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VOICES PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE: ACADIAN SOCIAL IDENTITY IN THE NOVELS OF ANTONINE MAILLET

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ABSTRACT

VOICES PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE: ACADIAN SOCIAL IDENTITY IN THE NOVELS OF ANTONINE MAILLET

By

Bernadette Marie Donohue

A prolific Canadian writer whose complete body of novels, plays and short stories traverse more than two hundred years of Acadian life, Antonine Maillet's works testify to the stories of her people's past, and to the birth of a new sense of Acadian identity from the eighteenth century to the present. Maillet is attempting to give her readers a glimpse of what she calls the "petite histoire" of the Acadian people. She is not trying to create a history of the Acadian people, nor even to represent Acadia, but rather to give voice to the people who made the history. Through her many characters, we begin to form an image of a people, a people who are engaged in the process of reclaiming and reestablishing the land, the language, the traditions and the stories threatened by the Deportation.

This study will examine the characters in Maillet's novels who are trying to rebuild the mythical way of Acadia, and who will witness the passage of their people from an oral culture to a written one. The types of characters which can be found in Maillet's works present to the reader

an image of Acadian identity, and at the same time contribute to the enhancement of this Acadian identity, for Maillet's work is both representative of and constitutive of a certain cultural identity. If Maillet's objective is to reveal the "petite histoire" of her people, then her characters embody the real experiences and concerns of the Acadian people, and in studying them, we can understand--from the inside--what Hans Runte terms "acadianitude." Maillet characterizes Acadian identity both by portraying the characteristics of acadianitude and by creating characters who embody this culture.

In my analysis of Maillet's novels it becomes clear that not only are there certain characters who appear in several novels, there are also certain character types which occur again and again in her novels. Her novels focus largely on small, isolated Acadian villages, at various epochs during the life of the Acadian people. Central to the life of these villages is the storyteller, who maintains his people's culture by telling the stories of the epic and legendary heroes, as well as the outrageous and equally legendary outlaws and rebels which color the "petite histoire" of the Acadian people. The last generation of these storytellers will, like Maillet herself, transition to the world of writing. These are they characters who represent the stubborn, rebellious, faithful and indomitable spirit which has kept the Acadian culture alive for more than two hundred years after it ceased to exist as a nation. These are the characters who give life to Maillet's "petite histoire."

To my father, who would have liked to see this.

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INTRODUCTION

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Acadian poet Raymond Le Blanc's words point up the embattled history of Acadian identity. The Acadians represent a minority in Canada, francophones in largely anglophone provinces, overshadowed by the 'other' francophone Canadians--the Québécois. Like their neighbors to the west, the Québécois, Acadians have had to struggle to maintain their language, their culture, their traditions, and their communities. Unlike the people of Québec, the Acadians have had no land to truly call their own, for "Acadie" technically ceased to exist in 1713[1] when the Treaty of Utrecht caused the French colony to be ceded to the British. But the Acadians did not cease to exist as a people. Although, as provided by the treaty, the Acadians were designated neutrals, they were still torn between their allegiance to their French culture, and the Roman Catholic religion, and their newly enforced allegiance to the English. They were willing to swear allegiance to the King of England,[2] but only with the provision that they could maintain their faith, and not be required to take up arms against the French in Quebec and in France.[3] Their refusal to turn against their French heritage, which led ultimately to their Deportation in 1755,[4] has continued for more than two hundred years, and has helped the Acadians to maintain their language and traditions, as well as a profound sense of who they are.

The Acadian people are probably best known to the world at large for the story of their diaspora, or "le Grand Dérangement" of 1755. At this time, the English ruthlessly carried out a relatively large-scale deportation of the Acadians (Griffiths, Deportation 141-4). Ironically, what was meant to obliterate them as a people was to become the defining event in the elaboration of their identity. According to Eloise Brière,

> the story [of the deportation] has been the basis for a shared feeling of community among the Acadian diaspora of North America (the Canadian Maritime Provinces, Louisiana, and New England) from 1755 to modern times. Its significance lies in the collective death and rebirth it embodied. A communal experience that sealed the bond between language and collective emotion, the retellings of the Grand Dérangement provided a basis for Acadian identity. (4)

The story of the deportation and its aftermath has become a symbol of Acadian identity for Acadians and non-Acadians alike. As historian P.D. Clarke maintains, "le mythe unificateur de l'Acadie prenait forme--c'était celui du paradis trouvé et du paradis perdu, c'est-à-dire celui de la Terre promise" (25). Rather than obliterating the identity of the Acadian people, the Deportation gave it shape and pointed it toward the future.

Probably the best known literary reference to the Deportation is Longfellow's poem Evangéline, a mythical account that has nonetheless contributed significantly to the shaping of the Acadian identity. Longfellow's poem was popular not only in the United States, it was also translated into many different languages, including French.[5] Evangeline

became a symbol of Acadia, and of the loss inflicted by the Deportation. According to Clarke:

> Evangéline est devenue un symbole culturelle puissant qui a joué un rôle non négligeable dans le développement de l'identité collective acadienne. C'est un symbole qui s'accordait parfaitement avec la conception cultivée par l'élite acadienne, celle d'une Acadie primitive, harmonieuse et chrétienne, brisée par la Déportation puis ressuscitée par la Providence. (31)

The image conveyed in Longfellow's poem, one of a pastoral and patriarchal society, and a romantic yet ineffectual heroine--whose life was completely controlled by outside circumstances--has long been the image that represented Acadia to Acadians and non-Acadians alike. Like the Acadians, Evangeline's life was forever altered by the Deportation. Unlike many of the Acadians, Evangeline never came back to Acadia, spending her life looking for her lost lover.

