a “heteroglossia” that allows it to capture the variety of “dialogue” inherent to real life (Bakhtin 1078-80). When told by a single (ra)conteur in a single voice, folk stories do not meet this standard. However, unlike a poem or essay, folk stories are not the creative products of a single person, but rather, “phenomenon” that through the “collective” nature of their creation (as Bauman would say) in fact become heteroglossic. Though Zipes may claim Perrault’s Cendrillon was written in the voice of a 17th century
Bourgeoisie, under Bauman’s framework each folk version of it is told in the “vernacular” of the \textit{(ra)conteur}, and together, these many stories create an oral tradition that actually display the unique voices of their tellers and fight against the “centripetal forces” (Bakhtin 1085) that would otherwise draw the language of these stories into amorphous unity.

All this is of course fine to say, but examples will be necessary in order to back it up. To this end, the following three chapters will provide concrete textual instances where this vernacular is present. Still, as a final theoretical consideration it is important to establish exactly why Bakhtin’s “heteroglossia” would be significant to this analysis. In many ways, the “stratification” that he writes about it almost perfectly represented by the Franco-American people (1085), divided as they were between Creole and Cajun, black and white, isolated and assimilated. And, not only did these internal divisions exist, but as a people Franco-Americans sat separate linguistically from their English-speaking surroundings, as well as geographically from their ancestors in the Eastern hemisphere. Because folklore can capture the unique vernacular voices that comprise this highly “stratified” people, and because the telling of folk tales allows for there to be voices to capture in the first place, it is through this process that the relationship between folk story and cultural or ethnolinguistic identity is solidified in the way necessary for this analysis.

Yet if folk stories are not recorded, then all of this theory remains analytically intangible. As a final affirmation of this thesis’ approach, we must see how even the act of documenting a folk story can relate to cultural and ethnolinguistic attributes, and more specifically, does so for the Franco-Americans living in the Upper and Lower Louisiana Territories in the 19th and early 20th centuries. To begin, from a practical standpoint it is of course essential that, if there is to be a “philology of the vernacular,” there first be texts to analyze. Assuming it were possible to
create a meaningful analysis just from one’s recollections of a story, there would still be no way to prove any of it to others. To even try and provide evidence would require replicating the story in some fashion, and unless this is to be done entirely orally, would therefore make necessary recording at least parts of the story. Thus, circumventing any of the apparent debate over the “purity” of written folk tales (Ben-Amos 14), it must at the very least be assumed that in order to carry out the analysis in this thesis, actual readable texts are needed.

Beyond necessity, then, what is interesting about these particular collections? First, it is important to recognize that even though the stories in this thesis were recorded by academics, they were not exactly disinterested researchers. Carrièr was presumably of francophone origin, and likely Claudel and Jarreau were as well. Moreover, both Barry Jean Ancelet—who though not referenced as heavily in this thesis, did record Franco-American folklore—and Claudel both used relatives as sources (Claudel 90; Ancelet 1vii-1xxii), while many of the additional resources discussed in Appendix B have direct, often familial connections to Franco-America. The act of recording these folk tales is thus not only for study, but as a way to connect with and preserve heritage that is important to the collectors. Ben-Amos ends his discussion in Toward New Perspectives In Folklore by claiming that “folklore does not have to be a marginal projection or reflection; it can be considered a sphere of interaction in its own right” (15). This means that even as we examine the texts of Franco-American folklore, we must remember that the very process that allows for “philology” is itself a part of the makeup of their culture and identity.

Finally, it is important to understand that the recording of these collections happened in a particular historical context, one that carries with it certain implications that must be considered, even if they do not directly affect the argumentation in this thesis. As has been stated before, each of the three collections used here were made between 1890 and 1950, a period during which
recording folk art of any kind was in vogue. It was in this time that researchers like John and Alan Lomax worked to collect regional folk music in Appalachia and southern black communities, and later that New Deal programs such as the WPA and Federal Writers’ Project supported the use of “folk” material to document rural American culture (Mitchell 34-41).

Meanwhile, the people of this era saw two world wars, the emergence of the United States as an international superpower, and transnational movements like communism, fascism, and modernism sweep across the globe. Because of their isolation and unique qualities, it is easy to think of Franco-America as removed from all this, but the efforts by Carrière, Claudel, Jarreau and others that lets the Franco-American people rest squarely in the zeitgeist. When their folklore was recorded, documenting culture may have seemed like the only connection with old traditions in an increasingly modern, globalized world, and it is this spirit that runs throughout the collections that we have today.

Ultimately then, we have begun to see in this chapter how folk stories relate to the culture and ethnolinguistic realities of Franco-American life. Moreover, even if in limited way, more of what comprises the “Franco-American” identity has begun to make itself clear. Yet this represents only a part of this thesis’ intent—it is not enough to simply establish a connection, but rather we must also see how these folk tales illustrate attributes of the prototypical Franco-American identity as it existed in the time and place where such stories were told. The next three chapters will each work to do this, drawing upon the theoretical basis that has been established thus far to show how distinct aspects of the text reflect Franco-Americanism in the “thematics” of their content and form. Finally, though, it is important to say one last thing: the folk tales we will see, like their more innocuous (or “bourgeoisified”) cousin fairytales, often contain rather

3 Interestingly, Cajuns actually did fight during the Second World War in an entirely French-speaking unit, as documented colorfully in Bernard 2-22.
fantastical elements. If nothing else, the contents of this chapter should make clear that despite this fact, these stories are as worthy of serious study as any literature in the vast Francophone canon.
Chapter Two

Origins of Franco-American Folklore and Identity

In Carrière’s words, by the 20th century Missouri’s remaining French speakers were like “gnarled and mutilated trees that have resisted the repeated on slaughts of time and storm” (1). It is not too far a stretch to see a folk tale similarly—as the twisted, diverging result of centuries of retelling and re-formation. So far we have seen, at least theoretically, how a tradition of folk storytelling can create a mirror displaying the character of a people. In this chapter and the ones that follow we shall see the mirror in action, as three distinct aspects of Franco-American folklore will be examined and shown to display attributes that produce a “prototypical” image of the Franco-American identity. However, if these stories are truly like trees, then they must have been planted somewhere, with some basis to form the roots of the tradition we see today in collections like those of Carrière, Claudel, Fortier, and Jarreau. The origins of Franco-American folklore must consequently be the first aspect we examine, for in exploring the question of where its folk stories came from, we can begin to see reflected the unique origins of the Franco-American people themselves.

At first glance, the answer to this question appears deceptively trivial. Presumably, if a Francophone people are telling certain stories then no matter where these stories are being told, they themselves ought to display French origins. However, while this generalization does hold true to a degree in the Franco-American tradition, the performative nature of storytelling works to cloud the picture. “In each historical epoch,” writes folklorist Jack Zipes, folk tales have been “generally transformed by the narrator and the audience in an active manner through improvisation and interchange to produce a version which would relate to the social conditions of the time” (116)—in other words, context is everything. Because each and every version of a
given folk story is told in a different environment, where a story is told is just as important as where it came from, and so simply tracing its history back to a single possible origin doesn’t reveal all that much about its meaning or significance. This raises a question: are these stories simply coming from Europe⁴, and so now display largely aspects of American life, or are they still for the most part about European people, places, or ideas? To determine how folk tales can demonstrate the “Franco-American” identity, it is essential to determine how this fundamental distinction is developed through the stories’ representation of their origins.

The rest of the following chapter will thus concern how we should make such judgments across Franco-American folklore. First though, it is important to explain the process by which the dichotomy would even arise at all. In his previous quote Jack Zipes describes a relationship between “narrator” and “audience.” For most Franco-American folk stories, the narrators would have been the conteurs who served as the primary sources of entertainment at social and family gatherings throughout the year (Carrière 7), and Zipes’ “improvisation and interchange” was thus a two-sided process, split between what each (ra)conteur’s actual narration and what the family members, partygoers, or other members of the audience imagined and maybe even remembered for their own retellings of the story later. The problem, though, is that it is impossible to do much better than infer what went through the heads of the audiences—the smiles, the gasps, the laughter—none of what might give us an idea has been recorded. How then, if there is no record of half the process left, is it possible to see this “interchange” and its effects on the relationship Franco-American folktales have with their origins? As Richard Bauman would say, the answer lies in the texts. By examining the evidence found across their folklore collections, details begin to emerge that repeat themselves across the whole tradition, representative of changes that

⁴ “European” will be considered synonymous with “French” unless otherwise stated. In the context of this analysis, the differences that distinguish the two are too fine for the scope of this thesis.
resulted in these stories from the *interchange* with the unique Franco-American attributes that characterize their audiences. Rather than attempting, perhaps futilely, to trace such stories back to their very moment of creation, by exploring the ways in which the origins of Franco-Americanism itself have consequently become a part of the narration of its folk tales, we can in fact see these origins clearly, even after centuries of transformation.

To thus begin this analysis, the support for the idea that Franco-American folklore mostly represents New World experiences is fairly straightforward. In short, the day-to-day existence of 19th and early 20th century Franco-Americans living in what had been the Upper and Lower Louisiana Territories would have been far-removed from France, so that by the time that these folk tales were recorded, they would have been part of a tradition that was both geographically and chronologically well-established within the borders of their existence. Carrière and Claudel, for instance, each published their folk tale collections in the middle of the twentieth century, two hundred years after their respective sources of Old Mines or the Avoyelles Parish were settled, with the Carrière collection comprising interviews with what amounted to a large group of subsistence miners (Carrière 8-9), while Claudel’s was based in a parish that had felt minimal contact with any metropolitan French for centuries (Saucier 210-211). Fortier and Jarreau, meanwhile, each interviewed poor black farmers (Jarreau v; Fortier x). Although several of Claudel’s sources did study Standard French (Claudel 89-96), it is unreasonable to assume that *most* or even *many* of the people hearing and telling the stories in these collections would have ever been able to visit Europe.

More to the point though, there is fairly substantial textual evidence pointing to an existence rooted firmly in the American continent. See, for instance, this passage from Carrière’s *Cendrillonne*:
That evening Cendrillonne enjoyed herself so much and found the prince so handsome that she remained until the clock struck twelve. She left immediately without giving him any excuses. When she descended the gallarée of the house of the dance, she lost one of her glass slippers."

(Carrière 143)

Rather than the images of feudal Europe we might expect from a story of princes and royal balls, notice here that when Cendrillonne makes her stroke-of-midnight dash, the shoe is lost not on the steps of a castle, but rather on “la gal’rie d’la maisonne d’la danse.” Standardizing for a moment the spelling, a gallarée was a kind of covered wraparound porch found on maisons (“houses”) owned generally by more well-to-do members of Franco-American communities (McDermott, The French, 20-24)—homes where balls and dances were a frequent, regular occurrences throughout the year (Bachand 27). Instead of the palace of some distant monarch, for a Franco-American audience this version of the story could have taken place at a wealthy neighbor’s house.

We see similar, albeit less pronounced, examples like this throughout the texts. In Jarreau’s Catafo, the family lives in a “cabanne” (“cabin”) in the “bois” (“woods”) (5). While this is of course not necessarily a setting foreign to Europeans, the uniquely sturdy “poteaux en terre” style developed by French settlers in America’s interior still made their cabins a long-
lasting and distinctive feature of Franco-American life (McDermott 144), to the point where even today the St. Louis Arch Museum has a replica of one conspicuously on display in its section on French colonization. Meanwhile, returning to Carrière’s volume, there is a character who uses a “conou” (“canoe”)—incidentally, a craft often associated with the Franco-American fur trade (Kent vii-viii)—to find a princess living in a “grande maison de brique” (“large brick house”) rather than in any sort of castle (64-5). Finally, in Claudel’s stories there is one character who sees a “kopal” (“copal”) (Claudel 101), or in other words, a distinctly non-European type of tree (USNPGS), along the path to the market while there is another who walks out from their house to a “magazè” (Claudel 129) (“corn crib” (Claudel 252)), which was a kind of structure European settlers in North America learned to build from their encounters with American Indians (Johansen 125).

All this, of course, is not meant to say that the word “château” (“castle”) does not exist in Franco-American vernaculars, and in fact we see it in several places (e.g. Carrière 135, 189, 214). What is actually interesting about all these different examples is that they show how Bauman’s “thematics,” such as the word château or even the inclusion of European species of tree, that might otherwise indicate a European existence have, through Zipes’ “improvisation and interchange” process, begun to shift so that the setting of these stories better reflects where they are being told. These examples thus go directly to the heart of the question at hand. For instance, it is possible that Carrière’s Cendrillon still has a European setting, that the conteur has simply used a more familiar word like “gal’rie” to describe a far-removed and unfamiliar concept, but regardless of their actual intent, the story has been stripped of an attribute, “the castle,” that would make it prototypical of a European story. Instead, at some point in the retelling of this

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See Appendix B for details.
story by Franco-Americans details about the settings of these stories have been replaced conceptually with those found more regularly in their lives, using lexicon we have seen that was used by them with much greater frequency than any perhaps more “accurate” description of the story’s original setting ever would be.

