

## Discourse, Evidentiality and the Seventh Son Healing Tradition in French-Newfoundland Culture

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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### Résumé de l'article

Cet article traite de la construction symbolique et discursive de la croyance dans le pouvoir du septième fils comme guérisseur chez les Franco-Terreneuviens. Il présente et analyse les stratégies discursives au moyen desquelles sont disséminés les détails de la tradition, aussi bien que le discours qui sert à soutenir sa légitimité. On présente aussi les manifestations de cette tradition en France et en Amérique du Nord.

# DISCOURSE, EVIDENTIALITY AND THE SEVENTH SON HEALING TRADITION IN FRENCH-NEWFOUNDLAND CULTURE

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*Dans ces temps-là, quasiment tout le monde avait des grandes familles. Puis s'il y en avait une qui avait sept garçons — vous savez, eh, pas de filles, rien que des garçons — bien, s'ils pouvaient en avoir sept, il fallait qu'ils en aient sept, bien, le septième guérissait, lui. Oh, oui! Ça, c'est vrai! Ça c'est, il était, il guérissait avec sa, avec sa main ou de quoi... C'est de quoi que je sais pas... que le Bon Dieu lui a donné de quoi. Mais asteure, il fallait que ce soit le septième, le septième des garçons. Le restant pouvait pas le faire.<sup>1</sup>*

*(In those days, nearly everybody had big families. And if there were any who had seven sons — you know, no girls, just sons — well if they could have seven, had to be seven, well, the seventh could cure. Oh Yes! That, that's true! Yes, he was, he healed with his hands... I don't know, the Good Lord gave him something. But it had to be the seventh, the seventh son. The rest couldn't do it.)*

## Introduction

This study is an examination of the dynamics of everyday narrative discourse regarding the socially — and culturally-prescribed role of magico-religious healer — that of the seventh son — in French-Newfoundland culture. More specifically, it is an attempt to determine how discourse, experience, and belief are related in the process of creating a matrix of evidentiality with regards to one aspect of this regional culture. As such, this study is not intended as a comprehensive or comparative survey of this tradition. Rather, it examines some aspects of the process whereby certain ontological and epistemological elements enter into a symbiotic relationship through oral discourse which subsequently

1. Butler Collection GRB #008; MUNFLA 80-144, F3487c/C4825); L'Anse-à-Canards; June 23, 1980. The "F" designation immediately following the accession number refers to the original recordings stored in the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archives. Duplicates of the author's own working copies are also deposited in the Centre d'Études Franco-Terreneuviennes, and are referred to by the "C" designation.

creates and maintains a certain cultural 'reality'. In this, I am adhering to a particular theoretical school which defines discourse as "a system of statements which constructs an object".<sup>2</sup> It should also be noted that the discourse examined here is not that of the healer, but that of the community which reifies the healer, a distinction of some consequence.<sup>3</sup>

Following a short discussion of some of the more important characteristics of this traditional role in various regions of continental France and French North America, the study will consider the status of the seventh son as healer in the context of contemporary French-Newfoundland culture. Finally, information provided by a number of informants interviewed primarily between 1980 and 1982 will be examined in order to determine the complex matrix of social, religious, historical and communicative factors which appear to have been instrumental in the local propagation and reinforcement of this tradition of belief.

### A Survey of the Tradition in France and French North America

In both France and French North America, descriptions of the nature of the seventh son and the extent and source of his healing powers vary from region to region and, at times, also demonstrate a certain degree of variation within the same region. Generally, the powers of such traditional healers derive from their having been the seventh consecutive sons (and, less commonly, consecutive daughters) born to a couple, an event which, by virtue of its rarity and its association with the traditional significance of the number seven, readily lends itself to extraordinary symbolic interpretation.<sup>4</sup>

Although most studies in French folklore dealing with the healing powers of individuals born under certain marked or unusual circumstances make reference to the seventh consecutive child, certain regional and local traditions exhibit some measure of variation on this theme. Bouteiller<sup>5</sup> notes that the fifth, seventh, and ninth child are generally considered to be endowed with the power to cure the

2. Ian Parker, *Discourse Dynamics: Critical Analysis for Social and Individual Psychology*, London, Routledge, 1992, p. 5. Note that this approach explicitly separates the notions of discourse and text which, despite their use interchangeably by some scholars, are not at all equivalent concepts.
3. A recent article deals with the discourse of traditional healers in Quebec. See Simonne Dubois, "Le rituel thérapeutique des guérisseurs québécois", *Canadian Folklore canadien* 14-1, 1992, p. 73-92. Dubois' doctoral thesis "La médecine traditionnelle dans l'univers socioculturel du comté de Lotbinière", Université Laval, 1989, p. 104-133, contains a number of references to the seventh son tradition, as well. For this last reference, I thank one of the anonymous referees of *CfC*.
4. A brief definition of the seventh son is to be found in Maria Leach and Jerome Fried, eds., *Standard Dictionary of Folklore*, New York, Funk & Wagnalls, 1972, p. 999.
5. Marcelle Bouteiller, *Médecine populaire d'hier et d'aujourd'hui*, Paris, Éditions G.-P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1966, p. 38-39.

scrofula and abscesses. Van Gennep<sup>6</sup> found that the first, seventh, and twelfth are considered healers, while Seignolle<sup>7</sup> mentions that in the Sologne region of France, only the seventh and ninth sons are so considered. This last observation specifically excludes daughters from the healing tradition, a feature common in most areas of France. And while the seventh daughter is more common in Franco-American — particularly Acadian — tradition, nowhere is there any mention of the tradition being associated with female children to the exclusion of males.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the talents of the healer are considered to be proportionately enhanced if he is the seventh son of a seventh son, and the power increases with each cross-generational succession. In the Nivernais region of France, Drouillet notes,<sup>9</sup> the power of the seventh son is limited to transmission and compounding over just four generations.

Variation is also displayed with regards to the range of illnesses and physical disorders deemed treatable by the seventh son. In France, it seems to have been a generally accepted notion that the seventh son could cure the scrofula, or tuberculosis adenitis, an inflammation of the lymph nodes caused by the bacillus of tuberculosis. Others are considered to be gifted bone-setters,<sup>10</sup> or able to cure stomach aches<sup>11</sup> and cold chills.<sup>12</sup> In the Lavallois region of Quebec, the seventh son is a bloodstopper, and cures toothaches and earaches, but is powerless against more serious illnesses.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the power of the seventh son is not restricted to human ailments: in Louisiana, the seventh is a powerful veterinarian;<sup>14</sup> and in the Rousillon area of southern France, Chauvet<sup>15</sup> cites an instance of a seventh daughter ridding grape-vines of phylloxera, a type of parasite. Not surprisingly, the seventh is generally regarded as being lucky by virtue of the unusual circumstances of his birth.<sup>16</sup>

6. Arnold Van Gennep, *Manuel de folklore français contemporain*, vol. I, Paris, Éditions Auguste Picard, 1943, p. 124.
7. Claude Seignolle, *En Sologne: mœurs et coutumes*, Paris, Éditions G-P Maisonneuve et Larose, 1967, p. 139-140.
8. The term 'seventh son' will be used as a generic to designate this type of magico-religious healer.
9. Jean Drouillet, *Folklore du Nivernais et du Morvan*, vol. IV, La Charité-sur-Loire, Éditions Bernadat, 1964, p. 194.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 194. See also Luc Lacourcière, "Folk Medicine in French Canada", in Wayland D. Hand, ed., *American Folk Medicine*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976, p. 206.
11. Paul-Yves Sébillot, *Le folklore de la Bretagne*, Paris, Éditions G.-P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1968, p. 8.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
13. Soeur Marie-Ursule, *Civilisation traditionnelle des Lavallois*, Québec, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1951, p. 94.
14. Corinne L. Saucier, *Traditions de la paroisse des Avoyelles en Louisiane*, Philadelphia, American Folklore Society, 1956, p. 140.
15. Horace Chauvet, *Tradition populaire de Roussillon*, Perpignan, Imprimerie du Midi, 1947, p. 104-105.
16. Arnold Van Gennep, *Manuel de folklore français contemporain*, vol. I, Paris, Éditions Auguste Picard, 1943, p. 124.