Not only did many Acadians, like Pélagie, heroine of the novel *Pélagie-la-Charrette*,[6] return to Acadia after the Deportation, some actually never left, having avoided deportation by hiding in the woods. These were the people who would repopulate Acadia, and devote themselves to keeping their culture alive. In the generations following the Deportation, the Acadians, like the Québécois, refused to be absorbed into an anglophone society, and maintained their communities and their way of life. Unlike Quebec, Acadia no longer existed as a political entity, but the people still existed, and they continued to struggle to maintain their identity. They did this largely by maintaining their language, culture and traditions, and by celebrating the memory of "le Grand Dérangement" and their attachment to the land of their birth.

"Depuis des lustres, la mémoire est considérée comme un élément clé dans la construction de l'identité nationale" (Clarke 3). Their past, which to a great extent they idealized, became the foundation of the Acadian sense of identity:

> Les idéologies acadiennes étaient celles de la survivance, posées sur la prémisse d'un retour à un passé idéalisé, contrepoint à un *statu quo* par trop plein d'embûches. Ces fondements s'exprimaient dans un ensemble national sous le triumvirat de la langue, de la foi et des origines. (...) Pendant un siècle, ces idéologies, auxquelles se greffa l'histoire, furent au coeur du discours identitaire en Acadie. (Clarke 19)

The Acadians managed to maintain a sense of cultural identity by valorizing the things they had in common--faith, ancestors and traditions--thereby overcoming the disjunction and diaspora forced on them by the Deportation.

The question of cultural identity is crucial for a nationless people such as the Acadians. And having a sense of cultural identity means distinguishing the qualities that draw a community together as well as those that set it apart from other communities. Raoul Boudreau explains this paradox in his study "La Quête de l'identité en poésie acadienne,"[7] explaining that identity distinguishes both what is similar, or identical, and at the same time that which is different. "L'identité collective. . . " he points out, "participe à la fois de cette ambivalence puisqu'elle insiste sur les caractères communs à tous les membres d'un groupe (la ressemblance) et sur ce qui distingue ce groupe de tous les autres (la différence)" (47). For the Acadians to maintain a sense of cultural identity, then, they had to focus on both the attributes that gave

cohesion to their community, and those that distinguished them from others both inside and outside of that community.

This distinction between "self" and "other" is natural at both the individual and the societal level, because, according to Benveniste:

> La conscience de soi n'est possible que si elle s'éprouve par contraste. Je n'emploie *je* qu'en m'adressant à quelqu'un, qui sera dans mon allocution un *tu*. C'est cette condition de dialogue qui est constitutive de la *personne*, car elle implique en réciprocité que je deviens *tu* dans l'allocution de celui qui à son tour se désigne par *je*. (260)

Individually, the Acadians in Maillet's novels may perceive themselves as very different from others in their communities. However, as a community they recognize a single culture that binds them together and separates them from the rest of the world. And when confronted by those "outsiders,"--generally representated by government officials--the Acadian communities of Maillet's novels band together to protect their own.

This defensive cohesion can be seen in *Cent ans dans les bois*, *Crache à Pic*,[8] and many other novels. The Acadians are building a collective consciousness that necessitates a distinction between themselves and those around them, the anglophone Canadians, the Québécois and even other Acadians.[9] This collective identity can also be cultural identity, a sense of belonging to a community which shares certain characteristics, traditions, values and a common history. As Raoul Boudreau explains, a sense of cultural identity is based on the concept of sharing ethnic origins, history, language, and geographic space (48). Despite the Deportation, the Acadians still managed to share

a history, language, even a geographical space, though not the same space as before the Deportation.

When, a century after the Deportation, the Acadians came together at a National Convention in 1881, they celebrated the culture that they had rescued from the Deportation--their past, present and future. In the roughly one hundred years between the Deportation and the first National Acadian Convention, Acadians--living mostly in small isolated communities--celebrated their traditions and their heritage in story and song, and thus kept alive their ethnic identity. Antonine Maillet maintains that:

> Acadia has proved that it has an inner need to exist and an inner quality of existence . . . There's a culture, in the most general sense of culture, which is the expression of one's selfhood. There is a tradition, a whole background of heritage, which comes from very deep roots, and this means that you don't sing or pray or sneeze or walk in the same way as your neighbours. For me, that's what defines an ethnic group. (Smith 255-6)

The Acadian culture has very deep roots, (stretching across two continents) that are grounded in their language, faith and traditions, and reflected in their stories. But perhaps the most important element in the maintenance of Acadian culture is their oral tradition, the stories and legends passed from generation to generation which became the myths which shaped their sense of identity. Maillet maintains that after the "Grand Dérangement," the Acadians "return to the land in order not to forget--it's the phenomenon of collective memory, and thus culture. They come back to Acadia because of culture" (Smith 262). Thus the stories of their past, their legends, their history--their oral tradition--provide them

with a vehicle for culture, uniting the people as listeners, and as sharers of a common heritage.[10]

The characters in Maillet's novels are part of this chain of oral history. In fact the narrator often deliberately elaborates the chain that connects her to the characters and the happenings in the novels:

> l'Histoire[11] continue . . . encore dans la bouche de mon cousin Louis à Bélonie, qui la tient de son père Bélonie à Louis, qui la tenait de son grand-père Bélonie . . . qui l'avait reçue de père en fils de ce propre Bélonie, fils de Thadée, fils de Bélonie premier qui, en 1770, fêtait ses nonante ans, assis au fond de la charrette même de Pélagie, première du nom. (PLC 12)

And in another novel: "C'est le vieux Clovis qui a tout raconté à mon père. Et lui s'en souvenait..."[12] Thus her novels are posited as a link in the chain of stories which have joined generations of Acadians and helped them to maintain their culture. And the characters in the novels are therefore the characters that would populate Acadian oral tradition.