It is then actually worth speaking a little more to the language, or vernacular, of the text. This will come up again in later chapters, but for now it is important to simply reflect for a moment on the kind of French being used. As the passage above illustrates, Franco-American folk tales were recorded in works like the Fortier, Carrière, Claudel, or Jarreau collections as quasi-phonetic transcriptions of the dialects or creoles in which they were told. By the late 19th to early 20th century, these were far-removed from the français de France a person might have encountered on the streets of Paris. We saw this in the previous text from Carrière’s Cendrillonne, with near constant examples of linguistic differences, including vowel shifts (“alle” versus the Standard French “elle”), lenition (“partsi” versus “partie”), and lexical change (“pis” versus “et”) among many others. While Carrière believes that the Missouri dialect actually does demonstrate characteristics of French spoken in the 16th and 17th centuries (Carrière, Phonology, 7), and there is even some evidence of similarities between this and other Franco-American vernaculars to Francophone dialects with little contact but similar historical roots (Valdman 19), the high degree to which they have changed set them apart from other, metropolitan varieties of French (Bollé and Neumann-Holzshuh 199).

But beyond just the natural change that occurs with distance and time, the language displayed in these stories conveys vernacular clearly rooted in the American continent. For instance, there is the heavy Anglo-American linguistic presence in these stories, one that would not necessarily be reflected in a place where Francophone and Anglophone language were so
readily intermixed. We see of course borrowed lexicon—Carrière’s glossary (313-320) includes Anglicisms such as “abuser,” (“to abuse”) “djob,” (“job”) and “team” (“team”); Jarreau has “jaug” (“jug”) (11) and “valé” (“valley”) (9); while Claudel mentions words such as “kètche” (“catch her”) and “gone” (“gone”) (84) and even has a character ask for “vaseline” (104)—however there are also moments where actual phrases of English even creep in, as with one of Claudel’s stories where a normally French-speaking character suddenly exclaims “you set me free!” (109). Meanwhile, even the American Indian presence is heavily represented in the folklore, as Claudel writes that Indian words like “boukän” (“smoke,” versus “fumée” in Standard French) have made their way into the vernacular (3). Finally, although the limited space this thesis provides cannot do it analytical justice, unlike the French dialects used in the Cajun and Missouri French stories, the Fortier and Jarreau collections comprise stories in the creoles spoken by the black Creoles of Louisiana. ⁷ As even the fairly racist Fortier concedes, these are not just uneducated “corruptions” of Standard French, but rather languages that have entirely their own “morphology and grammar” formed in North America by the descendants of slaves to French-speaking masters (Fortier x-xi). More so than for any of the vernaculars we have seen so far, the contents of these black Creole stories thus represent language that is unquestionably unique to the North American continent.

For all that has been said, however, it is still hard not to also see these stories as originally about Europe. The fact is, in the end even someone with only a few years of formal training in the Standard French can probably find stories like Carrière’s Cendrillon or even Jarreau’s Catafo intelligible. Once a few oddities are grasped, stories like those found in Appendix C are

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⁷ This sentence shows one confusing distinction so far left unexplained. A “creole” is a unique language formed by the pronounced contact of two or more different language groups (Velupillai 43), while Creoles includes the varieties of European or African-descendant people laid out in the introduction.
really not much more difficult to understand for someone who reads French than the English
defined in the dialogue of Huckleberry Finn, and most of the collections they come from actually
begin with fairly comprehensive explications of the pronunciation and grammars of the stories
within to aid with this (Carrière 18-19; Jarreau vi-vii; Claudel 56-88). Moreover, read out loud—
which is of course, as a part of an oral tradition, these stories’ “true form,” so to speak—they are
not very difficult at all to understand. Finally, even for the stories found in Jarreau or Fortier’s
collections, the creoles used in their narration derive their lexicon from French (Velupillai 49),
and so are decipherable so long as the basics of their unique grammar are understood. See, for
example, the first sentence in Catafo:

“Catafo té le plis vié dans les troix ti frèr. Yé rété avec yé moman et yé popa dans ein ti
cabanne auras dans bois.”

“Catafo was the oldest of three little brothers. They stayed with their mother and their
father in a little cabin in the woods.”

(Jarreau 5)

This sentence is a little tricky to understand, but once the equivalency between “té” and “était”
(“was”), “yé” and “ils”/“leur” (“they/their”), and “ti” and “petit” (“little”) becomes clear, it
makes almost perfect sense, albeit with some small grammatical peculiarities.

Ultimately then, all of this speaks to a reality underlying the vernacular of these tales, and
more broadly, underlying the tales themselves. Essentially, this reality is that implicit in a
discussion of Franco-American folk discourse is a diglossic hierarchy between the Standard
French of the metropole and the vernaculars we have seen thus far. Even when the language in
these stories explicitly and repeatedly contains grammar that is uniquely representative of where
they were told on the American continent, the very fact that Jarreau (v)—as well as Carrière (10),
Claudel (42), and Fortier (x)—compare Standard French with the language of these stories means that the grasp of Europeanism still holds them tightly, and that there fundamentally can be no “Franco-American” without paying heed to France and the French language. Even in Claudel’s volume *Fools and Rascals: Louisiana Folktales*, which translates some of the stories from his larger collection into English, the very first sentence states: “The folktales of Louisiana, *which are mainly French in background and language* [emphasis added], are found in the central and southern part of the state…” (1). In the first chapter we saw how the polyglossia of folklore allows it to act as a mirror for different peoples, yet at the same time even Bakhtin would agree that there are “centripetal forces” (Bakhtin 1085) forcing these vernaculars back toward their origin. It is these forces that, even hundreds of years and thousands of miles removed from Europe, still pull on the folk stories of Franco-America.

In some ways, to even say “Franco-American folklore” could thus really be seen as only giving slightly more specific details about where these particular *European* folk tales happened to be told. As with the previous conception of these folk tales as *coming from*, but not being *about* Europe, there is evidence throughout the available texts. We see this in *Catafo* (Jarreau 4-9) as well as *Compair Lapin et Ver de Terre* (Fortier 13-19), both stories told by people who realistically would not have had much direct contact or relation with continental Europe, being themselves either a poor farmer or descended from African slaves (Jarreau 15 and Fortier ix-x, respectively). Despite this, evil figures in both these stories are given an actual name: “Jiabe” (Jarreau 5) or “Diabe” (Fortier 14) (“the Devil”). These are not just instances of *a* devil, but rather in both cases the named, capital-d Devil of the European tradition. Does this mean these stories are about Europe? That would be a stretch, since the Devil is not exactly a figure with a clear geographic base—at least in the postal code sense. Yet even if it is impossible to say with
absolute certainty that Franco-American folklore has a European setting, these characters in it are not, for instance, given names from an American Indian religious tradition, but rather the European one that as we have seen, incidentally, Franco-Americans may not have had much ability to transmit by means other than sharing folklore. Once again, it is clear that Europe is an important part of the fabric of Franco-American folklore.

Meanwhile, stories like Carrière’s *C’est Bouki, mon cher mari!*—or any of the Bouki stories in Carrière, Claudel, and Fortier—feature the character, Bouki, who (as we will see shortly) is nominally African, yet who is featured in certain narratives that are (again as we will see in Chapter Four) European in origin. This is also a very important part of how the implicit hierarchy between “European” and “Franco-American” plays out beyond just the sphere of language. The stories themselves are made up of narratives that may possibly contain elements representative of American life, yet at the same time cannot be separated from the more fundamental European roots. Figures such as the princes, princesses, kings, and queens who litter stories like, for instance, the *Cendrillon(ne)* variants, *Le p’tsit boeuf* aux cornes d’or (Carrière 112-117), *La Bote* (Claudel 194), or even Fortier’s *Lé Roi Pan* (57-60) do not fit with the American political or social tradition, and once again lend their stories a certain old-world quality born in their origins in Europe, where monarchy had been a well-established tradition for centuries before the advent of American colonization. Although we have seen the effects of Zipes’ “improvisation and interchange,” it has clearly not had so profound an effect as to render these stories totally alien from their European roots.

Yet all the same, it now also becomes important to explain how these stories represent aspects of life reaching far beyond the borders of either France or America. There is apparently some evidence of a Spanish influence on Franco-American folklore from when the Louisiana
Territory was administered by Spain (Claudel, *Fools and Rascals*, 1), however for the more limited purposes of this thesis, whereby France and Europe are treated fairly synonymously, what really serves to throw a wrench in things is the inclusion of African elements in the text. Variants of the story *Bouki et Lapin*, for instance, which are found across all the available collections of Franco-American folklore, are retellings of a story originally from the coasts of West Africa, and while “Lapin” is of course a French word, the name “Bouki” actually comes from a Senegalese term for hyena (Cartwright 270). Beyond this proper noun, we see the word “gôbo” (“gumbo”) in a couple stories (Claudel 97, 208), which even though here used by a white Cajun *conteur*, was originally borrowed from a Bantu word for okra and is a term that eventually became an integral term in both creole and Cajun cooking (Mariani “gumbo”). We do not see the same word used in Carrière’s stories, but this makes sense given that slavery was not very pronounced in French communities in Missouri (Gerlach 12), and while Fortier and Jarreau’s stories do not mention food as often as Claudel’s, presumably this word would not have been unfamiliar—though of course we cannot know for sure.

Nevertheless, this still makes things more complex for two reasons. First, the language of these stories is no longer purely European in origin: it is combined with an element of African lexicon, which broadens the scope of the influences upon the language used in these stories. Just as the Anglo-American influence is reflected linguistically in these stories, the unique African component of the Franco-American identity is as well. Second, the presence of “Bouki,” and really even just the inclusion of an African story within the Franco-American folklore tradition, means that any analysis can no longer be solely concerned with only aspects of European and American life. Rather, “Franco-American” must include more than just the two sides to its hyphen—it is a mixture of cultures extending across continents. Some *conteurs* were certainly
the descendants of black slaves (Jarreau 1), but not only were their stories eventually assimilated into dialects of the French language, continued contact meant that they were told by white Franco-Americans many decades after slavery was abolished (Claudel vi-viii). Even more interestingly, Despite being perhaps involuntarily given, African elements have thus permeated the Franco-American folklore and identity, and have been blended into it (and least parts of it) as readily as any of the European or American influences.

At the same time, this is not necessarily the case for every instance of non-European origins in these stories. There are several folk tales that, although originally coming from cultures outside of Europe or America, do not have the same clear impact on the oral tradition, and so on the people. In Carrière, for instance, there are at least two stories—Aladin pis Adrien (200-204) and Ali Baba pis Moustapha (220-224)—that are presumably of Arabian origin. But unlike with the sub-saharan African stories, it is hard to see these as representing much about different aspects of the Franco-American identity. They only appear in the Carrière collection, rather than throughout others such as Claudel’s, Jarreau’s, or Fortier’s, and unlike with the Bouki stories there is not evidence like we will see in Chapter Four that these Arabic protagonists carried over into other traditionally European narratives. That is to say, whereas “Bouki” became a versatile character archetype that Franco-Americans used in other stories actually originating in Europe, “Aladin” is only present in this one instance. Moreover, while slavery provides a clear framework for the African influence, of the many accounts of Franco-American life not a single one mentions any Arab population, enslaved or otherwise. Possibly these few stories diffused from Antoine Galland’s famous 18th-century French translation, Les mille et une nuits, however there is simply not the clear textual or historic evidence to say that they are aspects of the Franco-American identity in the same way as the representations of African origins.
Finally, it is worth briefly addressing the fact that these stories are by no means prime examples of literary realism. Neither Europe nor America has ever counted fairy godmothers among their respective populations, nor ever have any members of their respective fauna uttered a single word. To whatever degree we may find Franco-American life existing in the worlds such tales portray, they cannot be based entirely on any real place. Still, even if there is not always a direct analogue, it is also not the case that such folklore should be removed completely from context. Just as there are not solely aspects of European or American life in these stories, they do not portray a world that is entirely fantastic. Perhaps Cendrillonne’s dress is magically fabricated, but it is for a dance similar to Franco-American tradition, held in a house of Franco-American style. And while animals like Bouki and Lapin speak, as we will see in Chapter Three it is in a dialect or Creole of French, with the pair even explicitly interacting with some “frâse” (“French people”) in one of their stories (Claudel 111) and “negres” (“blacks”) in another (149). Because of the origins they are rooted in, the simple presence of magic is not enough to discount the ability of these stories to act as illustrations of the attributes of Franco-American life.

