

*Cajun and Creole Folktales: The French Oral Tradition of South Louisiana.* By Barry Jean Ancelet. (New York and London: Garland, 1994. Pp.lxxii + 224, selective bibliography, indices of taie types, motifs, and narrators, ISBN 0- 8156-1498-1 cloth)

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cloth is both a social construction and a repository of the past. People use the cloth to weave their lives.

"The study of material things like cloth provide a way of grasping the microscopic ways in which more abstract ideas such as the past, identity, and obligation are constituted in the course of everyday social life" (p. 192). As the study of material culture struggles to find its way back into favour, Renne's results are eloquent and explicit testimony to the richness of the object as a point of entry into social analysis. Her descriptions share the significance of Bunu cloth in ways that readers have hardly imagined.

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***Cajun and Creole Folktales: The French Oral Tradition of South Louisiana.***

By Barry Jean Ancelet. (New York and London: Garland, 1994. Pp.lxxii + 224, selective bibliography, indices of tale types, motifs, and narrators, ISBN 0-8156-1498-1 cloth).

That *Cajun and Creole Folktales* is the product of twenty years of thorough, careful, and caring scholarly work by one of the field's most eminent collectors and commentators is apparent from the opening pages of the book. Series editor Carl Lindahl catalogues Ancelet's previous published work and his efforts not only to study the diverse folklore forms of south Louisiana but also to make those resources available to whatever audience is interested at the time. Much of this is revealed in a scene Lindahl describes when Ancelet finds himself bringing Wilson "Ben Guiné" Mitchell before a formal audience of some eighty odd people. Ben Guiné is at first overwhelmed and falters as he begins his first story, but in the midst of doing so he brushes Ancelet and instinctively turns his chair to someone he knows and trusts will appreciate his story and his efforts.

The scene captures vividly much of the feel of the rest of the book, whose organization is unconventional but once made familiar becomes a ready resource. Before getting to the tales themselves, which are presented with little to none of the performance situation but with thorough references

to tale types and motifs as well as related tales and types, Ancelet engages the reader in what is essentially an extended introduction which is divided into sections as follows: The Context, The Study, The Repertoire, The Language, and The Storytellers.

The first two sections, Context and Study, essentially tell two sides of the same story. Settlement of Louisiana, since being claimed in 1682 for France, was sporadic at best and always chaotic as the area changed hands and saw its population grow in fits and starts. The people who were to become Louisiana Creoles, a term coined under the territory's Spanish reign, came from Europe, Africa, and America itself. Cajuns, the group for which the region is best known, started arriving in the 1760s in an expulsion which should have resonance now for all contemporary readers. Such a large group arriving over a relatively short span of time shaped the region's culture strongly while at the same time always remaining open to both already extant cultures as well as fellow immigrant cultures, such as the Germans for whom a lake is named in southeast Louisiana.

Much of this underlines what could be called Ancelet's "gumbo" account of the development of traditions and forms in south Louisiana: "as the tales themselves demonstrate, and as Ancelet documents in his copious comparative notes, Cajun and Creole oral traditions are not simply French, but rather unique to French Louisiana, where African, African American, British American, Native American, and Spanish American populations have created a complex cultural mix" (p. x). Traditionally, researchers in linguistics, ethnomusicology, and even folklore focused on European or African origins of tales, songs, or artifacts, which revealed a number of interesting threads that Ancelet takes full advantage of in *Cajun and Creole Folktales*. Such approaches, however (even as they are repeated in various dissertations and monographs today), also spend too much time unduly looking past the tellers and their tales towards a distant history. The result is that a vibrant culture which has changed in very specific and fascinating ways has been understudied during one of its most dynamic periods.