Although the seventh son is considered to possess his healing powers from the moment of birth, certain traditions treat his power as potential and latent, requiring the fulfilment of certain specific conditions and rituals for its release. In the Nivernais, one such condition is that the child have captured a white moth in his hands before the time of his first communion.<sup>17</sup> In Sologne, the power is activated during the ritual of baptism itself, at which time the nickname 'Marcou' (for St-Marcoul) is bestowed.<sup>18</sup> In the south of France, this nickname is often used as a form of personal address and respect in lieu of the baptismal name proper, while in other areas of the country, a *marcou* is merely the term used to designate any such traditional healer.<sup>19</sup>

To complete this summary of the seventh son in French and Franco-American tradition, some discussion of the culturally-prescribed behaviour accompanying the exercise of this healing power is appropriate. The most common practice involves simply touching or massaging the afflicted part of the body; this is often accompanied by the recital, silently or aloud, of a holy prayer. In Brittany,<sup>20</sup> the *toucheur* (literally 'toucher' in English) requires that the patient consult him on three consecutive days, during which time both individuals maintain a strict fast. The *sété*, or *saludador*, of Roussillon relieves his patient's affliction by rubbing the painful areas with a cloth dampened by his own spittle, following which bread blessed by the *sété* is eaten.<sup>21</sup>

While the preceding discussion deals with the belief in the magico-religious powers of the seventh son in French tradition as documented by researchers over the past hundred years, this tradition is neither new nor restricted to French culture. The earliest written reference to the healing powers of both the seventh son and daughter dates from 1533, when it appeared in Cornelius Agrippa's *De Occulta Philosophia*.<sup>22</sup> The tradition itself is probably much older, although Bloch feels that the belief originated in print and was subsequently disseminated by way of chapbook editions of the writings of Agrippa and others.<sup>23</sup> This conclusion may be debatable, but is difficult to refute with certainty, however much one may disagree with Bloch's obvious literary bias and his accompanying philosophy of *gesunkenes Kulturgut*. What is certain is that the first printed reference in France to the seventh son as healer appeared in 1555,<sup>24</sup>

17. J. Drouillet, p. 194.

18. C. Seignolle, p. 139. Lacourcière notes that in Quebec, the term *marcou* designates "posthumous children" deemed gifted with the power of healing. See Luc Lacourcière, "Folk Medicine in French Canada", in *American Folk Medicine*, ed. Wayland D. Hand, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976, p. 203-214.

19. Other terms of reference are: *sété*, or *saludador* in Roussillon; *setou* in Gascogne; *septennaire* and *panseur de secret* (widespread); *touchou* in Poitou; and *traiteur* in Acadia and Louisiana.

20. P.-Y. Sébillot, p. 8.

21. H. Chauvet, p. 104-105.

22. Marc Bloch, *The Royal Touch*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973, p. 169.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 170.

a fact which places the belief *traditum*<sup>25</sup> at well over four hundred years old. In England, the belief was rare prior to 1700, when a “number of such healers had achieved prominence”.<sup>26</sup>

As noted above, the seventh son owed his gift of healing to the fortuitous circumstances of his birth; however, he was not the only type of traditional healer identified in French tradition. Examples are numerous, but one in particular is of special relevance here, this being the case of the hereditary miraculous healing power popularly attributed to the monarchs of England and France. French tradition held that the reigning monarch possessed the power to heal, by touch and prayer, the *scrofula*, a disease which consequently became referred to as the “king’s evil” (*le mal du roy*). This ability was believed to have been a divine gift bestowed upon the kings of France in return for the conversion to Christianity of the pagan king Clovis in the sixth century. A second interpretation, that of the Church, proposed that the power was originally held by St-Marcoul (Marcoulf, Marclou), who himself had supposedly received it directly from God.<sup>27</sup> When Clovis demonstrated his faith and interest in Christianity by allocating to Marcoul a large portion of land upon which to construct a monastery, Marcoul supposedly transferred his healing powers to Clovis in return for his kindness and humanity. As Crawford observes:

*Out of this arose the custom observed in later years by the kings of France at their Coronation, of going three days to their consecration at Rheims to Corbigny, to perform a nine days’ devotion at the shrine of St. Macoulf, and there to touch for the Evil.*<sup>28</sup>

Although the monarchy denied this interpretation concerning St-Marcoul, the Church viewed the involvement of the saint as one which consolidated and legitimized its position as intermediary between the sacred and profane domains, and which served as a particularly convenient means of securing the link between Crown and Church.<sup>29</sup>

Towards the end of the sixteenth century and early in the seventeenth century, the seventh-son healer became involved in the cure of this King’s Evil,

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25. “Belief *traditums* are [...] the *ideas* which are transmitted through the oral tradition’s various channels of communication. A belief *traditum* is not necessarily an element of text, but rather is the essential information encoded in textual form [...]”. Gary R. Butler, *Saying Isn’t Believing: Conversation, Narrative and the Discourse of Belief in a French-Newfoundland Community* (Publications of the American Folklore Society, New Series), St. John’s, Institute of Social & Economic Research, 1990, p. 5.
26. Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books Ltd., 1973, p. 273.
27. Raymond Crawford, *The King’s Evil*, New York, AMS Press Inc., 1977, p. 16.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
29. M. Bloch, p. 167.

and evidence indicates that he was viewed as an integral part of a magico-religious healing complex which included the Royal House and the Christian Saints as well. Seventh sons were believed to be born carrying a birthmark, usually located on the tongue, which took the shape of a fleur de lis, the symbol of French royalty. In France, the *marcou* was generally permitted to exercise his talents with the Church's blessings.

Given the pervasiveness and apparent importance of the seventh-son in France, it is understandable that eventually this tradition was transplanted to North America during the period of French colonization between the fifteenth and the nineteenth centuries. And, given that this belief is a component of traditional English culture as well, it is not surprising that the increased contact between the two colonial groups after the Conquest in 1763 was not as detrimental to the tradition's survival as might otherwise have been the case.<sup>30</sup> On the contrary, it is very possible that the sharing of this belief tradition served to mutually reinforce its legitimacy within each of the two groups.

### The Magico-religious Healer in French Newfoundland

The French in Newfoundland are descendants both of Acadian families who began to arrive primarily from Cape Breton Island in the early nineteenth century, and of single French males who originally came from provinces in northern France, primarily Brittany and Normandy, to engage in their country's fishing operations along what was then referred to as the 'French Shore'. Many of these latter deserted from the French fleet between 1850 and 1904, and remained in Newfoundland, eventually intermarrying with Acadian women already living in the area. It is not surprising, then, that many aspects of both French and Acadian traditional culture are to be found in this area.<sup>31</sup>

Even in the culture of French-Newfoundlanders, which is now restricted to a relatively small area encompassing the Port-au-Port Peninsula and St. George's Bay on the west coast of Newfoundland, criteria defining the seventh-son tradition differ from place to place. Between 1980 and 1982, I resided for a total of approximately ten months on the Peninsula proper, including a two-

30. Of course, there is some debate as to the extent of the contact between the French and English populations during the first century or so immediately following the Conquest. Indeed, some would suggest that, at the Catholic Church's prompting, the Quebec French *habitants* adopted an insular lifestyle effectively isolating them from contagion by the Protestant and capitalist ethic of the English, a situation which was to continue until the collapse of the traditional French agrarian lifestyle and the spread of urban capitalism from New England in the second half of the nineteenth century.

31. For a short history of French and Acadian settlement in the Port-au-Port/ Baie-St-Georges area, see Butler, p. 5-29, or Gerald Thomas, *Les deux traditions: le conte populaire chez les Franco-Terreneuviens*, Montréal, Bellarmin, 1983, p. 21-50.

month period in Cap-St-Georges in 1980, and four months in L'Anse-à-Canards in each of both 1981 and 1982<sup>32</sup>, during which time I lived with a family in that community, and participated to as full an extent as possible in the work and leisure activities of the inhabitants. Indeed, while some one hundred hours of sound recordings were eventually collected, the majority of my time was spent in activities other than the conduct of formal interviews, and it is this experience which has allowed me to understand the significance of the accumulated data.

My methodology was dictated by the sensitive nature of my research area, which involved all aspects of the past and present supernatural belief tradition of French Newfoundland.<sup>33</sup> As such, formal questionnaires were not considered as the objectification inherent in them would have rendered them useless. A way had to be found which elicited the information from informants without drawing undue attention to that information. I finally settled on a compromise whereby I initiated the interview and allowed it to flow along lines dictated by the individual. As the conversation developed, indirect and general reference was made to specific aspects of the belief tradition, in the hope that the individual herself or himself would broach the topic of their own accord. This methodology has the advantage of diverting attention away from the elicitation function of the interviewer, making of him or her a listener rather than an interrogator. The distinction is subtle, but essential, for in this way, the informant is for all intents and purposes placed in control of the interview session, and this technique has the added benefit of duplicating the interactional relationship which normally prevails when an older person is speaking with a younger one in this traditional culture where respect for and deference to the elders and their knowledge is the norm. In any event, this methodology proved most effective.

As an aspect of the supernatural belief tradition, I attempted in all instances to broach the topic of the seventh son with all my informants. And of 40 individuals ranging in ages from 18 to 85 recorded, all possessed at least a fundamental knowledge of the tradition.<sup>34</sup> As in France, most agree that the

32. I returned to L'Anse-à-Canards each year between 1983 and 1986, and in 1988, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada funded a project involving the training of a team of eight resident informant/collectors in L'Anse-à-Canards who themselves conducted interviews in their community. Over two hundred hours of sound recordings were collected during the twelve months of this project's duration. Analysis of material gathered during this project continues.