To this end, Claudel concludes his own quite voluminous thesis with a simple statement: that “the folklore of a region is a mirror of its soul” (448). With this remark he perfectly captures all that we have seen thus far. Franco-American folklore has a history as varied as the contents of its tales, and there is no single way each tale relates to its origins—in these stories there are elements of American life, elements of the French or European, and elements that fit into neither of these categories. Yet this is really what is so interesting about them, for they represent the literary output of a people with varied ethnolinguistic roots, who are best described as simply “Franco-American.” This identity is one whose origins are certainly complicated, but
as we have seen this does not mean that they are hidden from sight. We can see reflected, in the narratives of their folklore, the influences that ultimately made these people who they were.
Chapter Three

Heroes and Protagonists in Franco-American Folklore

For the historians and anthropologists of the world, it is the origins of Franco-American folk tales that are most interesting. Yet for those who actually heard them, anyone who sat enraptured at the feet of a conteur as their voice rose and fell with the cadence of the story, it is what they are about that matters. The next two chapters will continue to explore the narrative contents of the Franco-American folklore, but now they will focus on specific aspects that truly make these stories “folk tales.” At the same time though, because—as we have seen—folklore is so different from other forms of creative expression, before really getting into things it will be necessary to illustrate how such aspects actually play out in the context of their narratives. In short, we must first know who and what they are about before we can begin to examine what these indicate, and it is only after this that we can begin to see how each aspect works to reflect the Franco-American identity.

To begin then, putting it simply, we must ask who these stories seek to describe. Throughout the previous chapter, several characters were mentioned in an almost off-handed fashion, including Cendrillonne, Bouki, and Catafo, to name a few. Despite their inclusion, however, the reason for the prominence given to these specific individuals in the chapter itself was left unexplained. True, it may seem obvious that one ought to discuss the most important character in Carrière’s Cendrillonne, and that of course this would of be Cendrillonne herself—but why is she so important in the first place? This is to say, there must be something about Cendrillonne’s role within the story that warrants giving her the entirety of a title, so to speak, rather than a shared one as in Bouki pis Lapin, or one that focuses on something else entirely, as with Carrière’s L’p ’tsit bateau qui allait sun mer pis sur terre (144-149). Even in the relatively
limited space that a folk tale provides, there are presumably main, as well as supporting
characters that fill the narrative and provide it with the focus necessary to actually tell a story.
What is not clear, though, is why \textit{(ra)conteurs} or their audience would care enough to continue
telling or listening to stories about \textit{these particular characters}. Why would such figures even
matter to them at all?

If this question does not seem particularly perplexing, one need only look to a counter
example from the world’s oral tradition. Although eventually written down by Homer, the \textit{Iliad}
and the \textit{Odyssey} are generally thought to owe their development in part to the same kind of
storytelling found in Franco-American folklore, representing narratives that were repeated orally
by storytellers across generations (Martin 42-44). At the center of these epics are figures like
Odysseus and Achilles, who stand larger than life and perform deeds beyond the capabilities of a
normal person. Odysseus, for instance, is described as even in the simple act of throwing a discus
being superhumanly better than anyone around him (\textit{Odys}. 8.185-199), much less to say in his
more well known prowess in outwitting cyclopes or constructing wooden horses. In English we
call such characters “heroes,” a word coming from an Indo-European root meaning to “serve” or
“protect” (Watkins 76), and not only do the “heroes” of Homeric tradition fulfill this
etymological obligation, they do so in an exciting, larger than life way. It is no surprise that the
stories featuring them have been told and retold for millennia.

Many characters in Franco-American folklore, on the other hand, do not seem
particularly “heroic” at all. Carrière’s \textit{Cendrillonne} features a young girl whose greatest feats are
being attractive and having a “\textit{marraine}” (142) who is a fairy. It is only in the Claudel version
where she even begins to have a personality, gently mocking her sisters when they tell her of the
mysterious beauty at the ball (Claudel 178). Bouki and Lapin, meanwhile, seem to be mostly
concerned with their own wellbeing. In *Bouki pis Lapin* we see Lapin casually steal butter from Bouki (Carrière 30), before Bouki then threatens Lapin when he discovers the arguably minor theft (31). In *C’est Bouki mon cher mari!* (Carrière 23-25), Bouki slaughters an entire family for his own amusement. These are the sorts of stories that have been recorded in volumes of Franco-American folklore, not retellings of the exploits of Odysseus—or even “tall tale” style accounts of real French heroes like Jeanne d’Arc—but rather tales about crafty animals and fairy-blessed peasant women. The heroic qualities of the epic myth are distinctly absent.

However this is in line with what can generally be expected from folk stories. Folklorist Max Lüthi believes that “fairytale heroes,” as he calls them, contrast quite starkly with the giant figures of Western myth. He says that these characters are often portrayed as being alone, sometimes literally, but often due to their status as orphans or the youngest or most outcast member of their family (134-6). Carrière’s Cendrillonne provides the clearest example of this, surrounded as she is by two stepsisters and a stepmother who force her to do all the chores around the house, all while withstanding constant belittlement (Carrière 142-3), but we see similar characters in Claudel’s Finet, a youngest daughter (Claudel 161), or Fortier’s “Pove Ti Garçon” (“Poor Little Boy”) (90). Lüthi also claims that these characters have “no specific abilities,” and so must receive help from an outside source (137-8). This of course perfectly describes any version of Cendrillon, for whom even the quality great attractiveness is just a product of magical intervention. See, for example, one of the few passages that give a direct description of her in Claudel’s version of her story:
“Sãdriyôn a pri’l fouet. A l’a fouete troua foua. Al a sorti. Al ete bel. Al ave’l plu joli lêj e le souye e tou sa ki voule ale avek.”

“Cendrillon took the whip. She hit it three times. She left her home [for the ball]. She was beautiful. She had the prettiest clothes and silks and all that someone would want to have.”

(Clauidel 177)

She is not described in the text as “bel” (“beautiful”) or with “l plus joli lêj” (“the prettiest clothes”) until after she hits the fairy’s whip three times. Meanwhile, in Jarreau’s Catafo (4-8), the titular character similarly must receive a warning from the evil Jiabe’s wife in order to avoid being killed. It is unlikely that a child would otherwise have had any chance at fighting or outwitting such a monster without the advantage this provides. Although even Odysseus had Athena to offer words of wisdom, for the characters in the folk tales in these three volumes, assistance goes beyond simple guidance or counsel. In fact, it can be necessary to their very existence.

Moreover, in contrast to the larger than life quality of characters like Odysseus, the folk “heroes” of Franco-America are often portrayed as being literally diminutive. Clauidel’s volume alone includes such characters as “Ti Jâ” (“Little John”), “Ti Chfeu d’or” (“Little Golden Hair”), “Ti Chapilô Rouj” (“Little Red Riding Hood”) and “Ti Pouset” (“Thumbkin”) (iii-iv). Carrière’s collection includes many of these as well, adding in “L’P’tsit Lapin” (“Little Rabbit”), “P’tsit Dzuc” (“Little Duke”), “L’p’tsit vacher” (“The Little Cowboy”), and “P’tsit Pierre l’farmeur” (“Little Peter the Farmer”) to the mix (v-vi). This is once again in line with folk tradition, as Lüthi writes that “fairytale heroes” are often “the most peripheral members of society” (136). In other words, they are those who would normally stay out of sight and out of mind, something
expressed no better way than in the stature conveyed by their names. Rather than “John the Great” or “John the Lion Hearted,” it is the humbly labeled “Little John” who graces the pages of these collections. Such characters do not lead armies, nor can they even stand above the people around them—they are the small and weak, the youngest children, the animals, the orphans. Who among these would anyone jump to label as a hero?

Finally though, beyond even the lack of physical or natural greatness that Franco-American folklore portrays, it is the strange morals of many of its characters that make them so seemingly un-“heroic.” To return one final time to the Classical example, modern day concerns of slavery, violence, and sexism aside, it is hard not to see Odysseus as a force for good in his own story. If nothing else, the character has become famous for his determination to get home and return order to his long-neglected kingdom, such that few would question that this is at least nominally “heroic” morality. But conversely, again consider Carrière or Claudel’s many stories about Bouki and Lapin. Where is the “heroism” in these? It is certainly not shown when the characters commit acts of theft (Carrière 29, 31; Claudel 106, 111, 113, 116) or violence (Claudel 108, Carrière 30). Even the various Cendrillons of these collections are really morally neutral at best, doing little to benefit anyone other than themselves, and certainly not repaying or simply thanking their godmothers for all their assistance (Carrière 142-144, Claudel 297-302, 303-307, 308-310). Carrière’s C’est Bouki, mon cher mari! (23-25) features perhaps the worst characters of all, including a negligent father, a vengeful mother, and of course a version of Bouki who seems to be almost psychopathic. While these are just a few instances in a whole oral tradition, and it would of course be possible to find exceptions, they point to a repeated narrative focus on figures whose very morality simply cannot allow them to be called “heroes."
Perhaps then, the best way to describe the main characters in Franco-American folklore is simply as “protagonists.” True, this term is much less evocative than “hero,” but in this way it is also less beholden to the expectations such a word commands. Unlike “hero,” the roots of protagonist simply come from a rather limited Ancient Greek meaning, signifying the actor who was first, either in order or importance of their appearance, in a play (Murray 1604). Extended to folklore however, this etymology works nicely to describe the principle characters in Franco-American tales. Cendrillonne is the first, and only, named character in her story—the stepsisters, stepmother, father, and fairy godmother each get their due, but it is Cendrillonne who is mentioned again and again, and it is Cendrillonne who appears in each and every scene that is described. The same is true for Bouki and Lapin, as well as Catafo. This pattern in fact holds true throughout Carrière, Claudel, and Jarreau’s volumes: although other, unnamed characters may be mentioned first, it is the first named character who is typically of most importance throughout the narrative. Even L’ptsit bateau qui allait sun mer pis sur terre (144-149) seems to fit the pattern, bizarrely enough, since the “bateau” (boat) is mentioned before even the character Little John, who might otherwise receive first billing, and is ultimately referenced more frequently throughout the narrative. In short, they are the ones who the stories are actually about. While the roles of these characters cannot be described as particularly heroic, as protagonists they hold the center stage.

This nomenclature is also useful because it occasionally allows for a ready contrast that can make understanding why we should root for these characters slightly easier. Figures like the Jiabe or the stepsisters are, in a word, “antagonists” because they both oppose the actions of the characters who act as the narrative focus and often even wish to do them actual harm. Carrière’s stories about P’tsit Jean provide some of the clearest examples of this, such as in P’tsit Jean,
l’l’ion, l’loup pis l’eurnard (21-23) where “ein vieux qui était mauvais” (“an evil old man”) goes so far as to lock him in a room with a lion. Despite the occasional moral transgressions of folk protagonists, rarely do they act in such a deliberately malevolent fashion without reason. In this way, in C’est Bouki, mon cher mari!, it is easier to actually see the mother, despite her not being the character who appears most in the narrative, as the story’s protagonist due to her battle against the clearly more evil Bouki and who, incidentally, is implicitly featured in the title by being the one speaks the “C’est Bouki” (“It’s Bouki”) warning to her “mari” (“husband”). Yet at the same time, there are still many stories that lack any true protagonist/antagonist dynamic.

Bouki pis Lapin is one example, with both characters taking turns antagonizing the other, while Carrière’s L’p’tsit bateau qui allait sun mer pis sur terre (144-149) is another, since although this story arguably features the boat as a kind of inanimate protagonist, in this case there is no one who ever truly threatens its “wellbeing.” In the end, although the “antagonists” sometimes emphasis the relative goodness, or at least not-badness, of folk protagonists, they are not a consistent means of analyzing every story.

Still then, even with the ultimate choice to use “protagonist” rather than “hero” to describe the characters in Franco-American folk tales, the fundamental question remains: what about them makes such narratives so appealing? Stories do not simply spring into existence out of nothing, and thus there must be some reason for the repetition that has allowed them to span across generations. One possibility that will be explored more in Chapter Four is that they are simply entertaining, that regardless of their un-“heroic” natures, audiences derive enough amusement from hearing about figures like Cendrillonne or Bouki and Lapin that they continue to tell and retell stories featuring them. However likely this may or may not be, though, it is neither a particularly interesting nor satisfying response. Franco-Americans are not repeating
every single story they hear—as we have already seen, there are stories like *Aladin pis Adrien* that have limited dissemination across the tradition relative to others—and furthermore, they are choosing to tell stories about these characters over more “heroic” ones who otherwise seem like they would be more interesting, at least on face. In short, there must be something about *these particular characters* that actually make them compelling, and so causes them to be featured so prominently in stories across the Franco-American folk tradition.