This oral tradition is Antonine Maillet's heritage. Born in 1929 in the small town of Bouctouche, New Brunswick, Maillet grew up hearing the stories of the legendary heroes, adventurers and rebels of Acadia. At this time, people in town still gathered around the forge or the fire to share the stories of the oral tradition. But as evidenced in Maillet's novels, this world was coming to an end. Villages were no longer isolated, fishing was no longer an adequate means of support, and education and a new economy were beginning to change the Acadians' way of life. This dawning of a new era in Acadia, which also marked the transition from an oral culture to a written one would become a crucial

moment in the development of the modern "Acadian" identity--and it is this time which shaped Maillet's identity as a writer.

A prolific writer whose novels, plays and short stories traverse more than two hundred years of Acadian life, Maillet's works testify to the stories of her people's past, and to the birth of a new sense of Acadian identity. Maillet is attempting to give her readers a glimpse of what she calls the "petite histoire" of the Acadian people. In at least two of her novels, *Les Cordes-de-Bois* and *Les Confessions de Jeanne de Valois*,[13] Maillet's narrators refer to their subject matter as "la petite histoire," and in the prologue of *Cent ans dans les bois*, the narrator sees and narrates history "par les racines," from inside and down below. Because, as she points out, "d'au dessus, vous n'y verriez pas plus clair que dans un nid de fourmis" (CA 11). Maillet is not trying to create a history of the Acadian people, nor even to represent Acadia, but rather to give voice to the people who made the history. She writes from the inside of the anthill, as it were. Through her many characters, we begin to form an image of a people, a people who are engaged in the process of reclaiming and reestablishing the land, the language[14], the traditions and the stories threatened by the Deportation.

This study will examine the characters in Maillet's novels who are trying to rebuild the mythical way of Acadia, and who will witness the passage of their people from an oral culture to a written one. Though Maillet's theater also offers an opportunity for her characters to voice their stories, this study will focus on her novels, which offer a greater depth of character development, and a broader range of characters. The types of found in Maillet's works present to the reader an image of Acadian identity, and at the same time contribute to the enhancement of

this Acadian identity, for Maillet's work is both representative of and constitutive of a certain cultural identity. If Maillet's objective is to reveal the "petite histoire" of her people--a more personal view than could be afforded by History, or, as she states in *Cent ans dans les bois*, by any annalists, journalists, ethnographers, mythographers, historiographers, sociologists, archeologists or philosophers (337)--then her characters embody the real experiences and concerns of the Acadian people, and in studying them, we can understand--from the inside--what Hans Runte terms "acadianitude."[15] Maillet characterizes Acadian identity both by portraying the characteristics of acadianitude and by creating characters who embody this culture.

In examining Maillet's novels it becomes clear that not only are there certain characters who appear in several novels, there are also certain character types which occur again and again in her novels. Her novels focus largely on small, isolated Acadian villages, at various epochs during the life of the Acadian people. Central to the life of these villages is the storyteller, who maintains his people's culture by telling the stories of the epic and legendary heroes, as well as the outrageous and equally legendary outlaws and rebels that color the "petite histoire" of the Acadian people. The last generation of these storytellers will, like Maillet herself, transition to the world of writing. These are the characters who represent the stubborn, rebellious, faithful and indomitable spirit which has kept the Acadian culture alive for more than two hundred years after it ceased to exist as a nation. These are the characters who give life to Maillet's "petite histoire."

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Chapter 1

EPIC HERO(IN)ES, LEGENDARY FIGURES AND CULTURAL ICONS

Les légendes, chez nous, elles se vivent.
Antonine Maillet

The epic, a genre which: "unites a dispersed people under one hero, one myth, one nation, and eventually, one language..." (Runte, *Romancing* 143), can play a crucial role in the development of a people's cultural identity. Maillet's works can be classified as epic not only because of their heroic adventures, but also because they provide the hero(in)es, stories and myths which can unite a people. Maillet's novels celebrate the Acadian identity, which is brought to life with such color in her characters. These characters depict the Acadian struggle to construct and preserve a sense of community and common identity, fighting for the continued existence of their community as a social entity. Two such characters are Pélagie and Mademoiselle Cormier, who both return from exile to their native Acadia, bringing others with them. They like many of Maillet's heroes and heroines fight for a cause larger than themselves; they represent a group or community; and their actions have a lasting impact. "Pélagie, c'est le retour épique. Maria, Crache à Pic, c'est la survivance face à l'exploitation; c'est toujours le refus de soumission, devant l'histoire, devant le village ou devant les éléments" (Le Blanc, *Antonine Maillet* 59). Even though her heroines may not all play the same determining role in Acadian history that Pélagie-la-Charrette does, the epic nature of their stories serves to unite Acadians

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by giving them their own heroes and myths. This chapter will examine the epic, legendary and iconic characters created by Maillet, and the images of Acadian culture and identity that they provide.

Epic Heroines

One of the most prominent of Maillet's heroines is Pélagie-la-Charrette. The eponymous main character of this novel leads her people from exile in Georgia where they have been working alongside the slaves since the Deportation, back to their beloved Acadia, and in so doing, she conveys symbolic status to the story of the Acadian people. She is a true heroine, a savior of her people. Pélagie is thus the kind of character who can serve as an icon for all Acadians.