33. Interviews were conducted in the Kippens/Stephenville area, Cap-St-Georges, La Grand'Terre, Maisons-d'Hiver, and L'Anse-à-Canards, as well as in the one home remaining in the former community of La Barre.

34. The breakdown of informants recorded is as follows: Age 18-35: 6 individuals; Age 35-50: 6 individuals; Age 51-65: 10 individuals; Age 66+: 18 individuals. Total: 40. In addition to those individuals included in the recorded corpus, I had more than ample occasion to discuss the topic with at least twice this number in non-recording contexts, and in no instance, save with small children under the age of twelve, did I encounter complete ignorance of the seventh son tradition, although the depth of individual knowledge varied considerably.



seventh consecutive male child born to a couple is divinely blessed with the gift of healing. Unlike in France, however, the seventh consecutive daughter is also widely-believed to possess such powers. In L'Anse-à-Canards, most consider only the seventh son to be a healer, although many current residents formerly inhabitants of the resettled community of La Barre consider the seventh daughter a healer, as well. In La Grand'Terre, both the seventh son and the seventh daughter can heal, while the sixth can heal to a lesser degree. In Cap-St-Georges, it is the seventh and eighth son or daughter who is so-blessed, the eighth being more gifted than the seventh.<sup>35</sup> And, in all cases, the strength of the healing powers of such individuals is enhanced if they themselves are the offspring of seventh sons [Appendix, Texts 3, 19]. In French-Newfoundland tradition, these individuals are referred to simply as *septième*, or *seventh sons*, although in many cases, the term *docteur* was used to designate male healers, and in one case, the nickname 'Nursie' was applied to a seventh daughter at Cap-St-Georges.<sup>36</sup>

Opinions concerning the types of disorders which such healers can treat also vary, both between and within communities. However, nearly every informant questioned agreed that the seventh son was able to cure warts and other skin afflictions by touch alone, or by making the sign of the cross over an afflicted area with his right hand while reciting a silent prayer [Appendix, Texts 4, 10, 12, 19, 20]. Several cases of the skill of such healers in the treatment of broken or dislocated bones, and even crippled limbs [Appendix, Text 8] were cited, as well; and one seventh son in Cap-St-Georges was described as having successfully remedied a minor speech disorder.<sup>37</sup>

At this point, it should be noted that the seventh son is not the only category of healer in French-Newfoundland tradition. As is the case elsewhere in North America, individuals such as *arrêteurs de sang* ('bloodstoppers'), and *charmeurs de dents* ('toothache healers') are widely recognized, as in the following example:

*[Le charmeur de dents prend] un clou de deux pouces de longueur, eh. Il met cette euh, il met ça en tout cas là sur ta, sur ta dent. Puis euh, il dit de quoi anyway. Je sais pas quoi-ce-qu'il dit mais le mal de dents s'en va après.*<sup>38</sup>

*([The tooth charmer takes] a nail two inches long, eh. He puts that euh, anyway he puts that on your, on your tooth. And he says something anyway. I don't know what he says but the toothache goes away afterwards.)*

35. See example below.

36. Butler Collection GRB #017; MUNFLA 80-144; F3489/C4834c); Cap-St-Georges; July 9, 1980.

37. Butler Fieldnotes, Cap-St-Georges, 1980.

38. Butler Collection GRB #048; MUNFLA 81-338; F3890/C5236; L'Anse-à-Canards; June 1, 1981.

In addition, by virtue of their religious faith, priests are considered able to accomplish miraculous cures. Significantly, in French-Newfoundland tradition, a strong connection links priests and seventh sons, and a disproportionate number of the past and present parish priests mentioned by informants are said to have been seventh sons themselves.<sup>39</sup> And just as the priest is supposed to be a selfless, pious individual, the seventh son must offer his gift of healing freely and charitably, demanding no payment, else the power is lost [Appendix, Texts 11, 16].

A variety of factors have contributed to the maintenance and propagation of this belief and practice in French-Newfoundland culture. The first of these is the process of enculturation, whereby the generation-to-generation transmission of the essential components of the belief system exerts its influence. This enculturation process was further reinforced by the direct complicity of the local clergy through its support of the magico-religious status and accompanying sociocultural role ascribed to the seventh son healer. The belief is widespread in French-Newfoundland that the healing power of the seventh son is latent and is not released until shortly after birth, when the child's hands are blessed by the parish priest, a practice known to have been performed within the past thirty years (see also Appendix, Text 4):

*If [the seventh son] wanted to be a doctor, well, he went to find the priest to bless his hand, eh? Father Green was a seventh son.*<sup>40</sup>

Interestingly, although perhaps not surprisingly, at least two of the priests known to have performed this sacred ritual (for the seventh son is indeed associated more with the religious than the magical domain) were themselves seventh sons and were regarded as healers by their parishioners. Given the devout religious faith of the French-Newfoundland Catholics, it is understandable that, with the Church's perceived sanctioning of the traditum, the belief in the magico-religious healing power of the seventh son has persisted. An example of this faith is displayed in the following attempt by one informant to explain the seventh-son phenomenon:

39. For a general discussion of "passeux de verrues", "arrêteurs de mal de dent", "arrêteurs de sang", "septième", et "prêtres guérisseurs", in Acadian tradition, see Ronald Labelle, "Éléments naturels et surnaturels dans la médecine populaire acadienne", in *En r'montant la tradition: hommage au père Anselme Chiasson*, sous la direction de Ronald Labelle et Lauraine Léger, Ottawa, Éditions d'Acadie, 1982, p. 128-148. Labelle's treatment of the seventh son healer is unfortunately superficial, his only conclusion being simply that "[la] confiance qu'on leur accorde est expliquée en partie par leur statut spécial". [p. 138].

40. Butler Collection GRB #019; MUNFLA 80-144; F3498c/C4836; La Grand'Terre; July 13, 1980.

*La Sainte Vierge [...] elle, elle a passé les sept douleurs, eh? Ça c'est, c'est, ça a été dit dans la [], anyway. J'ai les, j'ai les, je les ai ici les sept douleurs, moi, ils sont/je les ai ramassées là []. Ma femme [] bien elle avait sept toutes pendues ici sur l'ombris, là. Les sept douleurs, la Sainte Vierge. Bien, peut-être que ça vient de ça? Le Bon Dieu avait passé le, il a été crucifié, il a porté sa croix. Puis il a été euh, et puis elle, elle avait []. Anyway il y avait sept douleurs en tout, qu'elle avait passé la Sainte Vierge. Asteure, c'est dit que le, le the seventh son, eh? Le septième garçon guérira. Asteure ça vient peut-être de ça? Tu sais les sept douleurs que la Sainte Vierge a passées.<sup>41</sup>*

*(The Blessed Virgin [...] she, she had seven sorrows, eh? That, that's, that's, that was told in the [], anyway. I have the, I have them here, the seven sorrows, they're/I collected them []. My wife [] well she had all seven hung on the walls, there. The seven sorrows, the Blessed Virgin. Well, maybe it comes from that? The Good Lord had passed the, he was crucified, he carried his cross. And he went, euh, and she, she had []. Anyway, there were seven sorrows in all for the Blessed Virgin. Now maybe it's said that the, the seventh son, eh? The seventh son will heal. Now maybe it comes from that? You know, the seven sorrows of the Blessed Virgin.)*

The propagation functions of traditional enculturation and the Church's ritual sanctioning are similar in that both presuppose the truth of the belief in the seventh son. In a sense, each offers abstract 'proofs' based on no referent other than that of ancestral wisdom and institutional authority respectively.