Of the many possibilities, there is one that best gets to the heart of this thesis. Truly heroic characters are interesting, but there is something about them that makes it difficult to relate to their exploits. No person, no matter how talented, can ever match the mythic deeds found in works like Homer’s *Odyssey*, and so any connection between *audience* and *character* requires narrative elements that bring the latter down to earth and closer to the human experience. Because of this difficulty, even in modern media we laud authors like Stan Lee for taking literal superheroes and “humanizing” them (Kandell and Webster). However, this is something that is hardly necessary for folklore protagonists. As we have already seen, these characters—even the animals—are about as “human” as can be, with many of the flaws and weaknesses being a normal, un-“heroic” person brings. Even the frequent use of the unremarkable name “Jean” (“John”) for these protagonists lends itself to an “everyman” interpretation.\(^8\) More to the point, though, Franco-American audiences may have found the protagonists of their folklore particularly relatable because of how well such characters represent their own lives. This is to say, a folktale demonstrating what is prototypically Serbo-Croatian would probably not hold sway with such an audience as strongly as one that demonstrates

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\(^8\) This name occurs more frequently than any other in the stories. In Carrière, 18 out of 73 stories concern someone named “Jean” or “John,” in Claudel it is 5 out of 30, and in Fortier it is 4 out of the 12 that are about humans. Moreover, more remarkable names often convey some kind of lowered or outsider state. For example, “Ti Pouset” (Claudel 204) or all the “Cendrillons.”
attributes of their own Franco-Americanism, but by telling and listening to stories about characters with the same qualities that they themselves possess, Franco-Americans are able to engage in a meaningful way with their own experiences and identity.

Of course it is not enough just to say that the protagonists of these folk tales demonstrate “Franco-American” qualities—they must be shown to exist as well. Returning to the thematic center of this thesis, there are many ways to go about illustrating how these characters reflect the complexity of Franco-American identity, but what is most important is to show that, just as we saw throughout the last chapter in their settings, text, and histories, the protagonists of these stories represent the same divergent and unique combination of origins and influences. In the pages that follow, then, three “sub-aspects” of our broader aspect of interest, protagonists, each does a good job getting the point across. In brief, they are as follows: one, the language used by these characters; two, the way they are described in the narrative; and three—interestingly enough—the food that they eat. In these ways, we can begin to understand the Franco-Americanism of the folk protagonists in the stories at hand that allow them to be such compelling centers of narrative focus.

The first “sub-aspect” has already been somewhat spoken to in the previous chapters, and so requires only a little further explanation. In short, it is important to remember that the language used in folk tales serves a “thematic” purpose, as Richard Bauman would say. Thus, when a Franco-American protagonist speaks, it represents the particular Franco-American dialect or creole of its (ra)conteur and audience. This is why we see Lapin say “Yé té pélé moin pour ein bap’tème” (“They’re calling me for a baptism”) (Jarreau 11) in one story, while in another he says “I’en a queuques-anes qui crient aprés moin” (“There’s some people calling me”) (Carrière 30). The sentences are close enough in meaning, but in the first he is speaking the Franco-
American creole of the black Creole who told the story, and in the second it is in the Franco-American French dialect of Missouri. What is interesting, however, is that both sentences—although conveying the same information with different lexicon—strike us as being “French.” There is no reason to think that these are German or English vernaculars, and for anyone who does not fluently speak the dialect or creole, the first step in understanding their meaning requires translating them back, in a sense, into the “original” French.

This thus connects the language used by these protagonists with the European linguistic roots of the people who told stories about them, but we can see equally well how their discourse reflects qualities born on the American continent. Even between the dialects and creoles that make up Franco-American vernacular, there are similarities in the way they diverge from Standard French, similarities that manifest in the dialogue. For example, in the previous sentences we see the first person object “moin” (rather than the Standard French “moi”), which in fact carries over across the collections of stories (e.g. Claudel 100; Fortier 92 among many others). Another common recurrence is “ti” (“petit” in S.F. or “small” in English) which we saw recur in many of titles mentioned previously, but also appears in dialogue, such as when Lapin calls calls someone a “ti fiy” (“little girl”) (Claudel 108), or when a mother speaks about one of her “ti garçon” (“little boys”) in a Fortier narrative (92). It would be nearly impossible to exhaustively list all such examples, but the point is that for the dialogue used by these characters, both in its fundamental connection to Standard French and France, as well as the similarities in its differences that arose in the centuries since colonization, there are clear representations of the same kinds of Franco-American language we saw discussed in the second chapter.

What is really much more interesting, however, is the way these linguistic choices by the (ra)conteurs interplay with how the characters are described and so the second “sub-aspect.” For
example, we have seen that both the character Bouki and the word giving him his name are originally from Africa, yet in this particular folklore tradition, Bouki himself has been changed to fit the new context he finds himself in. Not only does he, like Cendrillonne, use French dialects found only in America—and thus also not in Africa—but his very identity has seemingly begun to shift toward being Franco-American. Not many 19th or early 20th-century Franco-Americans could reasonably be expected to have much contact with hyenas, so how are they able to continue to tell stories about one?

Instead, Bouki is necessarily forced into a sort of amorphous, noncommittal existence. Claudel believes that (ra)conteurs and their audiences generally saw Bouki as a rabbit like Lapin (371), but this does not fit very well with his predatory behavior in *C'est Bouki, mon cher mari!*, nor does it really hold when he and Lapin are farming, calling each other “boug,” (fellow), or otherwise acting like two humans might (Claudel 106, 229). In one Fortier story, Bouki is even suggested as the father of a, presumably, human male (Fortier 64), and for that matter, Lapin himself is shown at one point owning chickens (Claudel 111), which is fairly suspect behavior for a rabbit. Claudel posits that Bouki stories may adapt elements of European Renard the fox narratives (371), however again this is an incomplete picture, ignoring the African influences on the character as well as the fact that in stories like the aforementioned *P’tsit Jean, l’lion, l’loup pis l’eurnard*, “eurnards” (foxes) are clearly labeled as such. In the end, like the Franco-American identity itself, Bouki transcends his origins.

This single example is representative of the whole nature of the way Franco-American folk protagonists are described. First, the most fundamental description is one’s name, and the names of Franco-American protagonists serve to highlight the same complex origins and influences we have been discussing since the introduction to this thesis. For example, while
Carrière’s “Cendrillonne” is clearly connected with the French “Cendrillon,” and even other similar European names like “Cinderella” or “Aschenputtel,” it also demonstrates a clear linguistic change—the double “n”—that we see in Franco-American words from Missouri like “maisonne” (versus the S.F. “maison” or “house”) (Carrière 22). Moreover, in one Cajun version called “Cendrilloous” found in a different collection (Charles 285-297), we see a distinct genealogical line from the Cajun “Cendrilloous” to a version “La petit anguilllette, ou Cendrilloous” (Charles 268-271) that was told by the Acadians who would go on to become Cajuns in Louisiana. As we have seen in the discussion of folk protagonist stature, these names can serve as basic descriptions of the characters, but they also provide clear illustrations of their diverse cultural and ethnolinguistic heritage—or at least that of the Franco-Americans themselves.

Beyond names, in the same way that descriptions of Bouki or Lapin have been adapted to make them fit into the Franco-American framework, we see this across the tradition for descriptions of other protagonists. There are stories such as Fortier’s Jean Des Pois Verts (89-91) or Ti Doigt (75-81) where characters are described as being black, presumably to better match the ethnicity of their (ra)conteurs and audiences. It is probably unlikely that white Europeans would tell stories about people who are of different races—at least outside of the occasional isolated “exotic” story like the aforementioned Ali Baba pis Boustapha—but among the black Franco-Americans, adding such descriptions into their narratives is natural and understandable. However, as we do not see words like “gumbo” in Carrière’s stories, there are also not these explicit references to race as we have seen in Fortier’s or even in Claudel’s (149) collections. It is not solely the inclusion of “blackness” that makes the descriptions of these stories representative of the Franco-American identity, but rather the fact that they all work to
incorporate the variety of origins and influences that makes up their people into the pre-existing European linguistic and narrative framework that had been passed down for centuries.

Finally, the third “sub-aspect” worth discussing is a less direct, though equally telling, component of the representation of protagonists in Franco-American folklore. Mythologist Tamra Andrews writes that “Food myths and food symbolism permeate ancient literary traditions” (1), and this is as true in the folk stories of Franco-America as in any tradition across the world. To Andrews, food is so frequently a part of traditional narratives because it is directly connected to the human experience, to what allows people to live and thrive (ix-x). What a people eat then is directly connected with who they are. But because each culture or society has different foods, just as the dialects spoken or descriptions given bring attributes of Franco-American life to the characters in these texts, the food the protagonists eat can connect them with their audiences as well. By looking at instances of prototypically Franco-American food that are featured in these stories, we may in fact see another crucial attribute of the identities of the people who told and listened to them.

For whatever reason—perhaps the same one that led to food being one of the Cajuns greatest contribution to the American cultural landscape (Bernard 49-51)—Claudel’s volume is particularly full of such examples. There are of course the aforementioned references to “gōbo” (“gumbo”) (Claudel 97, 208), but we additionally see several others throughout the text. “Mai” (“corn”) (Claudel 129) is one notable example, which is of course somewhat famously associated with the intermingling of European settlers and American Indians natives on the American continent (Mariani “corn”). There are also the very region-specific “kayou” (“clabber” (Claudel 243)) (Claudel 120), a type of soured milk eaten by people across the American south (Mariani “clabber”), as well as “pakān” (“pecans”) (Claudel 210), the nut with perhaps the strongest ties
to that same region and which was both first cultivated by black Creoles in Louisiana and also another example of borrowed American Indian lexicon (Mariani “Pecan”). Carrière’s Bouki pis Lapin, meanwhile mentions wheat and butter (30), two food items that, though not particularly unique to Franco-Americans, were certainly found in their cooking (Beulne 29-30). The same can be said of the “biscuit” referenced by Fortier (92) (Beulne 29-30), and all three of these are distinct examples of food carried over to the New World from Europe (Mariani “Biscuit,” “Butter,” “Wheat”), in this way serving to also represent the European origins of Franco-Americanism. Andrews’ book is titled Nectar and Ambrosia, named she says for the ancient words for the food of the gods (ix-x). Yet the protagonists of Franco-American folklore do not sip nectar, nor do they eat ambrosia. Instead, they eat the same humble, earthly foods that their audiences did.

As one final note, it is worth speaking briefly about the possible counterexamples to the idea of Franco-American protagonists that also exist within their folk tradition. As previously mentioned, there are some characters like Carrière’s Aladin or Ali Baba who do not necessarily consistently represent the origins of the Franco-American identity, and whose stories seem to be somewhat odd inclusions in the oral tradition. While this remains true, these characters nevertheless display some distinct attributes of Franco-American life that serve to bring them closer to the identity of the people telling these stories. For instance, in Ali Baba pis Boustapha (Carrière 220-224), Ali Baba is described as a “chasseur” (“hunter”) who lives in a “forêt” (“forest”) (221), while in the Galland version, which is presumably closer to the original Arabic narrative, he must “couper du bois” (“cut wood”) (Galland 306) to make ends meet. Although not a tremendous difference, it does put the character a little more in line with a figure, the coureur du bois, who would have been very familiar to Franco-Americans. Like this version of
Ali Baba, *coureurs* were hunters who spent their lives in the forest, facing threats no less
dangerous than the forty thieves Ali Baba encounters (Watts 92-110), and who were as close to
real adventurers as the Franco-Americans probably knew. Furthermore, as with “Cendrillonne”
versus the original “Cendrillon,” “Boustapha” is in a sense linguistically a Franco-American
adaptation of an originally Arabic name, which is— in Galland at least— written “Baba
Moustafa” (319). Even for these stories, removed as they are from the clear-cut origins of
Franco-America, their repetition in this folk tradition has made them better representative of the
Franco-American identity.

Even after all this, however, it may seem a little difficult to accept the conclusion that
these protagonists are actually Franco-American. How can Cinderella, or even Cendrillonne, be
from Missouri? What is important to remember is that the generalizations made here do not
extend to other folk traditions. As we move into the next chapter, we will continue to see
examples of how the Franco-American identity is represented in different aspects of their
folklore. Although some analysis can apply to folklore as a whole, the real importance in this is
when it does not. The characters in these folk tales are not interesting because they are in any
way “heroic” figures— they are interesting because in *these specific instances* they work to
illustrate a unique part of America’s cultural heritage. To the Franco-Americans themselves, this
would have meant that they could better relate to and sympathize with the protagonists they are
hearing about. But to us today, reading the stories fifty to a hundred years after they were last
spoken aloud, it means that even in the stories of an unfortunately named girl or two animals of
indeterminate species, we can begin to get a picture of a way of life that has otherwise almost
entirely vanished before our eyes.
Chapter Four

Folk Tale Morality

Having examined where Franco-American folk tales came from, as well as whom they are about, we can move on to the similar discussion of what lessons they convey and, of course, how this represents the Franco-American identity. For this analysis, while the plots of these stories are interesting, they are actually fairly incidental. Outside of a few details here and there—mostly ones that were covered in the second chapter’s discussions of origins—the narratives of the Franco-American folk tales discussed here are never sufficiently based in reality to offer much insight into the lives of their audiences. One can assume with a somewhat high degree of confidence that no fairy godmother ever helped a Franco-American get ready for a party, nor did any of their children ever get left in the woods to fight the Devil. However, it is possible that behind these narratives, so to speak, are ideas that can speak to the certainly more mundane existences of their (ra)conteurs and audiences. While it will be first necessary to establish that such underlying lessons exist, once this is done we can continue to clarify exactly how the stories Franco-Americans told were representative of their cultural and ethnolinguistic identity.