Pélagie-la-Charrette is decidedly grounded in both the historical and legendary past of Acadia. This is consistent with the traits that constitute an epic, the first two of which are: "1) Elle cherche son objet dans le passé épique nationale . . . 2) la source de l'épopée, c'est la légende nationale (et non une expérience individuelle et la libre invention qui en découle)" (Bakhtine, 449)[16]. In creating Pélagie, Maillet draws on the past. Pélagie not only represents all of the Acadians who fought to regain their homeland, she also becomes an icon, a symbol of the rebirth of Acadia. And there are other legendary and epic elements in *Pélagie-la-Charrette* as well. Beausoleil-Broussard is "an historical character who developed into a legend," Maillet says in an interview with Donald Smith[17] (266). And Maillet also incorporates two folktales "la Baleine blanche" and "la Dame géante de la nuit" into the novel, as well as other

mythical traditions such as the "black cart" or "la charrette noir" of death.

The story of Pélagie is not only firmly situated in the past, there are also several layers of separation between the story of Pélagie and the reader. We are told that the story has been handed down from generation to generation: "Depuis cent ans déjà qu'on se passait la charrette, de Bélonie en Bélonie, comme un fief..." (PLC 11). Thus the reader hears the story of Pélagie, as told to the narrator from

> la bouche de mon cousin Louis à Bélonie, qui la tient de son père Bélonie à Louis, qui la tenait de son grand-père Bélonie...qui l'avait reçue de père en fils de ce propre Bélonie, fils de Thadée, fils de Bélonie premier qui, en 1770, fêtait ses nonante ans, assis au fond de la charrette même de Pélagie, premiere du nom." (PLC 12)

The reader is then distanced from the actual events narrated. And this is Bakhtine's third distinguishing characteristic of an epic: "3) Le monde épique est coupé par la distance épique absolue du temps présent: celui de l'aède, de l'auteur et de ses auditeurs" (449). In the novel *Pélagie-la-Charrette*, information is at times attributed solely to legend (as are the exploits of Beausoleil-Broussard) and at times totally missing: "C'est ainsi que ni moi, ni Pélagie-la-Gribouille, ni même Pélagie-la-Charrette, première du nom, n'aurons jamais connu le nombre des victimes de l'ours ou du loup-cervier en forêt." (PLC 322) Thus in both its form and its content, in its oral aspect, and its legendary source of inspiration, *Pélagie-la-Charrette* is an epic. It is "a return to an epic moment in the Acadian past . . . the journey back to the kernel of national origins, by laying claim to the past, is a means of reclaiming the foundation on which identity will be (re)built" (Brière 7). *Pélagie-la-Charrette* thus

functions as a myth that embodies and perpetuates an Acadian social identity.

Moreover, just as the theme of an epic is not personal destiny, but the destiny of a community (Lukàcs 66), the theme of *Pélagie-la-Charrette* is the destiny of not just Pélagie, but of her community. It is not the story of one woman or even one family, but rather the story of the Acadian people, fighting to reclaim their lives after the deportation. The story begins with Pélagie and "les lambeaux de famille qu'elle avait réussi à rescaper du Dérangement" (PLC 17). But as the journey continues, more and more families attach themselves to Pélagie's cart: "Elle avait quitté l'Ile d'espoir avec sa seule famille, la mère pélage, plus une couple de rejets de pays qu'on allait rapatrier. Depuis lors, la Géorgie et la Caroline du Sud lui garrochaient chaque jour d'autres bribes de lignées à rentrer dans leurs terres" (PLC 73). And so the family that Pélagie left with has become a people: "Quelle femme cette Pélagie! capable à elle seule de ramener un peuple au pays. De le ramener à contre-courant." (PLC 113) Pélagie, who "n'a point hésité à s'emparer à deux mains d'un avenir absurde et chancelant..." (PLC 88), has become a leader for her people.

As Pélagie's "people" grows, so does her task--she is no longer on a personal journey, she has a mission: to bring her people back to Acadia, to rebuild the life which was taken away from them at the time of "le Grand Dérangement". She is willing to sacrifice her personal life to this end: with only a moment's hesitation, she accepts her son's decision to stay with the Iroquois, as the price for their continued journey, and she even sacrifices her own love for Beausoleil-Broussard when she chooses not to follow him, but to continue her mission: "Elle était misérable à

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fendre l'âme, mais elle ne perdait pas le fil de la vie...Elle continuerait sa marche vers le nord..." (PLC 135). She stands strong in her determination to regain Acadia, sacrificing her feelings and desires for her consuming devotion to Acadia. At one point she gives in to her human desires and makes a small detour in order to keep a rendez-vous with Beausoleil-Broussard, the legendary sea-captain who stole a ship from the English who were deporting him and his people.[18] Instead of going straight north, she heads toward the coast: "Pélagie-la-Charrette, en conduisant ses boeufs vers le nord en cette année 1772-73, criait plus souvent hue! que dia! Et ses boeufs tiraient vers la droite" (PLC 152). However willing she may be to delay their journey to meet up with Beausoleil, she will not abandon her quest.

Pélagie's commitment to this quest never waivers. She remains consistently strong and sure of her ability to reach her goal. Never does she doubt that she will once again see Grand Pré, the land she left. When faced with drought, she reminds her people that without the drought they would not have been able to move the oxen through the marshes of Savannah (PLC 31). When one of the group points out that she has a long journey before her, she refuses to be overwhelmed: "Il vous reste un continent à franchir, Pélagie, je ne sais pas si tu le sais. Elle le savait...Mais elle le saurait un jour à la fois" (PLC 35-6). Perhaps the most telling moment of the journey is when the carts appear to be helplessly trapped in the mud of the Salem marshes. Beausoleil, who has miraculously appeared just in time, is trying to rescue the carts and those inside, and he is on the verge of drowning. Pélagie stands rigidly against the horizon fighting with her will the battle she cannot fight physically. "Pélagie n'avait pas bougé durant toute la scène...elle se

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tenait droite comme un peuplier, ta tête au vent" (PLC 292). She cries out one thing only, "Ma vie!" (PLC 292). For Pélagie, this is the battle of her life. Her quest for her homeland could vanish beneath the mud of the marshes, and her lover along with it. But she stakes her life against the forces which would confound her, and she emerges victorious. Beausoleil and the carts survive.