This ideal model which portrays French Newfoundlanders as accepting the notion of the seventh son as healer because of the credence afforded it by their two most highly respected repositories of cultural 'truth' offers us a foundation for our treatment of the seventh-son belief complex. Nonetheless, it represents merely a point of departure with regards to evidentiality. People are not quite as uncritical and naive as models such as this would suggest, and the traditions and beliefs of community elders are not always incorporated *in totem* and without modifications into the culture of successive generations.<sup>42</sup> Like any other, the belief traditum underlying the seventh son depends largely for its support upon the variety and quantity of proofs and the quality of evidence available for its support. Since the number of individuals having knowledge of and belief in this

41. Butler Collection GRB #042/043; MUNFLA 81-338, F3887c/C5233; L'Anse-à-Canards; May 18, 1981.

42. For an excellent treatment of the nature of tradition and the criteria of truth, see Pascal Boyer, *Tradition as Truth and Communication: A Cognitive Description of Traditional Discourse* (Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990.

phenomenon is relatively large compared to the necessarily limited number of people who would have had the opportunity to encounter a seventh son and personally witness his healing abilities, then the basis for the acceptance of the traditum must be sought elsewhere in the complex of oral tradition discourse, and more precisely in the body of experience narratives which have developed around this traditum. For while the fundamental, primary traditum (i.e. "The seventh son is a born healer") offers no evidence, narratives recounting the experiences of known others with these religious healers serve to crystallize the phenomenon and render it at once more tangible, comprehensible and *real*. Consider, for example, the following personal narrative:

*Ah oui, oui, le septième oui, septième fille ou bien donc septième garçon. C'est un docteur, eh, il guérit, eh. Il y en a une fille, une septième qui reste là, [] là. Euh, je l'appelions Nursie. Nursie que je l'appelons nous autres, Rouzes... Oh oui, c'est une septième... C'est une jeune fille. Oh elle guérit, oui. Ils sont euh/septième et la huitième... Le huitième est meilleur que le septième... J'avais un mal ici là... ici là, l'hiver qui passait ici, là. {Oui.} Un chancre, qu'ils l'appelont. {Oui.} Oh, c'était gros comme ça. {Ah oui.} [J'avais mis] du stuff dessus tout en grand... ça guérissait pas. Je l'ai eu tout l'hiver puis ça faisait mal quand je marchais. Et ce printemps [la septième fille] est venue ici. Puis je lui ai demandé, tu sais, pour la croiser. Elle dit, "Lève la jambe," eh. Je me levais la jambe. Là, elle m'a dit, "Ferme-toi les yeux." J'ai fermé les yeux. Bien, je sais pas quoi-ce-qu'elle a fait. {Ah bon.} Je sais pas quoi ce qu'elle a fait, je l'ai pas vue... Elle dit, "Alright", elle dit. "It's gonna go away". [] Comme une semaine après c'était parti!<sup>43</sup>  
(Oh yes, yes, the seventh, yes, seventh daughter or seventh son. It's a doctor, eh, he cures, eh. There's a young girl, a seventh who lives there, [] there. Euh.. we, we call her Nursie Rouzes... Oh, yes, she's a seventh.... She's a young girl... Oh she heals, yes. They're/seventh and eighth... The eighth is better than the seventh... I had a sore here... just this past winter. {Yes.} A canker, they call it. {Yes.} Oh, it was as big as that. {Ah yes.} I'd put some stuff on it but... it wouldn't heal. I had it all winter and it hurt when I walked. That spring, she (seventh daughter) came over and I asked her if she could heal it. She said, "Raise your leg", eh. I raised my leg. She said, "Close your eyes". Well, I closed my eyes, I don't know what she did. {I see.} I don't know what she did, eh? I didn't see it. "Alright", she said, "It's gonna go away". A week later it was gone!)*

43. Butler Collection GRB #017; MUNFLA 80-144; F3496c/C4834; Cap-St-Georges; July 9, 1980.

This narrative is devoid of information concerning how the healer, in this case a seventh daughter, accomplished the cure. Indeed, the informant emphasizes how he was instructed specifically *not* to watch the procedure. Compare this to the following account:

*Un coup, j' étais euh, dans le bois à, à, à Black Duck. Je travaillais sur Doucette, eh. Puis j' avais mal de dents, eh... mal de dents. Oh, j' étais deux semaines avec mal de dents. Puis il y avait un, un... puis un, un, un seventh son, eh. Ça qu' ils appellont le... le 'septième', eh. Seventh son... J' étais le voir, sur un dimanche, eh. Faire guérir ma dent, eh... Puis il a mis ça (holds up finger) sur la dent/ il m' a deman/ demandé quelle que c' était , eh... Puis deux heures après, mon vieux!... [J] ai pas attrapé mal de dents après!<sup>44</sup>*

*(Once, I was euh, in the woods at, at Black Duck. I was working with Doucette's, eh. And I had a toothache, eh... toothache. Oh, I had a toothache for two weeks. And there*

*was a, a... and a, a, a seventh son, eh. That's what they used to call the... 'le septième', eh. Seventh son... I went to see him, one Sunday, to have him cure my tooth, eh... So he put his [holds up finger] on my tooth/he asked me/he asked me which one it was, eh... And two hours later, my friend!... [I never had a toothache after!]*

Like the preceding narrative, this example stresses the powerlessness of the afflicted individual and the apparent ease with which the seventh son is able to remedy the affliction. In terms of the narrator-audience communicative relationship, this juxtaposition of self-as-impotent with other-as-potent creates an interpretive frame which seems to effectively exclude the self-aggrandizement of the narrator as a motive for the narrative performance, and consequently contributes to the interpretation of the narrative content as true report of a real phenomenon.<sup>45</sup> This discourse strategy of self-effacement occurs quite regularly in narratives supporting the truth of other instances of supernatural experience in French-Newfoundland tradition.

While on the surface these experience narratives appear to serve purely informational and evidential functions, a closer analysis of the beliefs associated with the seventh son tradition reveals a traditum which helps explain why a narrator would choose to recount a narrative wherein his/her own role is a passive

44. Butler Collection GRB #058; MUNFLA 81-338; F3900c/C5246; L' Anse-à-Canards; June 16, 1980.

45. This observation applies solely to the content of the narrative itself. Obviously, the very act of assuming the central role of narrator in the performance context carries with it a certain socially situated prestige which is independent of the narrative content. Nevertheless, it is the impotence, rather than the active participation of the narrator, which is highlighted.

one, and which seems to place her/him in a subordinate position relative to the healer. French Newfoundlanders recognize that the effectiveness of the healing power depends as much upon the religious faith of the patient as it does on the power of the healer (Appendix, Text 13). As one informant noted: "...mais il faut que tu aies la foi. Si tu crois pas, ça marche pas" ("...but you have to have faith. If you don't believe, it doesn't work"). Hence, the narrators' experiences serve to reinforce and communicate to their listeners the strength and consequences of their own personal religious faith, an attribute highly valued in French Newfoundland. Thus we see that the narrator does indeed portray her/himself in a positive light, while at the same time using the report to convey the importance of personal faith, a feature which raises the narrative to the level of pedagogical discourse.<sup>46</sup> This condition might also explain the absence of personal narratives of failed cures, narratives which, while intended to serve as negative evidence against the tradition's validity, might rather be interpreted as an indication and consequence of the uncured individual's lack of religious devotion.

While examples of such magico-religious cures have been noted in all areas of French-Newfoundland, first-hand accounts are relatively rare (Appendix, Texts 5, 6, 14, 15). More common and more graphic than the vague narratives concerning cures are examples of the striking display, witnessed by many informants, of the power residing in the hands of the seventh son (Appendix, Texts 1, 2, 12, 15, 17, 18). The belief is widespread in this region that the blessed hands of the seventh son contain a power which causes a common earthworm, fly, or ant to change colour, shrivel, and die when it is held for just a few seconds, a phenomenon which is deemed indicative of the seventh son's healing power, as well:

*Oui, mais j'ai vu euh, c'était à, à ligne cent trois, je travaillais à ligne cent trois à Deer Lake. Il aurait pris/le septième, eh, septième...il aurait pris une le/ un ver que j'appelons ça. Comme une lesche [S.F. "esche"], eh? {Oui.} Il l'a mis dans sa main. Bien moi, je, tu peux prendre une lesche et la couper en vingt morceaux, là [.]. {Oui.} Puis ça, encore, les morceaux bougent. {Bougent, oui.} Puis lui, il mettait un, il met/il mettait ça, je sais pas, il faisait ça, il mettait sa main, il mettait seulement sa main comme ça. Puis dans...ça aurait*

46. For a discussion of pedagogical discourse, see Charles L. Briggs, *Competence in Performance: The Creativity of Tradition in Mexicano Verbal Art*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, p. 82-97; Charles L. Briggs, "Treasure Tales and Pedagogical Discourse in 'Mexicano' New Mexico", *Journal of American Folklore* 98, 1985, p. 287-314. This notion as it relates to French-Newfoundland is outlined in Gary R. Butler, *Saying Isn't Believing: Conversation, Narrative and the Discourse of Belief in a French-Newfoundland Community* (Publications of the American Folklore Society, New Series) St. John's, Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1990, p. 116-117; and Gary R. Butler, "Indexicality, Authority, and Communication in Traditional Narrative Discourse", *Journal of American Folklore* 105, 1992, p. 34-56.