The first issue to tackle must then be the proof that there is in fact meaning behind Franco-American folk tale narratives, and that this in turn plays into the concepts surrounding the transmission and reproduction of folk tale narratives that have been discussed thus far. Earlier, there was a suggestion made that folk stories were only repeated because of the entertainment they provide. This “null hypothesis” of folk tale morality, which in essence suggests that they were told purely for the amusement they bring, disregards almost any of the teleological implications of folk storytelling. In this way, normally—outside of special instances,
such as when being interviewed by folklorists—folk stories may be told during social events, family gatherings, or any other such occasion, but regardless, there is not any other “point” to the story, no reason for its existence other than the immediate emotional response it elicits. The problem with this conception, at least for the purposes of this analysis, is that there is little evidence that could be provided to either support or refute it. It is easy to write something like “the character Bouki appeared in so many stories across the tradition because his antics delighted Franco-American audiences,” but in truth there is no way to know what went through their heads, for neither Carrière or Claudel, nor Fortier or Jarreau, ever gave concrete, explicit proof of the emotional states of the people listening to these stories. Carrière may write something like “the wide range of the selection brings out forcefully the various aspects of the Creole mind, which, often, takes…delight in the somewhat course humor suggestive of the old fabliaux…”

(Carrière 10)

yet this is really no better than an informed presumption on his part unless he includes more substantial evidence to back up his interpretation. At least in this specific case, there simply is not physical or recorded proof one way or the other.

Thus, although folk stories probably provided entertainment, chalking their existence entirely up to this fact would paint an incomplete picture. This is particularly true considering the fact that there is evidence, both within the Franco-American tradition and for folklore generally, that folk stories had meanings that, if not entirely didactic, were at least told with some degree of moral intent. Some examples of these are clearer than others. In Carrière’s Cendrillonne, for instance, the protagonist’s sisters are not particularly pleasant, and so it is no surprise that they do not receive the same “reward” that she ultimately does, since they are at least in comparison
less deserving than her. It is easy to see how, even if the lesson of the story is not exactly “one ought not be mean to their step-siblings,” it at least conveys a certain sense of what is right and wrong. This is similarly the case in stories like Fortier’s *Ti Doigt* (74-81) or Claudel’s *Jack e se chyê* (132-141), where we see “antagonists” of the sort described in the previous chapter suffering repercussions such as death for their actions (Fortier 80; Claudel 141).

Still, this is not the clearest way these stories reflect morality. As we have seen, it is difficult to characterize every character in folklore as being entirely “good” in a conventional sense—more often than not, there are some whose successes are not tied to any particular virtue they possess. To this end, probably the best example to discuss would be the “tricksters.” This folk tale archetype, encompassing famous figures from the worlds’ oral traditions like Hermes and Anansi (or from Franco-American folklore itself, Bouki and Lapin) are not necessary “immoral,” according to folklorist Thomas Hyde, but rather “amoral [emphasis his]” (10) characters that act in ways blurring the distinction between good and evil. Their primary motivation is often is simply their “appetite” (17), which manifests itself through impulse and cupidity, whatever this may entail. In particular, “profane” tricksters like Bouki are driven towards earthly ends rather than any kind of higher, much less to say, noble pursuits. According to Hyde, such “profane” tricksters are very typical of African narratives (33), and so once again we see the multicultural, multiethnic origins of Franco-Americanism represented. For example, stories such as *C’est Bouki, mon cher mari!* (Carrière 23-25), *Bouki e Lapin abitâ* (Claudel 113-115), and *Compair Bouki et Macaques* (Fortier 24-27) all feature this same originally African trickster figure, Bouki, who is motivated by base urges such as bloodlust (Carrière 24) or hunger (Claudel 114; Fortier 26). The real question, then, is why would stories about such a figure continue to be told, thousands of miles from where he was “born?”
There is one possibility that does not begin to stretch credulity too far. Folklorists William Doty and William Hynes suggest that the concept of “metaplay,” whereby “trickster” characters actually work to demonstrate societal expectations through their flagrant disregard for them, is an important component to the moral content of folk tales. In other words, because children and other members of a folk tale’s audience are exposed to ideas of what is right and wrong in regular, day-to-day life, they are familiar enough with the basic moral system they live under to know when it is being broken. By showing characters who—to varying degrees of success—break the rules, the system is actually in a sense put in a spotlight and consequently reinforced (30). We see something like this in Carrière’s Bouki pis Lapin (29-31) or Claudel’s Bouki e Lapên dâ la boukâyer (110-113), where minor acts of theft and violence committed by these characters against each other or neighbors contrast with how members of poor, close-knit communities should behave, communities that as we have seen would have been familiar to Franco-Americans. Furthermore, these incongruities are in a sense why such stories were entertaining at all—if they had simply involved two animals working in a field before returning to their respective homes at the day’s end, they would both be less amusing and have far less moral impact. Probably, the very fact that audiences (presumably) realize these stories demonstrate ethically suspect behavior is one reason they have been engaging enough to be able to transcend their African origins and be told across Franco-America.

“Tricksters” and their lessons are only one example of the morality that is demonstrated in Franco-American folklore, yet they speak to a fundamental point, that these stories possess the ability to convey moral standards held by the community telling them. “Metaplay” is a perhaps more indirect manifestation, but throughout the oral tradition there are further ways that get at this much more directly. Folklorist Maria Tatar, for instance, is particularly convinced of
storytelling’s ability to reach children, linking for them “death and disobedience” in such a way that stories serve as “cautionary tales” for those looking to buck parental authority (25).

Interestingly, however, for Tatar there is a difference between “fairy tales” targeted at children and the more violent “folk tales” aimed at adults, such that in the latter some of the didactic intent is less pronounced (37-38). Therefore, Franco-American folk tales might have less pedagogical value than other similar narratives, since despite Fortier’s racist claim that the tales he collects were “related to children by childlike people” (ix), Carrière describes white adult Franco-Americans (who Fortier would presumably find less “childlike”) telling stories to each other (Carrière 8-9). In any case, it may be best to simply conclude with a qualified statement: it is unwise to assume a clear-cut lesson from every story, but there is the potential in these folk tales to carry greater meaning than may appear at first glance.

Yet with at least the potential for moral content in folklore thus established, it becomes possible to more clearly raise the same type of questions we saw in the previous chapters. So far some small examples have been mentioned, but how does such content really reflect attributes of the “prototypical” Franco-American identity? That is, what exactly about moral lessons in their folk stories is “Franco-American?” Just as the protagonists of these folk stories represent attributes that define their (ra)conteurs and audiences, the way morality is depicted may similarly reflect the values these people held, and so in turn reflects their identity. This is because identity goes beyond origins and current membership—to say, for instance, that one is a “Southerner” implies not only geographic, linguistic, or historic qualities, but often as well a certain kind of behavior that is seemingly representative of people from America’s southeastern states, and moreover, simple descriptions like “politeness” do not work to explain this behavior, because such concepts only have meaning when someone understands the value system that
causes it to be “polite.” However, in this way, by exploring the morality conveyed by Franco-American folk tales, we can see their value system represented, and continue to see another area in which the folk tales they told work to reflect their complicated identity.

First, though, it is probably best to begin with some background. Attempting to give a comprehensive account of the “morality” of a people is almost certainly a futile endeavor that would run afoul of all kinds of concerns over cultural relativism or any other of the host of issues that sociologists spend their lives studying. Additionally, an added complexity in describing Franco-Americans is that the descriptions of them we have today were often written by authors whose prejudice was intense. We have of course seen some of the wholly unfair views held by white observers about black Franco-Americans, but there are also similarly racist opinions that have been given toward Franco-Americans generally. Because, in their endeavors to expand westward, nineteenth-century Anglo-Americans coveted Franco-American land, they often resorted to denigrating the intellectual and moral capabilities of these people in order to justify seizing control (Banner 92-93). This comes across clearly in writings from the time, when authors makes such claims as traveler Henry Schoolcraft does when he writes that “it is but repeating a common observation to say, that in morality and intelligence, [Franco-Americans] are far inferior to the [Anglo-] American population.” (39). To say in return that this is an unfair characterization would be an understatement. Instead of battling through all this, it is probably better to try and describe where the values generally held across Franco-American culture came from, acknowledging at the same time that the beliefs of any given group of people are far too complicated to reduce to a few sentences.

This is backed up by the fact that, despite the condescension of some Anglo-America’s writers, better, more balanced perspectives do exist and clearly show the morality that was
present in Franco-American communities. Henry Marie Brackenridge—a nineteenth-century writer who was Anglo-American-born, but raised in French Missouri—lauded Franco-Americans for their “strict and exemplary” observance of Catholic religious doctrine (Recollections, 23). Another outside observer, politician Caleb Atwater, wrote after touring the Illinois Territory in the early 19th century that oft-repeated criticisms of their “enterprise” were quite unfounded (53). While Claudel does criticize the Franco-Americans of southern Louisiana for their treatment of American Indians (2), he nevertheless speaks highly and without hesitation of their “neighborliness” (20) and “close feeling of family ties” (22). Finally, even Henry Schoolcraft himself, who provided the questionable quote from the previous paragraph, qualifies his remark by stating that “it would be difficult to point out a town or village west of the Mississippi where there is greater attention to industry, morality, and religion than at [the Franco-American town of] Mine à Breton” (39). While it perhaps is true that Franco-Americans did not expand as readily or proselytize as ferociously as their Anglo-American counterparts, they by no means lacked moral structure, nor as Claudel points out (2), did they completely lack territorial ambitions. Any comments to the contrary represent the worst xenophobic bigotry of America’s imperialist past, and any values Franco-Americans may have had are rooted in the same basic honesty, decency, and intelligence that can be found in any people.

Their folklore, then, can be seen as illustrating the values that their morality comprised. For the purposes of this analysis, the values in a society are that which shows what is considered important, as well as how the society believes its members should act, and it is these together that are reflected in Franco-American folk tales. As folklorist Zack Zipes writes, “the folk tale is a part of a pre-capitalist people’s oral tradition [emphasis his] which expresses their wishes to attain better living conditions through a depiction of their struggles and contradictions” (122).
This framework, though certainly of a Marxist bent\(^9\), does give one way to go about determining which values really are salient and which ones are just products of a particular story’s narrative. In either the Claudel or Carrière Cendrillon(ne) story, for instance, it is not the case that being able to attend a ball in order to marry a prince would ever have been a “struggle” of anyone from either Louisiana or Missouri. At the very least, by the time these stories were recorded, Franco-Americans would have been United States citizens for over a century, and so free of any noble title. But the potential desire to rise in class and the social pressure to attend such community events are things that would have played a part in their lives, whether through the dances we have already discussed, or what Claudel calls “the wishful thinking of a peasant class under an aristocracy” (39), which he still believes to exist in Louisiana. Meanwhile, while finding a “Jiabe” in the woods might not ever cross the minds of a rationally minded Franco-American, the poverty that led to Catafo and his siblings being abandoned in the woods by their parents (Jarreau 4-9) could very well be. On this latter point at least, Zipes agrees, drawing the same conclusion in his analysis of the similar Hansel and Gretel story (128).

These are rather trivial examples, however in comparison with the story C’est Bouki, mon cher mari! (Carrière 23-25). It is worth taking a moment to really explore this narrative, because if there truly are “struggles” or “contradictions” on display here, they are certainly not clear at first glance. It is hard to see how people would fear someone like Bouki, whatever he is, imitating their voice and killing their children while they sleep. Looking more closely, however, there are in fact several ways in which this story might very well represent deep-seated concerns

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\(^9\) The reason this is caveated is that a Marxist interpretation would not necessarily follow from this thesis’ argument. If the only true “struggles” reflected in these tales came from class, then they would of course reflect this rather than the individual cultural or ethnolinguistic attributes of the people telling them. Because we see different “struggles” represented, there must be something else going on. This is not to say the Marxist view is incorrect, just tangential to the argument here.
of the people who told it. Looking to another example of a related, but “bourgeoisified”—as Zipes would say—narrative, in the European Brothers Grimm’s collection, there is a story called *The Wolf and the Seven Little Kids* (Grimm 22-25), where a mother goat leaves her children for the day, only for a passing wolf to imitate her voice and eat them all. What makes *C’est Bouki, mon cher mari!* really so much more terrifying is that, one, it is three human daughters who are killed by Bouki, two, that rather than eating them he “coupé l’cou à tous les trois” (“cuts all three’s throats”) (Carrière 24), and three, all this happens deep in the forest where nobody is around to save them. Grimms’ version ends with the classic “cutting open the belly and there they are all alive,” but in Carrière’s, all the mother can do is “coupé l’cou” (Carrière 25) of Bouki in return. There is clearly something more at play here.