And yet, she does have moments of weakness. After one rendez-vous with Beausoleil, she is distracted, "...Depuis le départ de Charleston qu'elle s'absentait durant de longues heures, Pélagie, comme une qui aurait eu un mal à cacher" (PLC 143). And although Pélagie is a strong woman, there were still some physical battles that she could not fight, like that of the Salem marshes. But despite these weaknesses, Pélagie remains a forceful heroine, a kind of anti-Evangeline. Not until the moment when the group at last arrives at Grand Prée, only to find it in uninhabitable ruins, does Pélagie realize that her people will not return to their past life, but to the future. "l'Acadie, ça n'existait plus' ...il n'y aurait plus désormais que des Acadiens" (PLC 342). Yet it is at this moment that she dies! Like Moses, she has brought her people back from exile, only to die at the doorstep of the Promised Land.

Pélagie's death is, like that of Moses, inevitable. An epic heroine, defined by the need to accomplish a single mission, she was unable to adapt to a new vision, a new mission. Once her vision is exhausted, so is she. Like Moses, who never entered the Promised Land, her mission completed, she no longer had a reason for being. The Deportation robbed her of her 'normal' life and propelled her into the role of hero and leader[19]. Thereafter, she could live neither for herself, nor for her children, nor even for her love for Beausoleil, she lived only for her

mission. On another level as well, her mission is over, for if Pélagie the hero's mission was to bring her people back to Acadia, Pélagie the character's mission was to acquaint the reader with the danger and struggles faced by the Acadians following the Deportation. As René Le Blanc writes, "Pélagie refait l'histoire au lieu de la subir" (*Oralité*, 39). This role will now be taken up by Pélagie's daughter Madeleine, and by many of Maillet's other characters. Pélagie has fulfilled her purpose, she has passed the torch to a new generation.

While the life of Pélagie is situated in a specific moment in the continuum of Acadian history, long after her death, her story will continue as a cultural icon, a symbol for her people. The story and the characters of *Pélagie-la-Charrette* take on legendary or mythical proportions, as Marjorie Fitzpatrick explains:

> both Bélonie and Beausoleil disappear at the end--Bélonie into the forest, Beausoleil out to sea--and thus quickly pass into the domain of legend. Pélagie herself is the source and inspiration of that legend as she and her Cart of Life at last go to their final rest in the soil of the new Acadia. Thus Acadia itself becomes the heaven of the emerging myth, the medium of ultimate union between Pélagie and the two men she loves. Pélagie is the brightest star in the new constellation...she is the epic heroine whose quest for life and freedom has given significance to the lives of the others, and it is her womanhood that shapes that quest. Her triumph is in defining the roles of others without limiting them. (151)

Pélagie-la-Charrette, the epic, unites its people through identification with a common legend, giving shape to a society by providing Acadians

with a myth, a hero, and ideals which form the basis of a cultural identity. Maillet's epics "found her country, ground it in its fundamental orality, and present of it for the first time an image in which all Acadians, despite their diversity, dispersedness and isolation, can recognize themselves and the distinct society they form." (Runte, *Romancing* 145) *Pélagie-la-Charrette* is charged with the elements of Acadian tradition. Pélagie is the representative heroine who is "veuve d'un homme, d'une famille, d'un peuple. Veuve de toute l'Acadie qu'elle avait entreprise de se ranimer et de rebâtir," (PLC 132). Her return to Acadia is "entreprise individuelle et collective qui marque le destin de l'Acadie" (Laroche 15). And the tales and supernatural occurrences such as the sightings of Blackbeard's ghost, the burning ship and the "charrette noir de la Mort" have long been a part of Acadian folklore, the gathering and sharing of Acadian traditions. The story itself, as a folktale, is a unifying force: it unites narrator and listener as well as linking one generation to another. As the folktales, such as that of Pélagie, are passed "de père en fils," they become more mythical than historical. And these myths helped shape the oral Acadian society:

> Ces récits de bouche à oreille, c'est tout ce qu'il faut pour donner à la matière les vertus merveilleuses propres à la transformer en mythe. Rien d'étonnant, alors à ce que la pâte humaine de l'oeuvre soit transposée à un niveau d'interprétation où l'humain atteigne facilement aux dimensions du gigantesque, l'orientant ainsi vers le caractère mythique, qui confère à ces personnages une valeur de type ethnique. (Le Blanc, *Oralité* 38-9)

Pélagie has taken on mythical proportions that, thanks to the oral tradition, have allowed her to become an ethnic symbol.

In *Pélagie-la-Charrette*, one of the generations through which the story is filtered is that of Pélagie's and Bélonie's descendents Pélagie-la-Gribouille and Louis à Bélonie[20]. The novel *Cent ans dans les bois* takes up the story of this generation, of Pélagie-la-Gribouille and her contemporaries, as they struggle to maintain a sense of their community and culture after "cent ans de silence." This epoch in which Pélagie-la-Gribouille, Louis à Bélonie and the others live, ("sur l'empremier") is a special time; the narrator finds it to be "le plus mystérieux, le plus envoûtant des mondes" (CA 9). La Gribouille and her contemporaries are the generation that must bridge the gap between the Acadians who returned from the Deportation to reclaim land and the Acadians of the future, who will carry on an "Acadian" identity.