*vi dix secondes... ou vingt. {Oui! Puis elle crevait!} Cre/oh, crevait!. Sou/Souvent je faisons ça. N'importe de quoi, il aurait pris une mouche sur la main comme ça, oh [] il l'écrasait pas ni rien. Puis il était obligé de tenir la mouche comme la/ou bien il aurait pu tenir sa main. Tandis ça touchait sa... {Elle crevait!} Oui, puis elle crevait.<sup>47</sup>*

*(But I saw euh, it was at Line 103, I worked at Line 103 in Deer Lake. He would take/the seventh, eh seventh...he would take a/a worm as we call it, like a lesche, eh? {Yes.} He put it in his hand. Well, I, you can take a baitworm and cut it in twenty pieces, there [] {Yes.} And still, the pieces will move, eh. {Move, yes.} And he, he put a, he put/he put it, I don't know, he did that, he put his hand, just his hand like that. And in... it would live for ten seconds... or twenty. {Yes, and it died!} D/Oh, died, of/often we'd do that. He would put anything at all, he'd take a fly in his hand like that, oh [] he didn't crush it or anything. But he had to hold the fly, or he had to hold his hand, as long as it touched... {It died!} Yes, and it died.)*

Such reports are comparatively commonplace and deal with visible and public proofs of the seventh son's power which complement reports of the more invisible, private cures effected by these healers. This connection is *not* to suggest that the belief in the healing power implies a belief in or even a knowledge of the killing phenomenon. However, the killing phenomenon is a secondary element, an 'accoutrement', if you like, in the belief complex surrounding the seventh son, which is centrally and primarily a healing phenomenon, and its function is in all cases to support this primary belief element. Indeed, rarely does one encounter the killing phenomenon except in discussion which centres around the seventh son's power to heal. All of this demonstrates how discourse provides the "epistemological object status" of healer to support the "ontological object status" of the seventh son, for without a basis for knowing, there can be no basis for being.<sup>48</sup> And, just as Hymes points out, "performance affects what is known",<sup>49</sup> discourse transmits and maintains the body of tradition from which it stems.

The connection of the earthworm to the seventh son tradition is common in English tradition; however, little evidence is to be found in sources treating the tradition in the French context in Europe. While the majority English culture in the region has exerted a strong influence on the French tradition, one cannot assume that this intercultural contact is the sole contributor to the presence of this

47. Butler Collection LANSEGB #071; L'Anse-à-Canards; November 22, 1988.

48. Ian Parker, p. 23-41.

49. Dell Hymes, *'In Vain I Tried to Tell You': Essays in Native American Ethnopoetics*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981, p. 132.

element. A diagnostic technique practised in Brittany is sufficiently similar to suppose the possibility of a connection:

*Une technique... fut observée, au début du siècle, en Basse-Bretagne pour la guérison des plaies: on posait sur le mal un ver de terre en pensant à un Saint précis. Si le ver mourait, le diagnostic était bon; sinon, l'on recommençait l'opération.<sup>50</sup>*

*(A technique... was observed, at the beginning of the century, in Lower-Brittany for the cure of sores: one laid an earthworm on the patient while thinking of a specific Saint. If the worm quickly died, the diagnostic was correct; if not, one began the operation once again.)*

As mentioned in the introductory discussion, the French healing Saints (*Saints-guérisseurs*) strongly influenced the seventh-son tradition in France. Since there is documented proof that many of the early settlers in the Port-au-Port Peninsula region were originally from Northern France, and specifically from Brittany and Normandy, the above example relating the earthworm to these healing Saints may partially account for the prominence of this feature in the French-Newfoundland tradition.

The testimony of two informants further muddies the question as to the extent and direction of the cultural exchange which inevitably took place in this region. With regards to the seventh son, one informant stated:

*Puis le King's Evil, bien, il y a avait pas de, tu sais, il y a personne qui peut guérir ça, rien que le septième d' enfants, eh? Le septième enfant.<sup>51</sup>*

*(And the King's Evil, well, there was, you know, there's no one who can cure that, except the seventh child, eh? The seventh child.)*

It is significant that, while speaking French, the informant refers in English to the 'King's Evil'.<sup>52</sup> Yet, another informant uses the French equivalent term:

*Le garçon à [ ] ma cousine. Ma première cousine — elle est morte asteure elle est... [ ] non c'est pas celle-là qui est morte non. Elle reste à St-Georges puis elle avait mal ici, là. Le mal de roi qu'il appelliont. En anglais, [ ] quelque chose comme ça. Et puis ça guérissait pas, eh... Et puis il [i.e. septième fils] l'a guéri lui.<sup>53</sup>*

50. M. Bouteiller, p. 38-39.

51. Thomas Collection #047; MUNFLA 74-195; F1699; 1974.

52. Some French Newfoundlanders refer to the 'King's Evil' as *le mal du diable*, or 'devil's evil'. See Butler Fieldnotes, 1980-1983.

53. Butler Collection GRB #017; MUNFLA 80-144; F3489c/C4834; Cap-St-Georges; July 9, 1980.



*(My cousin's son at [ ]. My first cousin — she's dead now, she's...  
[ ]no she's not the one who died, no. She lives in St-Georges and she  
was ill here. The king's evil they call it. In English [ ] something like  
that. And it wouldn't heal, eh... And so he [i.e. seventh son] cured  
her.)*

Given the almost universal bilingualism of Francophones in the area, the use of neither the English nor the French term permits us to establish the cultural origin of this aspect of the tradition. Obviously, a combination of factors are at work here.

That a variety of factors have contrived to support the maintenance of the seventh son tradition in French-Newfoundland culture is apparent. Not only do the older members of the communities continue to adhere to the belief, but also, at least two seventh sons and one seventh daughter under the age of forty have undergone the Church ritual of empowerment and have practised their healing skills within the past twenty-five years. During the summer of 1980, I had the good fortune to meet and talk with a seventh daughter in the community of La Grand'Terre. At the time, she was in her early twenties and recounted how, as a child, the local priest had blessed her hands. As a young girl, she did not especially believe that she possessed any extraordinary talent until one day, at the age of twelve, she was approached by an elderly woman. This woman insisted that the girl touch her hands to heal her warts, and after the girl had reluctantly complied, the old woman continued on her way. Several weeks later, this same woman came to the girl's home to thank her for her assistance — the warts had disappeared completely. Here we have a case of the healer being "taught" the nature and use of her power by the patient, an instance which clearly demonstrates the function of a discourse of belief in symbolically creating the reality of the traditional healer's status.

## Conclusion

There continues to be a culturally prescribed social role assigned certain individuals from the moment of their birth. As Frank points out:

*The core of the effectiveness of methods of magical and religious healing seems to lie in their ability to arouse hope by capitalizing on the patient's dependency on others. This dependency ordinarily focuses on one person, the healer, who may work privately or in a group setting. In either case, the patient's expectation of help is aroused partly by the healer's*

*attributes, but more by his paraphernalia, which gains its power from its culturally determined symbolic meaning.*<sup>54</sup>

The seventh son and other related healers are materially perceivable agents symbolizing and embodying the assistance believed possible from some higher authority. The healer is the intermediary for supernatural healing and serves, in complicity with the faithful, to channel this supernatural medical assistance. In this sense, the practice is closely related to the belief in faith healing, itself a strong component of supernatural belief in French-Newfoundland culture. What I have attempted to demonstrate here is how the 'symbolic meaning' results from the construction of a reality and the creation of a knowledge through discourse.<sup>55</sup>

While this treatment of the seventh son healer has not dealt with the influence of such practical considerations, it is obvious that the continued prominence of both natural remedies and supernatural healing practices is due, at least in part, to the particular circumstances characterizing everyday life in French Newfoundland. The men, when not engaged in the hazardous traditional occupation of inshore fishing, often turned to the lumber camps for work, and for most of their history, the communities in which the Newfoundland French lived were geographically isolated from centres where professional medical assistance might be obtained. In the absence of institutionalized health care, the seventh son and other healers, to whom tradition had ascribed a mystique similar to that surrounding the trained physician, remained viable and necessary alternatives for the treatment of injuries and illnesses in this regional culture. That the tradition persists despite the introduction of modern health care facilities is evidence of the power of both traditional knowledge and belief, and the discourse which supports this epistemological complex.

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54. Jerome D. Frank, *Persuasion and Healing*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins Press, 1961, p. 62.

55. It should be noted that the conclusions reached here derive specifically from an analysis of the seventh son component of the broader healing tradition. However, it is expected that while the specifics of the individual discourses surrounding each category of healer would differ, a more general discourse would contain elements common to all. Nevertheless, the differences would be of significance in their own right, and a study currently in progress addresses precisely this question.

## Appendix

### Text 1:

J. S. — Elle va prendre, elle va prendre le *worm* you know, “Where’s the [worm]?” [ Elle va le reprendre bien comme ça puis, elle va le mettre dans sa main, eh. Puis il va crever. *Right off the bat*. Il crève... Oui, dans sa main.

[Butler Collection GRB #017; MUNFLA 80-144, F3488c/C5236; Cap-St-Georges; July 9, 1980.]