Several possibilities emerge when considering the conditions that the people telling this story would have been under. Generally, as we have seen, by the 19th to 20th century Franco-Americans were isolated culturally and linguistically from their neighbors, almost totally alone on the North American continent. Their closest relatives would have been, for the most part, in Canada, separated by an arbitrary but firm national border. Moreover, this story comes from the oral tradition of the French Missouri, and except for perhaps among the black Creoles of Louisiana, there would have been no group of Franco-Americans as isolated as this one. When Carrière visited to record this story, he counted only “six hundred families” in the region (2), out of nearly four million people living in Missouri in 1940 (“1940 Census”). With no direct analogues in the Jarreau, Fortier, or Claudel collections, this story clearly represents a transformation of a European story by a particularly isolated subset of the Franco-American population into a version that reflects the unique issues surrounding their own experiences on the American continent.
Practically speaking, we see this in several places in the story. First, it concerns a family who forgo the relative safety of civilization in order to have the “maisonne en queue part dans l’bois” (“house in the woods”) (Carrière 23) that both parents seem to foolishly desire. Community is always important, but for Franco-Americans, it must have seemed doubly so, and the dangers that follow abandoning such safety a natural consequence. Regarding their language, meanwhile, Bouki is able to enter into the family’s house when he finally learns to say their secret phrase “mini mini caminant des fées, séparon donfait, conconq’ment” (24). While this is really probably just a narrative conceit, it does have interesting parallels to the ways that Franco-Americans might have identified each other “in the wild.” With language acting as a bond between them, simply being able to say a few words in their French dialect may have seemed in itself like the repetition of some kind of password, or even a signal that someone is trustworthy. And of course, finally it is worth noting that just as all Franco-Americans were “a people without a country” to guide them (Thorne 68), the mother’s own act of revenge is carried out under no legal authority, with no one commenting on the morality of her actions (Carrière 25). 

“C'est Bouki, mon cher mari!” is an undeniably dark and bizarre narrative, but it makes perfect sense that it was told in the way it was, by the people who told it.

To put an end to a lengthy diversion, “C'est Bouki, mon cher mari!” is thus of particular interest because of the admittedly confusing moral system it portrays, but through this lens of Franco-American “isolation” it begins to make sense. The values that come from this can be found in many different stories across the tradition, including those that have already been discussed in this thesis. Versions of Cendrillon(ne) are of course centered around community events, and it is through this system of support that Cendrillon(ne) herself is able to escape the difficulties she faces. Without having the opportunity the ball presents, she would still be
sweeping dust for her stepsisters, which of course also plays into the “wishful thinking” Claudel discusses (39). Meanwhile, stories such as *Catafo* (Jarreau 4-9), *Le piti perdu* (Claudel 129-132), *Jack e se chyê* (Claudel 132-141), and *Belle Finette* (Carrière 100-109) all display situations similar to that in *C’est Bouki, mon cher mari!*, whereby isolation puts the protagonists into mortal danger. In these stories, not only are children abandoned, and thus left isolated by their parents, but the stories themselves often begin with families far out in the woods, facing difficulties as a result. It is only through cooperation—often in the form of the “aid” that folk tale protagonists must receive—that they even survive.

The values of community and cooperation found in these folk tales can thus be seen as reflecting the same values that would be important to Franco-American life, as well as the “struggles,” as Zipes would say, that make them so important. The relationship between these and isolation was singled out because it seemed particularly salient to the complex, unique Franco-American identity discussed in this thesis. For a people who were isolated from their various roots, the Franco-American communities they belonged to would have been a way to maintain cultural and ethnolinguistic bonds, and so being in these communities would have been itself an important part of being “Franco-American.” Still, there are certainly other ways in which “struggles” faced by these people would be reflected in the values and morals of their folk tales. For example, in Fortier’s *Ti Doigt* (74-81) there is a vivid condemnation of the horrors of slavery, something that would have been quite real for black Franco-Americans, even decades after their nominal liberation. Claudel speaks of the poor treatment of American Indians by Franco-Americans (2), a relationship that is then attested to in two stories in Jarreau’s collection, *Ein American et ein sovage* (13-14) and *Le Francais et Sovage-yé* (14-15) where it is the “sovage” (“savage”) American Indian who is ultimately punished, and the “American” or
“French” (maybe even Franco-American) protagonists who are rewarded for outwitting them. It is also worth noting, of course, that these particular Jarreau stories were told by white creoles from Louisiana (Jarreau 15). For good or for bad, all three of these stories reflect the ways Franco-Americans would have viewed the issues of race that affected them, issues that also would not have been present in these same forms in Europe or Africa. Again, these stories portray a moral system, and in these, demonstrate the moral identity of the people who told them.

In the end, for all that has been said in this chapter, it is important to remember the distinction that has been drawn since the discussion of origins. We do not know how audiences reacted to the moral lessons these stories reflect, or whether they even took them to be lessons at all. None of authors of the collections used in this thesis make any guesses, and in this chapter it is only broadly, across the entire world oral tradition that we have seen academics discuss the efficacy of folk storytelling pedagogy. Nevertheless, what has been shown here is that once again, just as in the representation of their origins and nature of their protagonists, what is being said by the (ra)conteurs—the texts that result from their narration—have begun to change to reflect attributes prototypical of their unique Franco-American identity. For us, now in a world with no end to opportunities for ethical instruction, this is what makes the morals of these stories such an interesting thing.
Conclusion

Although not always in a happy fashion, one certainty of folk tales is that they will come to an end. An analysis of them, of course, must do the same. In short, this thesis has argued that the francophone or French-creole folk tales told in the former Upper and Lower Louisiana Territories are representative of the “Franco-American” identity of the people that told them, and from this, has suggested that we can then identify attributes of a “prototypical” Franco-American identity from the region. Now, to conclude its argument in full, we must discuss exactly what ultimately can be taken away from this analysis. There are three questions that remain, and in answering these we will see what this thesis has really been about, as well as what limitations it faced and where its argument could be expanded upon or further developed in future works. With this, then, an end of sorts can be reached.

The first question is thus fairly simple: what has been shown? The first chapter demonstrated the theoretical and practical underpinnings for this thesis’ approach—that is, Bauman’s “philology of the vernacular” coupled with concepts from linguistic prototype theory—while the remaining three worked to examine the discrete instances where these ideas were made manifest in the text, grouped together in chaptered categories. Throughout each of these it was also equally important to show why the categories themselves were chosen, and more specifically, to show why they not only demonstrated attributes of Franco-Americanism, but of the qualities of folk storytelling that actually allow this thesis’ approach to be most effective. It was necessary, in other words, to show why these were elements of folklore that demonstrated Franco-Americanism, and not some other literary devices. In this way, a structured and internally consistent analysis has been maintained throughout this argument, rather than just a regurgitation of related words and phrases that appear throughout these texts.
What has therefore been shown by this thesis is that Franco-American folk tales have changed, through a process that here has been labeled “improvisation and interchange,” so that they better display the decidedly complex historical, cultural, and ethnolinguistic origins of the Franco-American people themselves. We have seen where this has happened broadly in the language and subjects of these “texts,” but also in more specific aspects such as in their protagonists and moral lessons. Importantly, this thesis has not argued that any of these changes are by necessity constrained to Franco-America, but rather are representative of prototypical attributes of the Franco-American identity. For instance, the use of the word “pecã” (“pecan”) in one Franco-American story (Claudel 210) does not mean that stories told on the American continent by other groups of people would not have used a word like “pecan” (in fact it would makes sense that they did, according to the argument made in this thesis) nor that every single Franco-American who heard this story ate the nut. Rather, what is very likely is that we would not find references to such foods in the original European or African stories from which Franco-American folklore originated, but instead would—because of their cultural salience—find them as we have in the stories Franco-Americans told. Ultimately then, what this thesis can really be said to have shown is that through the inclusion of changes such as these, folk tales have become a productive means of representing the complicated identity of the Franco-American people.

So, moving on to the second question that remains, what cannot be shown? This is a much broader inquiry, however it is possible to give a few concrete answers. First, it is worth repeating one final time the geographic and temporal restrictions that have run throughout the analysis in this thesis. The four collections referenced here cover about fifty years and several hundred thousand square miles, yet even this does not cover the breadth of Franco-Americanism that has existed in the New World. These stories may possibly reflect attributes that defined the
Franco-American identity in similar communities in Quebec, the Caribbean, South Carolina, or New England, but the concepts of “improvisation and interchange” and “philology of the vernacular” used in this thesis’ argument would not support such claims—though they would also not contest them—because the stories used here were not told by the people living in these places and so we cannot see how their own “improvisations and interchanges” would have played out. Similarly, they may possibly reflect attributes of Franco-Americans who lived outside of the timeframe that contains these collections, but any such claims must be tempered by the nature of this analysis.

To turn to a more personal discussion, I think it is additionally worth discussing what limitations I ran into over the course of my research. Originally I had intended to base my analysis on the Aarne-Thompson-Uther (ATU) folk story classification system, in essence selecting several “tale types,” then finding as many examples of Franco-American folk stories as possible for each one and comparing them, with the ultimate aim of identifying what similarities and differences between groups of Franco-Americans were reflected by the similarities and differences between the versions of each “type.” In the corpus of stories in Appendix A, for instance, I have still included two versions, one Missouri French and one Cajun, of ATU 510A, commonly called “Cinderella” (Uther 293-294). The problems with this approach were twofold. One, there were often not enough examples of stories clearly fitting each tale type I chose, and it was often difficult to determine when a certain type was being used or when there were elements of several present. Two, for the stories I even had, there was not enough historical or cultural documentation I could find and analyze within the span of a single semester to draw clear, meaningful distinctions between populations. Although there is a decent amount of research about the Franco-Americans who lived in the region and time discussed in this thesis—much of
which has been cited therein—the fact remains that a person could spend their lifetime trying to explore the various intricacies that make up the Franco-American identity. In the end, I had to limit myself to showing how certain of its more prototypical attributes were represented across the entire folklore tradition that I had at my disposal, regardless of how the individual narratives might have matched up structurally.

The third and final question is one that continues to be somewhat personal, asking in short, what is left to be shown? First, it is clear that my analysis could, with more time, be broadened to better capture the entirety of the “Franco-American” population. This of course could be achieved by exploring more folk tales, and one fruitful approach would be to take some of the audio-only databases that I have documented in Appendix B, like the Aroostook County Oral History Project, and transcribe them in a fashion similar to Claudel, Jarreau, Fortier, or Carrière’s works so that there are more vernacular “texts” to examine. It would also be useful to see what kind of folk tales are still being told in any formerly francophone regions, particularly ones like southern Louisiana that still seem to have a strong Franco-American presence. Shane K. Bernard’s book The Cajuns: Americanization of a People spends most of its time discussing what happened to this Franco-American group in the second half of the twentieth century, such as the simultaneous “exploitation and revitalization” (Bernard 112) of their culture in its last couple decades. It would be wrongheaded to say that the Franco-American identity has been totally assimilated into American culture, and so further folk tales analysis might reflect how this identity has changed in the last fifty years.

Finally, there has been a tiny amount of necessary stretching, so to speak, of the historicity in this thesis. Although in an ideal situation all sources of historical information would have been confined, at least in subject, to the timeframe established from the beginning, it was
sometimes more powerful to use evidence that most accurately reflects qualities of the Franco-American identity from outside these confines. For example, while Henry Marie Brackenridge wrote well before Carrière was even born, his first-hand, lived experience in Franco-America makes what he said stronger support for certain claims I made than even Carrière’s own, outsider, observations might have been. This was a deliberate choice on my part, however if this research were to continue in a larger and more in-depth study of Franco-American folktales and identity, I would want there to either be enough stories to better cover the entirety of Franco-American history—something that may very well be impossible if there were none recorded—or sufficient analysis of primary source historical documentation so as to not have to occasionally rely on claims that lie, at least partially, outside of the scope of this thesis.