Like her ancestor Pélagie, La Gribouille is influenced by the Acadian preoccupation with the combined myths of "paradis perdu" and the "terre promise." She has a veritable passion for the land, which she sees as essential to the survival of her small community of Acadians; "j'ons laissé Grand-Pré aux Anglais et Memramcook à l'arpenteur Des Barres, j'abandonnerons point le Fond-de-la-Baie aux vers ni aux bêtes à bon Dieu" (CA 44). Pélagie-la-Gribouille "n'avait cessé de défendre la terre contre l'océan, depuis l'arrivée des ancêtres sur la baie" (CA 17). This land that she and her family have worked on for generations is an integral part of her identity--it is not the promised land, nor paradise regained, but it represents an effort to reestablish paradise and the foundation on which the future will be built. For Pélagie, the land and the respect for the land are something that is passed from mother to daughter, since the time of Pélagie-la-Charrette and Madeleine. She wishes to pass this heritage on to her only daughter, Babée, by keeping

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her away from the islands, and the sailor that she loves: "c'était précisément pour l'éloigner de tout ce qui sentait le sel et les marées qu'elle tenait à garder sa fille sur sa terre" (CA 163). The "Promised Land" provides the stability that Pélagie deems necessary to assure the future of their community. "sans la terre et la forêt, le peuple du Fond-de-la-Baie se réveillait bien au-delà de la vallée de Josaphat au bout du siècle" (CA 17). Her ancestors went to great lengths to return from the Deportation to reinstall themselves near Memramcook, only to find that the land that they had cleared belonged to someone else, and they must move on. The land that they ultimately settled and the community that they founded at Fond-de-la-Baie is the basis for the rebirth of their community, and it is the inheritance which they left to future generations.

Pélagie la Gribouille finds her roots and grounds her sense of identity not only in the land but also in her sense of connection to her ancestors. As René Le Blanc argues, "la mythification des personnages, même dans la révolte, se fait par l'enracinement dans la tradition ancestrale" (41). Like many other "défricheteux de parenté," Pélagie-la-Gribouille, "haire et descendante en ligne directe de la plus solide et authentique Acadie ancestrale" (CA 17) is very concerned with genealogy. She laments that though she descends from Pélagie, she has only one quarter of LeBlanc blood: "la Gribouille qui aurait pu naître LeBlanc légitime et de plein droit, s'était vue affublée d'un quartier de Léger, sorti de nulle part, par nul autre que son propre engendreur Xavier qui avait lui-même raté son LeBlanc d'un seul lit" (CA 36). Her lineage connects her to the story of the return from exile, to Pélagie the first who made it

possible for the future generations of Acadians (like la Gribouille) to call themselves Acadians.

Already proud of descending from Pélagie-la-Charrette, Pélagie-la-Gribouille becomes even more preoccupied with her ancestry when the community finds out that Pélagie's son Jean left behind a LeBlanc treasure. Jérôme, the wandering storyteller, brings news that there is a LeBlanc treasure buried in the vicinity (bringing with him a map), provoking in la Gribouille and in the community a great desire for what they feel is their legitimate inheritance. Jérôme's news and map turns the men of the town into "douze chevaliers...qui partaient à la quête du trésor des LeBlanc" (CA 61). The men take their mission seriously, even going to confession to prepare, but the crusade ends in a less than dignified manner when they find in the place of the treasure a barrel of excellent white wine, the men end up drunk on the beach:

> et l'Acadie à jeun et sans péché qui était venue creuser dans la dune pour retrouver le trésor de la lignée et qui s'abreuvait goulûment à la source jaillie des veines ancestrales, crut entendre frissoner les foins sous le rire du Lac-à-la-Mélasse, des Pointes et de la butte-du-Moulin. (CA 65)

The chivalric quest for this treasure will continue throughout the novel, until it is discovered that the "treasure" is, in fact, land in Philadelphia, which is being used by "des Anglais"! The quest for treasure, and their longing for their inheritance keeps Pélagie and her cohorts looking to the past. And it is this past, after all, which has given them their greatest legacy--their history and their culture.

But as the people will learn at the end of their treasure hunt, and as Pélagie-la-Gribouille learns, the moment has come to stop looking

toward the past, and to start looking toward the future. Pélagie's community, Fond-de-la-Baie, is no longer isolated, it is penetrated by a string of outsiders. Jérôme's presence is quickly followed by the appearance of the cadaver of a black man unearthed in the dune, Renaud--"un Français de France"-- and their "neighbors" from the "île Saint-Jean (Prince Edward Island). These outsiders force the community, and Pélagie in particular, to confront change. Jérôme not only brings with him stories from outside the small community, he is the first outsider to hear their story: Jérôme-le-Menteux, un étrange, le premier hors-les-côtes à l'entendre en cent ans" (CA 34). His appearance at the beginning of the novel foreshadows the opening up of the isolated community, and the dawn of a new epoch in their history. He also serves as witness to the changes taking place. He realizes that when Renaud teaches everyone to read and write, that their oral tradition is at risk. "Jérôme est le premier à comprendre. Il comprend surtout que le rejeton des vieux pays a surgi sur leurs côtes pour y semer le progrès, les idées neuves et la discorde. Qu'est-ce qu'un peuple qui sait conter et réciter a besoin de savoir lire!" (CA 150). Jérôme, an outsider to the small community but an Acadian nonetheless, is also a storyteller, which puts him in a privileged position. He is the keeper of their stories and their culture, and he can recognize the significance of the intervention of Renaud, who brings with him literacy.