### Text 2:

L.D. — Il y en a à/il y en a à l’entours ici qui a, qui a, qui a fait ça... revenir de même, vous savez, eh. Mais je n’avais un moi. Je me rappelle plus de qui que c’est. *Anyhow* celui-là il restait à l’entours ici là. Ça il a fait, il a mis, de, du sang, le ver dans sa... puis il a tourné blanc, le ver a tourné blanc. Et puis j’ai demandé, on demandait nous autres, eh, pour voir s’il était un... Il dit “Oui”, il dit “C’est/il est correct.” Il pouvait faire venir le, le, le ver, là, quasiment tout blanc, là, eh. Mais avec un petit peu de rouge dedans vous savez?... Et puis...[] faisait aller ça dedans là, le, le... rou/ le blanc de dedans. Le fournis est en vie encore ou quasiment.

[Butler Collection GRB #019; MUNFLA 80-144, F 3490c/C5238; La Grand’Terre; July 13, 1980.]

### Text 3:

J. W. — Il avait, il y en avait eu à Comer Brook, [] c’était un prêtre. C’était le, ils avont dit que c’était le septième, son père était le septième, puis lui était le septième aussi. Voilà deux générations. Puis il guérit quasiment tout. Oui, il y avait une femme là avec/ elle avait les, les mains, elle avait *rhum/ euh, arthritis* dans les mains, elle avait les deux mains de même. Et puis il a prié, elle a entendu où-ce-qu’il était, puis quand elle a descendu, elle se retrouse les deux mains comme ça, là... Bien oui elle était là puis elle, puis elle a été, a été le voir.

G. B. — Oui, et puis il a fait une petite prière puis...

C. W. — Oui.

J. W. — Oui, c’était dans l’église.

C. W. — Puis le monde, tout le monde là priait.

J. W. — Oui.

G. B. — Ah oui, oui.

C. W. — Ça fait que... elle a guéri.

G. B. — Oui.

J. W. — Il l’a guérie. Mais ça c’était le septième du septième qui va qu’on dit. Dame, je sais pas si c’est vrai.

[Butler Collection GRB #030; MUNFLA 80-144, F3501c/C4847; Kippens; July 24, 1980.]

### Text 4:

J. B. — Oh oui, oui! Mais dame faut que ça soit... des, des garçons? Peut-être, peut-être des filles j’ai jamais entendu parler, mais dame faut que ça soit rien, sept garçons faut pas qu’il y ait des filles entre les deux là. Faut que ça soit tous des garçons. Puis le/oui, oui! Le septième. Alors le septième il guérit ça c’est vrai ça asteur. Oui, ça a été prouvé ça.

G. B. — Est-ce qu’il y en avait euh... par ici?

J. B. — Oh oui, il y en avait un au Creek-là [i.e. Campbell’s Creek], eh Cannon, le garçon à... Ça guérit bien. Toutes sortes d’affaires. C’était par le pouvoir de, du Bon Dieu, je pense. Oui, oui, oui. Il guérissent, il faisait la croix de son pouce, là, sur de quoi là puis t’aurais ]. Oui. Puis il allait toucher le, du mal, puis ça te guérissait. Ah oui le septième, ça.

G. B. — Ah oui? Mais est-ce qu’il fallait faire quelque chose, par exemple euh, le prêtre devait bénir sa main?

J. B. — Ah le prêtre, oui, oui. Le prêtre bénissait sa main ou son/ ou s’il y avait de quoi là qui.

G. B. — Hum, hum. Est-ce qu’il y avait des Français qui étaient des septièmes aussi?

J. B. — Oh oui, [] certainement qu'il y avait des Français. Il y en avait du monde, j'en ai connu quoi, j'en ai connu un au Cap mais dame il y a si longtemps de ça. Il est peut-être mort asteure mais je le sais pas mais il y en avait un, puis il guérissait. Oh oui. Puis celui-là de, du, de la [] là, du Creek, là, il guérissait aussi. Il fallait pas le faire à un autre, le prêtre pouvait pas le faire à un autre, fallait que ça soit le septième. Le Bon Dieu lui donnait le pouvoir. Oh oui! [Butler Collection GRB #042/043; MUNFLA 81-338, F3887c/C5233; L'Anse-à-Canards; May 18, 1981.]

Text 5:

J. B. — Asteure, il y a une fille à la Grand'Terre là, une femme. Elle était la septième à l'époque. Je peux pas vous dire ça juste, là, parce [] ici, il y avait, il y avait un *party* ici. Et puis moi j'avais mal dans mon bras ici, là. Je suis pas si pire comme j'étais là pour... En premier j'aurais pas pu jouer une gigue ou bien donc j'aurais bu un peu ou de quoi de même. Puis j'ai monté à la Grand'Terre avec elle, c'est mon garçon qui l'a *drivée* en haut. Puis je lui ai dit pour mon bras là, puis elle m'a, elle m'a parlé de ça, là, de/ Si jamais que je la revois faut que je lui demande, ce qu'elle a dit. Elle m'entendait qu'elle était la, la septième. Mais, je pourrais pas vous dire s'il y avait des, des garçons à travers ça ou quoi là. Puis elle a pris mon bras dans sa main de même là puis euh, puis elle m'a dit en anglais, elle dit, "I don't guarantee nothing, but", elle dit, "it could get better". Je dis, "Are you the seven, the seventh?" Elle dit, "Yes". Et c'est tout ce qu'elle m'a dit. Mais mon bras est plus pareil, c'est-ti mon idée qui a fait ça? Je sais pas. Asteure là quand même que je bois pas un coup, je peux vous faire un/ jouer aujourd'hui pour vous, eh? Avant je peux pas jouer du tout. L'archet s'en allait, bien j'allais [] le nerf était parti, eh?

G. B. — Oui, oui.

J. B. — J'avions pris mon archet de même là puis pour jouer puis là elle a tombé.

G. B. — Oui. Alors elle t'a guéri?

J. B. — Bien pas tout net mais je suis meilleur.

G. B. — Oui. Est-ce que tu as senti quelque chose quand elle a, elle t'a touché?

J. B. — Non, non. Non.

G. B. — T'as rien senti?

J. B. — Rien senti.

G. B. — Elle a fait le signe.

J. B. — Non, tout ce qu'elle a fait, elle a pris mon bras puis ça...

[Butler Collection GRB #042/043; MUNFLA F3887c/C5233; L'Anse-à-Canards; May 18, 1998.]

Text 6:

E. B. — Le septième est supposé de... docteur, il guérit. Je sais que, il guérit euh, sacré ou *whatever* que c'est. Oh oui. J'avais un garçon, moi, le plus vieux de mes garçons. Il avait attrappé un... [] les quoi-ce-qu'ils l'appelont, là? Il avait comme des *galls* sur le nez. Et puis ça grandit, ça grandissait, ça grandissait, ça grandissait. Puis bientôt c'était proche de ses yeux, ça s'approchait, de par les yeux, vous savez [] toujours ça bouche les [] et tout, là, ça faisait le tout rond, c'était tout rond, ça travaillait tout rond. Là bien, vois-tu, je m'en vas/ il y avait un, un, Dussault, André Dussault, il était marié, puis il avait un garçon, son *baby*, il était à près comme deux mois. Il était le septième. Il était sept garçons, septième, sept garçons qu'il a eu, un après l'autre. Et euh, j'ai, j'ai mis un cheval, un petit buggy, là. Puis là, je me pousse, puis je m'en vas le voir. Et euh, j'ai arrivé là, j'ai dit euh. que mon garçon, il avait comme euh, six ans je pense, six, sept ans par là. Je dis que j'avais le/ il avait les *galls* sur le bout du nez puis là, ça commençait à grandir, et grandir, et grandir. Puis je dis, "Vous avez euh, le septième, le garçon. Je suis venu voir si vous auriez pu le faire la croix sur, sur, sur son euh...[] qui grandit tout le temps." Puis c'était pas joli, c'était vilain. Toujours elle a pris son petit *baby* dans le berceau. Et puis elle s'en a venu et puis elle a pris sa petite main, puis elle a fait la croix,

chaque bord, vous savez, trois fois, elle a passé tout le tour. Comme ça, puis elle faisait la croix dessus. Puis là je m'en ai venu chez nous. Puis, que trois quatre jours après, c'était parti. Là!

G. B. — Mais c'était une bébé?

E. B. — C'était un *baby* mais elle a pris sa petite main puis elle a, fait faire la croix, vous savez tout le tour de ses... [], vous savez. Toucher ça puis la croix puis. Pas une grosse croix, juste une petite croix, tu sais?

G. B. — C'est quelle main/C'est quelle main? Quelle main?

E. B. — La main droite.

[Butler Collection GRB #044/045; MUNFLA 81-338, F3888c/C5234; L'Anse-à-Canards; May 20, 1981.]

Text 7:

E. B. — Asteure il y en a un/il y en une/il y en a un il était euh, il appartient de la France je crois. Euh, il guérit comme ça. Il était un septième aussi puis il guérit. Il était/il était ici là à, à St-Georges. Il y a comme quatre ans de ça. Il y avait un garçon aussi, ça, un Bozec, là. Il était estropié, il avait un corps, il était dans un accident, un *car*? Et puis il était bien estropié, il marchait à la canne.