Nevertheless, for all that has been qualified and caveated in this conclusion, the implications of the previous four chapters still stand. Today—even if someone in the United States can no longer go into an entirely French-speaking city as Lewis and Clark did—the remnants of Franco-American language and culture are still clearly a part of the national fabric. From Illinois to St. Louis, cities and states across what was Franco-America still bear the names given by their French progenitors. Today, Americans still eat creole or Cajun cooking, either from cookbooks at home or in restaurants that far exceed the boundaries of Louisiana. Each year they also hold celebrations like Mardi Gras that have their origin in Franco-American culture, and many Americans’ names even clearly show these roots, with francophone adaptations littering the nominative landscape. These remnants of Franco-Americanism represent an identity that has by no means completely disappeared.

The folk tales that remain are thus one more way of connecting with this piece of America’s cultural and ethnolinguistic heritage. Whether the stories within them continue to be
told or not, the collections made by Jarreau, Fortier, Claudel, and Carrière stand as reflections of the time, place, and people where they were made. In reading these folk tales, we see mirrored images of those who told and heard them, and in this way are able to understand who they truly were. Yet the point of all this is not just to demonstrate an interesting fact about these stories. It is rather to say that they should be read, that the Franco-American identity is both unique and complicated, totally deserving of exploration. For anyone, even a person who has no ties at all to the French who lived in the Upper and Lower Louisiana Territories, it is possible, with a little knowledge of French, to do this. Such interesting and accessible sources should not languish as artifacts, left untouched in a library or online database. Instead, the stories told by Franco-Americans, these amber-preserved depictions of their identity, should continue to be found, read, analyzed, and perhaps someday again, retold.
Appendix A

Corpus of Franco-American Folk Tales

The following five stories are typical of those found in the Franco-American oral tradition and were referenced most often in this thesis. For the sake of context, they have been included here in their full forms, with no editing except to correct a few clear typographic errors in the original collections.

“Cendrillonne” (Missouri French; Carrière 142-144)

C’est bon d’yous dzire eune fouès c’étaient ein vieux pis eune vieille. ‘L ontvaient eune fille: i’ l’app’laient Cendrillonne. La vieille alle est morte. Ç’a pas été ben longtemps, l’vieux i’ s’a eurmarié avec eune aut’ vieille veuve qu’avait deux filles, elle aussite. Les deux filles pis la belle-mère i’ maltraitaient Cendrillonne; i’ yi faisaient faire tout l'ouvrage, i’ yi donnaient pas d'linge pour aller neune part. Alle avait pas d'souyers, alle était tout l'temps nu-pieds. Ça s'fait que Cendrillonne a pouvait pas aller neune part. L'prince i' avait donné ein gros bal pour assayer à s'trouver eune femme. Les filles-là à la vieille i' sontaient après s'préparer pour aller au bal; ‘i s'peignaient, pis i’ s'frisaient, i’ s'pouponnaient deux, trois jours avant l'bal. L'après-midzi dzu bal, 'l ont commencé à s'poudrer, pis à s'friser encore, mais i’ nn'avait personne qui pouvait les chanzer ben comme Cendrillonne. Quand Cendrillonne a mettaient ein morceau d'linge sus leu dos, i’ restaient jolis. Cendrillonne a frisait leus ch'feux, pis i’ restaient jolis. Alle a d'mandé à ane d'ses sœurs pour yi préter eune robe pour aller au bal aussite. Sa sœur a y'a dzit: "Tsu eursembles à aller au bal, touè, Cendrillonne! Si tsu vas, i' t'quitteront pas renter."

La marraine à Cendrillonne était eune vieille fée. Alle a été ouère sa marraine dans l'après-midzi avant l'bal. Sa marraine a y'a d'mandé si a allait au bal. "Mais non, ma marraine," a dzit, "j'ai pas d'linge." -- "Va!" a dzit, "soûès pas inquiète. Après qu'les autres vont être partsies,
m'as aller t'agréyer." L'souère, après qu'es l'ont été partsies, sa marraine alle est v'nue, a s'a assis dans sa chambre. Cendrillonne, a l'a chanzée en vert pis des p'tsits pantoufles d'or. A dzit: "T'as aller pis tsu vas rester jusqu'à à minuit, mais pas plus tard que minnuit, t'attends." Alle avait six souris att'lées sus l'carrosse à Cendrillonne, pis ein gros rat qui le m'nait, pis la vieille fée, par sa magie, a tout chanzé ça en beaux ch'faux, pis l' Gros rat qui m'nait l'carrosse, alle l'a chanzé en homme qui avait eune grande moustache. A dzit: 'T'attends, si tsu testes là plus tard qu'minnuit. tsu vas t'trouver à pied."

Quand 'l a arrivé à la dans, l'prince a été la rencontrer. L' n'vait pas eune plus belle princesse que elle. L'prince i' restait rien qu'avec elle. Cinq minutes pour douze, Cendrillonne alle a parti, son carrosse était drètte là pour l'attendre. L'restant d'la nuit, l'bal i' valait pas grand'chose au prince. Il aimait pas les aut's filles qui étaient là. Quand ses sœurs sont eurvenues l'lend'main matin, i'ont dzit: "Cendrillonne, si tsu s'rais v'nue au bal hier au souère, t'aurais vu eune belle princesse." A leu-z-a dzit: "Teut' ben qu'alle était pas plus belle qu'moin." L'prince, lui i' était pas satisfait d'ça, il a eurdoublé son bal l'souère. Les sœurs d'Cendrillonne, i'ont parti d'bonne heure comme d'coutsume pour aller au bal. Après la brenante, sa vieille marraine à Cendrillonne est eurvenue. Alle l'a gréyée tou[t] en bleu, c'te fouès-là. "Rappelle-touè, ma fillole, passe pas minnuit." -- "Non, non," a dzit, "ma marraine."

Quand alle a arrivé au bal, l'prince a été la rencontrer à la porte, i' l'a faite rentrer. L' dansait pas avec personne d'aut' que elle. Cinq minutes pour douze, a s'a excusée au prince, i' fallait qu'a parte. L'prince a été la eurconduize jusqu'au carrosse. Alle est eurvenue. L'prince pas satisfait d'ça, i' eurdoublait son bal l'lend'main au souère. L' crouèyait d'garder la princesse ein peu plus tard. Quand Cendrillonne alle était partsie, la danse a valait pas rien au prince. Ses sœurs sont eurvenues. L'lend'main matin, i' dzisaient à Cendrillonne: "Si tsu s'rais v'nue au bal
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hier au souère, t'aurais vu eune belle princesse." -- "Ah!" a dzit, "teut' ben, alle était pas plus belle que moïn." L'souère, c'était ein autre gros bal. I' fallait qu'i eurtournent au bal encore. Après qu'les sœurs à Cendrillonne 'l ont partsi, la vielle marraine alle est eurvenue; alle l'a habillée tout[t] en blanc souère-là, des p'tsites pantoufles d'cristal, d'vitre. A y'a dzit: "Écoute ben, ma fillole, si tsu passes minnuit tsu vas t'eurtoutrouver avec ta vielle robe pis nu-pieds."

Ça fait Cendrillonne a s'plaisait si ben pis a trouvait l'prince si joli souère-là, alle a resté jusqu'à l'horlage a sonné douze. Alle a partsi à la course, alle a laissé l'prince, a s'a pas excusée ni rien. Quand alle a été pour descend' la gal'rie d'la maisonne d'la danse, alle a perdu eune d' ses pantoufles d'cristal. L'prince 'l a partsi par derrière elle; 'l a pas pu la rattraper, mais 'l a trouvée sa pantoufle d'cristal. Quand alle a arrivé oùse quon carrosse 'i était, 'i 'nn'avait pus d'carrosse ni rien. I' fallait qu'a s'en va cheux eux aut's, 'mieux alle a pu. Quand alle a arrivé là, sa marraine alle était pus là non plus. L'prince 'l a commencé à charcer la fille qui usait pantouf'-là. I'allait à toutes les maisonnes oùqu'i'avait des filles pour la faire mesurer pantouf'-là. Il a été à la maisonne à Cendrillonne. Les deux sœurs 'i ont assayé à mettre souyer-là." Cendrillonne alle a été pis alle l'a mis. C'était jusse sa bonne mesure. "Ah!" i' dzit, "v'nez avec moïn, à c't'heure; on va s'marier." L'a emm'né Cendrillonne cheux lui, pis i' l'a ben chanzée. I' dzit: "Vous êtes la même fille qui i' était v'nue à ma danse, à mon bal." Ses sœurs pis sa belle-mère sontaient si jalouses i'ont pas voulu aller au dziner à Cendrillonne.
“Sādriyōn” (“Cendrillon”) (Cajun; Told by Roberta Roy; Claudel 177-180)

Èn foua i nave troua seur. La plu jën s’áple Sādriyōn. Sādriyōn s’ete la servāt de deu zot seur. A pouve fer øryē k’a voule e a pouve pa ale nun plas.

Tou le sâmði o souar i nave è grā bal. Le deu seur ale tout le sâmði o souer, e i fale Sādriyōn le zed a s’abíye, e i fale juska a le zaport leur o. È sâmði o souar, apré k’i zete parti, i na èn fe ki vyē e ki di a Sādriyōn, “Tu veu ale o bal?”

A di, “Oue.”


I na èn t’seur ki di, “O! aret dō, toua! J va’t flāke ēn tap! T’e tro bet! Tu poure pa et jāme bel kōm sa!”

Sa fe, Sādriyōn a parti. I y’ōn flāke ēn tap, e a dize, “Pa plu bel kə mō, pa plu bel kə mō!”

Tou la smēn Sādriyōn a travaye dur, dur, e kā’l sâmði e vnu ākor, a le za ede a’s prepare, a le za pórtre leur o. A le za ede a’s chāje e tou. Kā i zō parti, al a pri sō fouet. A l’a fouete troua foua. Al a sorti. Al ete plus bel kə la prāmyer foua. Kā al a arive a la mezō, I prēs ete da la mezō,
pou el prân sò bra pou el râtre avek lui, e’i mòn a fe ê chmê pour el râtre. Ou! al ete telmâ bel! Al a u ê bô tâ! E kâ al a ete pare pou revnir, l près di, “Atâ, j va t’ramne.”

A di, “Nô merai.” A di, “I fo j’m’a râtourn mô tou seul.”

A s’e râtouren el tou seul. Kâ al a arive che euzot, al a pase ân eryer. Al a fouete’l fouet troua foua. Al e’rvanu âkor dâ sò mêm lêj k’al ave. Al a ete, a s’e kouche dâ’l fouaye avek sô chyê. Lânêm matê le deu seur s’lev. I zô di a Sâdriyon tou pou’l bal. I y’ô di pou’stô bel fiy, k’al ete plu bel kə l’ot sâmî e kômâ boukou byën abiye al ete. Sâdriyon dize, “Pa plu bel kə mô, pa plu bel kə mô!”

L’ot seur di, a di, “J va’t flâke ên pouse! T’e tro bet! Tu kône tu poure pa et jâmê bel kôm sa.” A y’a flâke ên pouse. Sâdriyôn a parti, â dizâ, “Pa plu bel kə mô, pa plu bel kə mô!”

Al ete avek sô chyê. A s’e asi dâ’l fouaye. Al a travaye dur tou l’ot smên. Sâmî o souar e’rvanu âkor. Al le za ede a’s prepare. E apre k’i zô parti, al a pri sô fouet. Al a fouete troua foua. Al ete plu bel kə le prômyer foua k’al ave ete o bal. Kâ al a arive a la mezô, l près ete a la port dô kour pluto k’ala port dô mezô pou la râkôtre. Al a pri sô bra. Al a râtre. I la lache pa. Al a dâse avek lui tou la nui. Kâ i sô vnu pou partir, l près di, “Atâ, j va t’ramne.”

A di, “Nô, i fo j’m’a râtourn mô tou seul.” Al a parti a marche, e al a perdu ên dô se souye. L près l’a ramase. I zô ete. I s’e kouche.

E lânêm i zô kômâse a lui dir pour la bel fiy âkor. A di, “Pa plu bel kə mô, pa plu bel kə mô.” Sa fe, i y’ô di d’ale dâ sô fouaye. I voule pa k’â sor paska al ete tro bet, al ore jâmê pu et bel kôm set fiy-la.

Sa fe, l près a parti bô matê, lui ousi. Il a parti avec l souye. Il a passe dâ chak mezô. I voule le fiy k’ave ete o bal muzur l souye pou vouar ekel ki povue’l met. Le fiy koupe leur pye, i
koupe leur zortey. I zeseye tou sa i naye moyê pou eseye d’met l souye, me i na persôn ki pouve’l met.