Pélagie-la-Gribouille, like the others, does not easily adapt to the changes taking place around her. Her commitment to the past and to maintaining her lineage is so strong that she refuses to accept that Babée loves Pierre, who is not only not descended from Pélagie-la-Charrette, but is from "l'Ile Saint-Jean," and thus <u>not</u> from "la terre

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ferme" (CA 172) or "solide" (CA 200). He does not fit into the image of ancestral identity she clings to.[21] Instead of accepting the alliance of Babée and Pierre, she tries to force Babée to marry an older hunchback, Léon LeBlanc, who would tie her more directly to the line of Pélagie-la-Charrette. La Gribouille's understanding of her culture, her Acadian heritage, is so centered on the myth of Pélagie's cart that she is, in fact, unable to see the Acadians from the island as sharing in that Acadian heritage. It is not until the convention, when Pierre so eloquently pleads for the recognition of the islanders' share in the common plight of the "Grand Dérangement" and its aftermath, that Pélagie is able to expand her vision of cultural identity to include Pierre, and others like him. Pélagie's sense of community is as insular and restricted as her small community itself was for nearly one hundred years. She distinguishes as "other" all those who do not come from her community, or descend from Pélagie-la-Charrette. La Gribouille needs to widen her vision to include other Acadians who transgress the boundaries of family and village but who nonetheless still share the common tragic history of the Deportation. The first "convention nationale" gives la Gribouille this opportunity. She recognizes, finally, that there are other Acadians outside her community who share a culture and history. Recognizing that Pierre shares in her heritage and is not completely different or "other" allows Pélagie to accept his union with Babée without feeling that she is sacrificing her past.

The story of Pélagie-la-Gribouille letting go of the past, and opening herself to new ways of seeing things is also the story of Acadia coming out of the woods and out of their isolated communities to join others and to move into a new epoch. Pélagie's growing pains are the growing pains of the Acadians, secluded in small communities for a century. The

convention allows them to see themselves as part of a larger whole. It also forms a bridge between the past and the future. At the convention, as La Gribouille and the others demonstrate, the Acadians realize that they are in fact a "people," who share a common history and heritage, and they are further united by the designation of the feast of the Assumption as their national holiday. They need no longer cling to the past and to the myths... as the only way of maintaining a sense of identity. From this point on, they recognize the importance of the present and even the future to their sense of cultural identity. And they recognize that they play as important a role as that of their ancestors in the creation and maintenance of this identity. At the beginning of the novel, it is pointed out to Jérôme that the Acadian people coming back from the Deportation "n'avaient plus le goût du martyre: ils y avaient déjà assez goûté à Grand-Pré, puis en exil, et à Tintamarre. Ils ne demandaient plus qu'à vivre, vivre, survivre!" (CA 23). The Acadians of the next century, however, realize that they desire and can have more than mere survival. Pélagie-la-Gribouille is the heroine of this new movement, passing on to her daughter not only the past, but the future as well.

Pélagie-la-Gribouille serves as the icon of a new generation of Acadians. Though La Gribouille's battle may not seem to have the epic proportions of that of Pélagie-la-Charrette, its ramifications are every bit as enduring. Like her ancestor, La Gribouille embodies the struggles of her time. Thus Pélagie-la-Charrette is not the only folktale, nor the only heroine who unites Acadians, and develops their sense of ethnic identity. Both Pélagie-la-Charrette and Pélagie-la-Gribouille are the kind of epic

heroines who are responsible to varying degrees for the direction of their people, ushering them into new lands and new epochs.

Legendary Figures

Maillet's more modern characters continue the work of Pélagie even as her descendant Pélagie-la-Gribouille does. The eponymous heroines of three other novels, *Mariaagélas*, *Crache à Pic* and *Les Cordes-de-Bois*[22], engage in adventures that easily take on legendary proportions, and they, like Pélagie, provide modern Acadians with cultural myths and icons. The exploits of these characters are characterized by heroism tempered with mischievousness, and their daring deeds are the source of many stories. These stories are modern folktales glorifying a new generation of Acadian heroines.

Crache à Pic, part of this new generation, may be an outlaw and a rebel[23] who answers only to her own conscience, but she is at the same time a heroine who is not afraid of a challenge and who acts selflessly. Although she wanted to go to sea, Crache à Pic could not turn her back on her family obligations, as her brothers did. So, sacrificing the freedom and independence of her life sailing around the world, she returns to her village to keep a promise that her mother would not die alone and to take up the care of her younger, "innocent" brother Tobie. Daughter of the infamous Chache à Pic and his uncommonly strong wife Aglaé, Crache à Pic is not destined for an ordinary career. Rather, she takes up bootlegging, flying in the face of convention, and also opposing the town's powerful bootlegger, Dieudonné. The object of Crache à Pic's Prohibition-era bootlegging is not merely financial gain, but also to partake in the pursuit of the forbidden fruit--a joy which she seeks for

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herself and on behalf of those around her--her brother, the neighbors who form her crew, and the entire village. She had received this mission when she gave up her life at sea to return to her mother's deathbed. Her dying mother commissions her: "Mange [les fruits des champs] sans te faire du souci, parce que le Dieudonné, ses champs, il les a volés lui itou au pauvre monde" (CAP 46). From then on, Crache à Pic had to take responsibility not only for her destiny and that of her helpless brother, but in fact for all the helpless townspeople, struggling with the Depression and with the economic usurpation of Dieudonné. "Ce jour-là, Crache à Pic avait su qu'elle combattrait le bootlegger, David devant Goliath, armée de son seul courage et de sa jarnigoine qui devait bientôt ébahir le pays" (CAP 245). The exploits of Crache à Pic and her improvised crew serve not only to entertain the villagers and provide them with bootleg liquor, but also to unite the village against Dieudonné--the rich encroacher--and the true outsiders--the authorities.

Ironically Crache à Pic actually falls in love with "Vif-Argent" the constable assigned to police the village and the sea after the former constable "Martial" is killed by bootleggers. Crache à Pic is momentarily placed in the position (not unlike that of Pélagie) of having to choose between her personal feelings and desires, and her loyalty to the town and its only sources of income, bootlegging and poaching. But in the end, it is Vif-Argent who compromises his job for love, distracting Tobie's bear and unearthing Crache à Pic's cache of Caribbean rum to prove her that she cannot outwit him, but leaving the rum for the villagers to enjoy.