G. B. — C'est Néri?

E. B. — Néri. Et puis il a été le voir. Bien, il m'a dit quand que, quand qu'il a mis sa main, sur, ses deux mains sur ses épaules. Bien il dit c'est pareil, il dit, comme l'électricité passant à travers de lui. Il sentait ça ohhhh ça, ça. Comme ça souquait ça. Il dit, c'est, c'est dur à croire, c'est dur, dur à croire... Mais c'est... Et, et puis il s'en vient chez lui puis, il a pas *usé* la canne depuis. Puis il a passé deux ans asteure.

[Butler Collection GRB #044/045; MUNFLA 81-338, F3888c/C5234; L'Anse-à-Canards; May 20, 1981.]

Text 8:

E. B. — Oui, moi j'ai quasiment eu un septième aussi. J'ai eu euh, cinq garçons, non asteure... *yeah*, cinq garçons. Et puis une fille et puis un garçon.

G. B. — Ah bon.

E. B. — Oui.

G. B. — C'était le septième garçon mais il y avait une fille entre eux.

E. B. — Oui, si j'avons pas la, la, la, si j'avions pas la fille, j'avais euh, j'aurais eu un sept.

G. B. — Alors ça marche pas s'il y a une fille entre?

E. B. — Oh non! Non, non, non, non, non, non.

G. B. — Oui. Faut que ça soit le, le septième après six, six garçons?

E. B. — Oui, *right, right*.

[Butler Collection GRB #044/045; MUNFLA 81-338, F3888c/C5234; L'Anse-à-Canards; May 20, 1981.]

Text 9:

G. B. — Mais comment est-ce qu'ils peuvent faire ça, ces gens-là, ce monde-là, comment?

E. B. — Bien, c'est un, c'est un *gift* ça qui est, qui est donné du, du Bon Dieu ça, c'est, c'est, c'était euh, vous savez c'est, c'est curieux la vie, *you know*. C'est, c'est, c'est dur à comprendre. Il y a du monde qui est mis dans le monde pour s'enten/ se [retenir] de l'affaire, eh? Il y en a qui est mis dans le monde pour guérir il y en a d'autres qui est mis dans le monde pour soulager du monde... []. Vous savez les soulager de toutes sortes de façons. C'est incompréhensible, c'est incompréhensible!

[Butler Collection GRB #044/045; MUNFLA 81-338, F3888c/C5234; L'Anse-à-Canards; May 20, 1981.]

## Text 10:

- M. D. — Hum... Bien euh, ma fille, là, elle avait, elle a une tête, là, il y a six ans, mais elle avait des verrues sur les mains, eh. Plein de verrues sur les mains. Puis elle a été au *seventh son* avec, avec ses mains. Puis elle a, je sais pas quoi-ce-qu'il a fait dessus. Euh, ils disaient qu'il guérit, le *seventh son*. Bien, pas longtemps toutes les verrues étaient parties dessus ses mains.
- G. B. — Et quoi-ce-qu'il a fait pour euh?
- M. D. — Bien je le sais pas. Faut croire qu'il priait euh, une prière qu'il priait je pense que, qui a fait tout s'en aller de dessus ses mains.  
[Butler Collection GRB #049; MUNFLA 81-338, F3891c/C5237; L'Anse-à-Canards; June 1, 1981.]

## Text 11:

- M. B. — Non, non. Et puis euh, il fallait pas qu'il prenait de paiements, eh?
- J. B. — Oh non.
- M. B. — Non.
- G. B. — Oh il prenait pas de paiements?
- M. B. — Non, non.
- J. B. — Oh non.
- M. B. — *He couldn't do that.*
- G. B. — Il fallait le faire de bon cœur.
- J. B. — Oui.
- G. B. — S'il, s'il, s'il avait accepté le paiement quoi-ce qui?
- J. B. — Ca aurait pas guéri.
- M. B. — Non, ils disent ça, eh? Ils disent que si tu prenais du paiement, il la, il l'aurait pas pu guérir.
- G. B. — Oh il aurait perdu le pouvoir.
- M. B. — Oui, il aurait perdu ses pouvoirs.  
[Butler Collection GRB #050; MUNFLA 81-338, F3892c/C5238; L'Anse-à-Canards; June 2, 1981.]

## Text 12:

- T. L. — *I guess* qu'ils guérissent. Ils vont prendre un.../j'ai vu mon, le garçon de ma sœur, eh. Une mouche puis un ver mettre sur sa main, là, [] sa main, reste là ... Une mouche, [] met ça sur sa main. Oui [], oui. Il est septième oui. Il est guéri.
- G. B. — Oui?
- T. L. — Ah oui, des affaires qu'il y a! Ils pouvaient pas guérir les *cancers*.
- G. B. — Non.
- T. L. — Non.
- G. B. — Et quoi-ce-qu'ils faisaient pour guérir, ils touchaient ou?
- T. L. — Oh oui, oui, petite croix.
- G. B. — Il faisait le signe.
- T. L. — Le signe de croix, oui.
- G. B. — Est-ce qu'il disait.
- T. L. — Il disait de quoi lui-même, tu pouvais pas comprendre quoi-ce-qu'il disait.
- G. B. — Ah, à lui-même?
- T. L. — À lui-même, oui, oui.  
[Butler Collection GRB #052; MUNFLA 81-338, F3894c/C5240; Maisons-d'Hiver; June 4, 1981.]

## Text 13:

- T. L. — Ah bien, oui. Peut-être, peut-être, oui, sur le septième ça se pourrait. Au Cap, il y a un septième aussi là asteure, je sais pas s'il est mort ou pas. Oui, il a guéri Arthur Felix. Arthur Felix là, tu sais. Oui, oui. Oui, Arthur [] il l'a rencontré sur le *bus*, ah, il s'en allait à l'hôpital

pour quelques affaires qui avaient arrivé. [] s'en allait chez lui. C'est une bosse qu'il avait dans la tête []. Ça a guéri quand il a arrivé chez lui, le lendemain matin c'était parti. Mais faut que tu crois là-dedans, quelqu'un qui croit dedans va te guérir, s'il croit pas dedans, c'est *no good*. Non.

G. B. — Et euh, est-ce que la septième fille euh, aussi pouvait?

T. L. — Je sais pas, je crois pas.

[Butler Collection GRB #052; MUNFLA 81-338, F3894c/C5240; Maisons-d'Hiver; June 4, 1981.]

Text 14:

F. F. — Ah? Oui, ça marchait, oui... Asteure, un coup j'étais dans le bois euh, à, à Black Duck, [] chez Doucette, eh. Puis j'avais le mal de dents, eh. [] ah, c'était deux semaines mal de dents puis il y avait un, un, *seventh son*, eh? Ils les appellaient les septièmes, eh, *seventh son*. J'ai été le voir, sur un dimanche pour guérir ma dent, eh. Il a vu ça, eh. Là, il m'a [] puis deux heures après mon vieux/non, non j'ai pas entendu le mal [] après.

G. B. — Quoi-ce-qu'il a fait?

F. F. — Il a touché ma dent de sa droite, c'est tout. Oui.

G. B. — Il n'a rien dit euh?

F. F. — Je sais pas [] quoi-ce-qu'il a dit là. Il a peut-être/il a peut-être dit de quoi à lui-même, là, tu sais, eh. Je sais pas quoi-ce-qu'il a fait, mon vieux, mais il a guéri ma dent.

G. B. — Hum. Curieux. Et comment-ce-que vous saviez que le septième était béni comme ça?

F. F. — Bien, j'avais entendu parler, eh. J'avais entendu parler avant, eh. Mon défunt/mon défunt père, oui.

G. B. — Il y en avait, par ici, là, des septièmes?

F. F. — Non. Je sais pas, celui-là, il était, il était au *Crossing*, eh. C'était, c'était là qu'il restait. J'avais monté le voir un dimanche, eh. Arsène Dussault, c'était son nom, eh?

G. B. — Puis ça a marché?

F. F. — Oui, ça a marché.

G. B. — Jamais eu de mal après?

F. F. — Non.

[Butler Collection GRB #058; MUNFLA 81-338, F3900c/C5246; L'Anse-à-Canards; June 16, 1981.]

Text 15:

P. S. — Il y en a qui m'a guéri une, je m'en souviens [] il y avait, j'étais dans une cabane, je coupais du, je coupais du bois *pulp*. Et il y en avait un dans notre cabane puis je souffrais comme mal aux dents. Je souffrais beaucoup du mal aux dents quand j'étais jeune. Il y avait pas de dentiers dans ce temps-là les *dentists*. Et euh, ah, je dis, je souffre assez moi. J'avais ça quasiment pour une semaine, là. Puis je savais pas en premier qu'il pouvait guérir les dents puis ils m'ont dit. Ça fait une/quand j'ai vu ça j'ai essayé/je lui ai demandé pour guérir ma dent. Quand je lui ai demandé, il m'a donné une claque avec sa main, eh. Il a pas tapé dur donc. Puis, là, il a pris son pouce, comme ça, trois fois avec son pouce.