The next three sections of the book on The Repertoire, The Language, and The Storytellers seek to correct that situation. The first section, which in effect acts as exposition for the latter and greater part of the book, discusses each of the genres under which Ancelet groups the various texts he has collected: *Contes d'animaux* (Animal Tales), *Contes merveilleux* (Magic Tales), *Farces* (Jokes), *Menteries et contes forts* (Lies and Tall Tales), *Contes de Pascal* (Pascal Stories), *Contes*

*légendaires* (Legendary Tales), and *Histoires vraies* (Historical Tales). What is most impressive about his treatment of the various genres is his subtle understanding of which texts are slowly fading from use and which texts are gaining in currency or are arising and why this is so. Perhaps the best example is his inclusion of the Pascal tales, which is a specialized lying tradition extant in a few bars that line the street of one block of Mamou. Everything a reader needs is here to be able to understand, and indeed even imagine, the time, place, and circumstance of Pascal tales. So vivid and complete is Ancelet's exposition that the rhythm and intonation of the speakers shines through even in the English translations of the tales. More importantly, he is able to place the Pascal tales within the context of the other forms in the repertoire of these speakers, as when he notes that "Pascal tales are essentially spontaneous creations within a traditional framework formulated by a certain community of storytellers for a specific cultural purpose" and is able to specify exactly what each of those abstractions means.

The French and English headings for each genre listed above presage the paired texts that follow in the collection itself. Like his previous book, *Musiciens cadiens et créoles/The Makers of Cajun Music*, Ancelet refuses to let the original French of the oral versions of the texts be lost in the double translation to English and to print. While his initial discussion of ethno-poetics in the language section might be a bit too technical for general readers (and here I have students in mind as I discuss below), he does stress the political and ethical nature of transcription, especially as it relates to the historical and current status of Cajun French and Creole. In fact, the only suggestion I would have for future revision of the book comes here when perhaps a bit more discussion of the varieties of Cajun French and Creole, since some speakers can either shift between or elide the two (as well as with English), which he documents here, would I think contribute to his larger narrative of the unique historical nature of French Louisiana.

Finally, before the tales themselves, Ancelet is careful to introduce us to each of the tellers, whose name will appear alongside the title of the tale to underline who has made it manifest. The biographies are short, but taken as a whole they reveal the network of tellers that makes up the particular community behind the collection itself. Some of the photographs included here are worth the price of the book itself, especially that of Ben Guiné in his garden.

The tales speak for themselves, and there is a generous serving of each. Each is headed by a number, a title in French and English, a teller, and then a

discussion of any particularities of the particular telling as well as a glossing of the types and motifs involved and the connections to other tellings or cultures that these might lead the reader to explore. Other collections regularly referenced are Aarne-Thompson's *The Types of the Folktale*, Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, Baughman's *Type and Motif-Index of the Folktales of England and North America*, and the Université Laval's Archives de Folklore.

Having used this book in both lower and upper division university courses, I cannot recommend it highly enough for its immediate accessibility and ease of use. The introductory materials quickly sketch out the history, landscape, and people involved and the organization of the tales by genre allows for a variety of discussions about the form, function, and dynamics of folklore forms and the cultures within which they reside and which they also populate. Such ease and comprehensiveness stem from Ancelet's deft handling of all these matters, a result of many years of work both to study and to encourage the cultures of French Louisiana. We can only hope that *Cajun and Creole Folktales* is but one more byproduct of such work and that there will be more like it to come.

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***National Redeemer Owain Glyndwr in Welsh Tradition.*** By Elissa R. Henken. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996. Pp. xii + 250, £12.95, ISBN 0-7083-1290-X.)

As the Stone of Scone, the coronation stone of the Kings of Scotland and the great symbol of Scottish independence was being delivered to Scotland after its long exile in England, it seemed inevitable that there should be a revived interest in similar nationalist markers in Wales. Significantly, the Welsh turned to Owain Glyndwr, the redeemer hero of this book and the great symbol of Welsh resistance. Recently the Owain Glyndwr Society was formed, its main aim being to discover Glyndwr's last resting place and to honour that location. Since the year 2000 is the 600th anniversary of Glyndwr's uprising they will encourage the setting up of a significant and ethnically meaningful