Sa fê, il ariv a la mezo de troua seur. Le deu seur ete asi, e i le za dmâde pou muzure’l souye. I zô muzure’l souye, me i pouve pa’l met. Il a atâdu’l ti chyê ki jape, ki dize, “Ma metres e avek mò dâ’l fouaye! Ma metres e avek mò dâ’l fouaye! Sa fê, i va ou’l chyê e i dmâd a le tit fiy, “I na kekê d’ot dâ la mezo?”

I diz, “O ouè, i na ên tit servât avek l chyê-la ãn eryer.”


“C'est Bouki, mon cher mari!” (Missouri French; Carrière 23-25)


I’ nn’avait ein bouki qui s’prom’nait dans les bois-là, pis il a vu les filles dans maisonne-là. I’ dzit: “I’ faut que j’vas charrer avec les filles-là pourtant; faut que j’trouve eune magnière d’charrer avec eux aut’s.” Il a resté à l’entour jusqu’à c’que l’vieux i’ vienne leu porter l’souper. ‘L a attendzu qu’le vieux aye chanter sa p’tsîte chanson: “Mini mini, caminant des fées, sépraron donfait, conconqu’ment.” Bouki i’ dzit: “Si j’peux chanter ça comme ça, à c’t’heure, j’pourrai charrer avec les filles.” L’bouki a été s’cacher dans l’bois, pis i’a assayé à chanter la p’tsîte chanson, mais i’ pouvait pas, i’était trop enroué. ‘L a été sus l’forgeron s’faire passer ein fer rouge dans l’gavion. ‘L est eurvenu, pis ‘l a rassayé; i’ pouvait pas la chanter encore, i’était encore trop enroué. ‘L a eurtourné sus l’forgeron s’faire passer ein aut’ fer rouge dans l’gavion. ‘L a écoutes quand l’vieux il est v’nul l’vend’main au souère porter à manger à ses filles, il a chanté tout douc’ment par en erriere l’vieux.

Là, i’ s’a en allé dans l’bois, pis il a chanté sa p’tsîte chanson fort; i’ pouvait la chanter jusse comme le vieux. “A souère,” i’ dzit, “m’as aller charrer avec les filles.” L’soüère, à à [sic]
peu près huit heures, ‘l a été, pis ‘l a chanté: “Mini mini, caminant des fées, séparon donfit,
conconqu’m’nt.” Les filles ‘l on dtzit: “L’a queque chose d’pas ben dans la maisonne d’Papa. I’
s’en vient nous qu’ri.” Alles étaient fièrt’tes d’sortsir. ‘L on descenzu l’pagnier, ‘l on ‘halé en
haut, pis quand ‘l est arrivé en haut, c’était ein bouki qui’i’était d’ans. I’ voulaient pas
qu’i’rent’, les filles. “Ah!” i’ dtzit, “j’sus v’n’u charrier justement ein p’tsit moment avec vous
aut’s. J’rest’ras pas longtemps.”

Taleure, les filles on commencé à assayer à l’renwèyer. I’ eurgardait par en dehors d’la
maisonne, pis i’ dzisait i’ faisait nouère, qu’i’avait peur.—M’as rester à coucher avec vous
aut’s,” i’ dtzit, “les filles.” Après qu’les filles ‘l on été endormies, i’ leu-z-a coupé l’cou à tous
les trois. L’souère, quand l’père ‘l est v’n’u pour les souègner, ‘l a chanté sa p’tsite chanson deux,
trois fouës; l’pagnier était déjà à terre, i’avait pas personne qui grouillait. L’vieux homme i’ dzit:
“Pargué! I’ s’auraient-i sauvées mes filles?” ‘L a monté en haut, pis les a trouvées avec l’cou
coupé tous les trois.

Il est eur’venu, pis ‘l a dtzit ça à sa femme. “Ah!” a dtzit, “c’est des ouvrages à Bouki, ça.”
A s’a pris ein rasouère, pis alle a partsi l’lend’main. Quand alle a arrivé l’long d’la mer, Bouki
était après jouer dans l’sable. “Hève!” a dtzit, “Bouki, mon cher Bouki, viens donc que j’té
peigne. J’vas t’gager,” a dtzit, “qu’tes plein d’poux.” Bouki est v’n’u, pis i’ s’a couché, sa tête sus
ses g’noux, pis alle a commencé à l’peigner. “Comment est-ce qu’tu fais,” a dtzit, “Bouki, quand
tsu commences à t’endormir?” – “J’ronflé justement ein tout p’tsit brin,” i’ dtzit. – “Comment-ce
Taleure, Bouki ‘l a commencé à ronflé. Plus ça allait, plus i’ ronflait fort. La vieille alle a
aveindzu son rasouère tout douc’ment, pis alle a coupé l’cou à Bouki. “Quiens,” a dtzit, “Bouki,
tsu f’ras pus mourir d’mes filles.”
“Bouki pis Lapin” (Missouri French; Carrière 29-31)


L’lend’main matin, Bouki i’est v’nus, pis i’a dzit: “Hèye, Lapin,” i’ dzit, “à matin, j’t’ai, pis m’as te ch’ter dans mon puits.”—“Ouais,” i’ dzit, “Bouki, c’est pour ça tsu m’as attrapé? Si tsu m’jettes dans ton puits, j’pourrais bouère quand j’voudras.”—“Ben,” Bouki i’ dzit,” j’vas t’ch’ter derrière la bûche dans la chum’née, moin,” i’ dzit. —“Ah! ben,” i’ dzit, “Bouki,
“Catafo” (Creole; Jarreau 4-9)

Catafo té le plis vié dans les troix ti frère. Yé rété avec yé moman et yé popa dans ein ti cabanne auras dans bois. C’était einne familie qui té ben pauvre; yé té pas gain assez pou manger, et yé té pas gain en nul part.

Ça fait, la vielle famme-la dit à so marie pou courir jeter petit-yé dans bois là ou yé sé pé pis tournein. Catafo tend ça, et li fait so ti frère-yé. Li rempli so poche-la pélé so petit-yé bonhaire.


Catafo et so dé ti frère-yé suive yé popa dans bois. Li couri loin avec yé, et Catafo semein la farine en misire yé marché.


“Ga petit-yé tournein,” la vielle famme-la dit, tout sirprend. “To pas meinein yé assez loin; c’est pou ça yé trouvé chémin pou tournein.”

Apres yé couri coucher Catafo tend so moman dit à so popa li té gain pou couri perd yé encore démain matin. Ça fait, li lévé tout doucement et remplu so pauche-yé avec des grains maïs fois-ça-la. Li sémant la grain mais-la tout di long la route.

Yé popa dit yé pou espéré pou li dans einne place là ou li té croit petit-yé té ben perd. Et, yé té perd oussi; main Catafo té gain dans l’idée pou suive trac la grain mais-la.
Yé espéré pou vié nomme-la ein ti moment, et quand li wa que li sé pas tournein, li dit so
ti frère-yé pou suivie li, et li parti on trac mais-là. Li suive ça pou ein démi mille, main apres ça, li
té pé pis trouver grain-la, et les ti garçon-yé té ben perd. Catafo té pas connein ça pou fait. Li
décidé on einne direction, et yé parti, les troix ti frère-yé.

La nuit rivé et yó té plis perd que jamais. Les dé plis jeine commencé crier, et ça troublé
Catafo plis. Li té olé continué, main yé dit yé té lasse, et yé té pé dans noir-la. Yé suive ein ti
boute encore, et Catafo wa einne limière loin dans bois-yé. Li montré ça à so ti frère-yé, et ça
donne ein ti brin courage. C’est là Catafo fait so l’idée pou passer la nuit.

Li couri coignein on la porte et einne vielle famme sorti pou parler avec li. Li té sirprend
pou wa des petit là à l’haire ça-la. Li mandé yé ça yé té olé.

“Mo olé einne place pou nous-autres coucher,” Catafo répond. “Nous perd, et nous olé
manger.”

“Mo pé pas fait arien pou onzot,” li répond, “parse que mo marie c’est ein Jiabe et l’a
mangé ouzot quand l’a tournein.”

Catafo parlé jissqu’à li donné yé souper et einne place pou coucher. Yé chouché dans
même lité avec les petits à Jiabe. Et, quand Jiabe tournein, li senti la viande fraiche.

“Oui la viande fraiche m’apé senti là?” Jiabe mandé à so farme.

“C’est la viande béf to menein hier là.”

“Oh! non! Ça sent méilliére que ça,” Jiabe répond. “Mo pas croit ça.” Li lévé bère lité-la.

“Ah! Troix petits! À m’apé couri gain ein souper! Laissez moin couri filer mo couteau pou
couper yé cou.” Et li parti dans la kisine.

Catafo tend ça, et li révéillé so frère-yé. “Lévé,” li dit yé. “Nous sa gain Pou partir astè-
la.” Yé té pas olé lévé, main li fait yé lévé quand même. Yé parti dans bois encore.


“La mo gain ouzot,” li dit. “Mo gain ein grand sac en bas ouzot, et chaque qui a gardé en bas, a tombé dans sac-la.”

“To pé éspérer si to olé,” Catafo repond. “Main, n’a jamais gardé en bas.”


“Troixième-la pas loin.”:


“Mo olé ouzot vini rété avec moin,” li dit ye. “Mo sa ben content pou guin ouzot, passe que mo marie chué mo kain petit-yé.”

Et, c’est comme ça Catafo et so frère-yé trouvé ein la maison pour ye rété, avec la famme à Jiabe. Ye rété là tout ye vie, ben satisfé.
Appendix B

Other Sources of Franco-American Folklore and Culture

In this appendix I will provide a brief and non-exhaustive list of places where other sources of Franco-American folklore and culture can be found. My thesis was focused on a few specific textual sources, however I believe that it is essential to show how these representations of the Franco-American identity have survived, even today. The following sources were identified during my research and I have included a short background explanation for each one:

*Folktales from the Avoyelles Parish, Louisiana.*

This (now digital) collection of recordings was originally made in the 1940s by Calvin Claudel in the process of researching his doctoral thesis at UNC-Chapel Hill. They were then used by Barry Jean Ancelet in his own research.

https://digitallibrary.tulane.edu/islandora/object/tulane%3Acajun

*Library of Congress Joseph Médard Carrière Collection*

This is the original collection of recordings by Carrière from his fieldwork in Missouri. These were originally recorded on wax cylinders, however now they have been duplicated on what are essentially large cassette reels. The best way to access these recordings is by visiting the Library of Congress American Folklife Center. They are of extremely poor quality, however some interesting songs and stories not mentioned elsewhere in this thesis can be discerned.

https://lccn.loc.gov/2014655523

*Aroostook County Oral History Project*

This is a collection of recordings made in Aroostook County, Maine. Some are in French, and there are some stories and discussions of Franco-American life.

http://www2.cary.lib.me.us/gendb/aoah/
Pierre A. Boyer Collection, The State Historical Society of Missouri

This is a collection of recordings made of Pierre A. Boyer, a speaker of Paw-Paw French. They include full-length, very comprehensible stories. The best way to access them is to visit the State Historical Society of Missouri’s research center in Columbia, where the tapes are available on cassette.

https://shsmo.org/manuscripts/columbia/c4349.pdf

The Old Mines Area Historical Society

This is the main historical preservation society for Paw-Paw French language and culture. They put on annual fêtes during which Franco-American culture is celebrated.

https://omahs.weebly.com

Dennis Stroughmatt et L’Esprite Creole

This musical group performs traditional Franco-American folk music from the (former) Illinois Territory. The lead singer speaks some Paw-Paw French. Videos of them performing and Stroughmatt speaking are available on Youtube.

http://www.creolefiddle.com

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Heay7zhmC1w

Les Amis

This organization is dedicated to the preservation of colonial French history in Missouri and Illinois. They are very friendly and enthusiastic in their efforts, and help maintain several historic sites across the two states.

https://les-amis.org
The St. Louis Gateway Arch Museum

This museum—located at the base of the Gateway Arch in St. Louis, Missouri—provides a good, if touristy, overview of the history of Missouri, including its Francophone influences. Details about it, including pictures of the cabin referenced in the second chapter, can be found at the link below.

https://www.archpark.org
Appendix C
Geographic Scope

The following maps have been adapted from the public domain maps accessible via the website for the US Geological Survey’s National Map. Full citations are in the Works Cited Section of this paper.

Important locations have been demarcated, including Old Mines, where Carrière centered his research, as well as the Avoyelles and Pointe Coupee Parishes, where Claudel and Jarreau, respectively, conducted theirs. Old Mines was in Missouri, which had before statehood been part of what was called the “Upper Louisiana” or “Illinois” Territory, as opposed to the “Lower” Louisiana Territory that includes the two aforementioned parishes (Balesi 163). As Carrière explains (1-3), the French communities he observed were centered in Old Mines, but spread across modern day Washington and Jefferson counties as well.

Important Locations:
A) Old Mines, MO
B) Avoyelles Parish
C) Point Coupee Parish
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