G. B. — Hum, pour le signe de la croix?

P. S. — Le signe de la croix.

G. B. — Trois fois.

P. S. — Mais dame le mal a venu plus dur pour un, pour un petit bout. Pire là.

G. B. — Tout de suite là?

P. S. — Oui. Puis là ça, ça a manqué tout d'un coup. Oh oui. Et, il prenait, il prenait une mouche. Nous-autres, on va prendre une mouche dans la main, eh, elle va pas crever eh. Bien, lui il prenait une mouche dans sa main puis elle elle crevait.

G. B. — Vous avez vu ça?

P. S. — Oui.

G. B. — Oui.

P. S. — C'est drôle, eh? Oui, il y avait un, j'avais un cousin ici, là. Il y avait un sur la côte de l'est à Terre-Neuve, ici, là. Il était prêtre mais il se/il était *seventh son* puis son père était *seventh son*. C'était un septième, eh? Et il dit/ils m'ont dit qu'il était bon pour guérir. Parce qu'il y avait un homme il avait, il souffrait avec un mal dans, dans le côté, eh. Puis c'était un pêcheur. et ça fait il, le prêtre lui a dit, il dit, "Demain", il dit, il pouvait pas aller pêcher parce ça faisait trop mal. Il dit, cet homme-là, il dit, "Demain", il dit, "prends ton canot puis va-t-en pêcher", il dit. Il a, il a été dans son canot puis il a senti de quoi qui a défoncé en dedans de lui. Puis après ça il, il était plus malade, il l'avait guéri. C'est drôle comment-ce-qu'il y a du pouvoir, eh?

[Butler Collection GRB #061; MUNFLA 81-338, F3903c/C5249; L'Anse-à-Canards; June 30, 1981.]

Text 16:

P. S. — C'est rien que par ici que j'ai entendu parler de ça. Oui, Dussault, là. Il est mort, il a mourri il y a pas longtemps, là. Un Dussault de West Bay, il est à peu près de mon âge, plus vieux que moi. Il dit, c'est le septième. C'est celui-là qui m'a guéri.

G. B. — Est-ce que vous l'avez payé ou?

P. S. — Non, non, Non.

[Butler Collection GRB #061; MUNFLA 81-338, F3903c/C5249; L'Anse-à-Canards; June 30, 1981.]

Text 17:

M. F. — Il y en avait à, il y a à Piccadilly, un Dussault? Il est mort asteure. Arsène, Arsène Dussault il était septième. C'était curieux, les septièmes, je pense qu'ils disoient qu'ils guérissent. Mais j'ai vu le septième, tu vas prendre un, j'appelons ça un ver [] une lesche, eh? Le... des fois tu vas aller voir plus en-dessous des les [] ou en-dessous de les morceaux de bois [] puis tu le coupais par/le cassais par morceau ça, eh. C'est à cause ça va encore bouger ça, eh? Puis moi, j'ai vu le septième, Arsène Dussault, puis il y en avait un autre Alexander à Deer Lake, Paddy Alexander à Deer Lake. Il mettait sur sa main comme ça dans... 5 secondes comme ça le ver a crevé. Le ver a crevé, eh. Il bougeait plus.

G. B. — Dans quelle main est-ce qu'il l'a mis?

M. F. — Dans... bien, je pense c'était, bien, je sais pas [] quelque chose de même. C'est peut-être bien cette main ici. Bien..[] si tu es à droite []. *Watch that! Can you do that?* Le ver venait, le ver bougeait un petit peu []. Mais c'est-ti le, l'électricité ou quelque affaire qui est dans leur corps qui est plus que, que j'avons pas nous autres? Il y a quelque affaire là que j'avons pas. Oh, j'ai vu ça plusieurs fois!

[Butler Collection GRB #066; MUNFLA 81-338, F3908c/C5254; L'Anse-à-Canards; July 6, 1981.]

Text 18:

M. F. — Non, oh non. C'était/ils auront guéri comme euh, peut-être bien comme te toucher, le mauvais. Bien il y en a qui auront fait peut-être bien comme faire la croix sur quelque affaire, eh. Faire une croix, bien, ça c'est la façon catholique de faire la croix sur/Mais euh, ça je peux pas dire, je peux pas dire comment-ce-qu'ils guérissent parce j'ai jamais, j'ai jamais été me retrouver pour me faire guérir, eh. J'ai jamais [] ces années-là comme ils avont, mais ils n'en ont pas de médecin ici supposé de guérir. Puis c'est, là, je pensais, faut croire qu'ils étiont/ Arthur, mon frère Arthur, il avait quasiment mourri, il travaillait en bas à, à Port Sanders. C'était dans la Hawk's Bay, Port Sanders. Il a été trouver un septième là puis il dit je pense que ce septième l'a guéri. Il dit *O.K.*

G. B. — Mais c'est rien que le septième, c'est ça, qui peut guérir?



- M. F. — Bien oui. Ils disoient que le six aussi a un peu de pouvoir pour guérir mais dame je sais pas ce que, quoi-ce-qui est la cause qu'ils avont du pouvoir. Je sais pas/moi je peux pas dire, je sais pas. Mais pour ça, j'ai vu ça fait des [] Paddy Alexander là, à Deer Lake. Oh je l'ai vu faire ça peut-être bien une cinquantaine de fois. Il prenait un ver puis personne d'autre pouvait le faire, rien que lui. Il mettait un ver sur sa main puis...  
[Butler Collection GRB #066; MUNFLA F3908c/C5254; L'Anse-à-Canards; June 6, 1981.]

## Text 19:

- N. B. — J'ai pas été, mais ma sœur [], eh? Elle avait des, des verrues, là, tu sais. Elle avait des verrues sur les mains puis, il s'en avait, il s'en avait disparu.  
G. B. — Oui? Quoi-ce-qu'il a fait pour les faire disparaître comme ça?  
N. B. — Je le sais pas, il dit une prière ou quelque affaire.  
G. B. — Ah oui, oui.  
N. B. — *A blessing*, je pense.  
G. B. — Est-ce qu'il touchait les verrues ou?  
N. B. — Oui.  
G. B. — Il touchait aussi, eh. Comment ça se fait que c'est le septième comme ça, là? Est-ce qu'il y a une raison comme ça, là, que c'est le septième et pas le huitième par exemple ou?  
N. B. — Je sais pas quoi-ce-qui est la raison. Mais dame faut qu'il y ait sept frères sept garçons dans, tout d'une rangée vous savez?  
G. B. — Ah oui, pas de filles entre eux.  
N. B. — Pas de filles entre eux.  
G. B. — Est-ce que ça marche aussi pour les filles par exemple. Est-ce que ça marche la même affaire pour les...  
N. B. — Asteure il y avait un, un missionnaire qui avait venu à La Coupée, eh. Il était à, à, il était un sept frère, le septième.  
G. B. — Oui.  
N. B. — Et il venait d'un septième, son père était un septième aussi, eh?  
G. B. — Ah oui.  
N. B. — Et puis quand j'avais, euh, mon estomac m'énervait, j'ai été le trouver. Puis il a donné son *blessing* à ça puis j'ai pas eu ça après.  
G. B. — Oui? C'est tout ce qu'il a fait, un *blessing* comme ça puis...  
N. B. — Oui il a, il prie sur le, il prie sur le, il prie, il donne un *blessing*, son *blessing* puis j'ai pas eu mal à l'estomac après.  
G. B. — Hum! Est-ce que, est-ce qu'il a touché aussi pour euh?  
N. B. — Oui.  
G. B. — Il touche puis un, donne un *blessing*.  
N. B. — Oui.  
[Butler Collection GRB #075; MUNFLA 82-254, F4531c/C5877; L'Anse-à-Canards; May 20, 1982.]

## Text 20:

- M. B. — Il y en a un à Piccadilly, *seventh son*. Bien, il avait, mon frère Gordon a monté en haut là puis il avait un *ring worm* là puis/  
N. B. — Il était pas grand non plus quand il a...  
M. B. — Ca, ça s'en a été.  
G. B. — Oui. Quoi-ce-qu'il a fait le?  
M. B. — Eh?  
G. B. — Quoi-ce-que le *seventh son* a fait, quoi-ce-qu'il a fait pour guérir le?  
M. B. — Il a justement, il a justement touché ses doigts.  
N. B. — Il prie, il dit une prière, *of course*.  
G. B. — Il dit-ti une prière ou?

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M. B. — Je le sais pas.

G. B. — Oui.

M. B. — Tu l'entends pas.

[Butler Collection GRB #077; MUNFLA 82-254, F4533c/C5879; L'Anse-à-Canards; May 26, 1982.]