> Non pas victoire de l'homme sur la bête, mais de l'amour sur les usages et coutumes. Le Vif-Argent qui abandonnait aux fêtards du pays de quoi se souvenir toute leur vie de cette glorieuse époque de

la Prohibition, en réalité invitait tout le pays à célébrer les noces défendues entre un connestable et une hors-la-loi. (CAP 263)

But this unconventional alliance is not destined for a smooth course nor a happy ending. For a time, the two go their separate ways since their chosen careers are irreconcilable (CAP 266). Quicksilver's love is doubly forbidden for Crache à Pic, as the occupations of outlaw and constable are irreconcilable, and as Crache à Pic is not living for herself alone. Crache à Pic has a mission, but even more importantly, Crache à Pic cannot deny her true self. In the end, Crache à Pic, like Pélagie, will not compromise her mission, even for love.

Vif Argent, her lover, even sacrifices himself, dying in her place, in order to bring down "Goliath," that is, Dieudonné. Cast in the role of David she must triumph; she will do so by outwitting, not by overpowering, Goliath. Her mission is not finished until she defeats Dieudonné, the rich giant who has usurped the lands of the poor defenseless villagers. In her triumph over Dieudonné, Crache à Pic reestablishes the rights of the townspeople, maintaining and affirming the community. And through her bootlegging, Crache à Pic not only provides the town with liquor, she also provides them with much needed entertainment, staging elaborate diversionary ruses to deflect attention from her illegal activities.

Her final act is to orchestrate the culmination of the trial of Dieudonné for the murder of Vif Argent, which unites the village against the law of the outsiders. Crache à Pic becomes a hero for her people. And the tales of her exploits, like those of Mariaagélas and others, depict "la plus glorieuse et la plus tragique époque" of Acadia (MG 236). Crache à Pic symbolizes the newfound thrill of freedom offered during

Prohibition, an epoch that transformed Acadia into a place of wonderfully illicit adventures in bootlegging.

Like Crache à Pic, Maillet's legendary heroine Mariaagélas also exercises the forbidden profession of bootlegging. Mariaagélas's actions may not have been as self-sacrificing as those of Pélagie, or even those of Crache à Pic, but her exploits and adventures do contribute to the cultural myths of the Prohibition generation. As the disbelief expressed by the narrator would indicate, Maria's story might at first glance lack the distance typical of an epic:

> Vous me direz que c'est inutile, que vous ne pouvez pas croire à une histoire comme celle-ci, que vous avez trop vécu, que vous n'êtes pas si légers de croyance et que les côtes d'Acadie, pour tout dire, sont trop à l'abri pour avoir connu des aventures pareilles . . . Je vous connais. Vous croirez aux sorciers, plutôt, et à l'Antéchrist, et au septième du septième, mais pas à l'existence de Mariaagélas. Elle est trop proche et elle nous ressemble trop. Ç'a quasiment trop l'allure de la vérité pour être vrai. (MG 9)

In her introduction of Maria, the narrator simultaneously brings out her resemblance and proximity to real people on the Acadian coasts, and her unbelievable, mythic proportions. Her story, then, serves as more than a mere adventure story. It defies belief and produces a hero who is of the people, and nonetheless as mythical as the Antichrist. And the mythic proportions of her story, as well as its thorough grounding in Acadian time, language and space place Mariaagélas firmly in the cultural context of the Acadian people.

That Mariaagélas is no ordinary girl is clear early in her life; at five, she has figured out the best time to go out collecting returnable bottles,

"à huit ans, elle était le plus gros vendeur de bouteilles de tout le sû du pont" (MG 12). A girl this clever is not destined to end up in the canneries in the states, nor cleaning other people's houses. And indeed, having already refused to leave her village to work in the canneries, she soon dooms her future as a servant as well, by delivering "le plus formidable poing dans l'oeil de mémoire scolaire" (MG 14) to the schoolteacher whom she feels has insulted her little sister. Having disdained and forsaken the traditional paths of girls her age, Maria has no choice but the extraordinary: "Mariaagélas comprit qu'elle n'avait plus le choix, qu'il lui fallait se lancer à l'aventure" (MG 14).

It is through her career as a legendary adventurer that Maria makes her contribution to Acadian culture, history, and ethnic identity, becoming such a colorful piece in the tapestry of the Acadian story that the narrator, on hearing her story, dreams of bringing it to life:

> Je me rappelle avoir rêvé, à ce moment-là d'écrire un jour les belles aventures de cette Mariaagélas qui s'est battue si joyeusement avec la mer, les douaniers, les pêcheurs, les curés, les commères, et la vie, pendant la plus glorieuse et la plus tragique époque de l'histoire de mon pays. (MG 236)

Like Pélagie and Crache-à-Pic, Mariaagélas is one of the defining stories of Acadia.

Although *Mariaagélas* and *Crache à Pic* resemble each other in many ways, and even recount some of similar adventures, the novels and the heroines still differ substantially. Crache à Pic has relationships and is firmly rooted in her community, whereas Maria, who disappears at the end of the novel, has mythical proportions from the beginning. Maria seems to belong more to Bakhtine's "passé épique" and Crache à Pic to

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the real world. Nowhere is this more apparent than at the end of the two novels. Crache à Pic, who has finally triumphed over Dieudonné but has lost her lover, remains in the village to preserve her victory. Maria, however, disappears quietly at the end of the novel--rather like Bélonie in *Pélagie-la-Charrette*--and only vague rumors of her are left. She has vanished into the domain of legend.

Pélagie-la-Charrette, *Crache à Pic*, and *Mariaagélas* are stories that link one generation to another. The tradition of storytelling has given the Acadians a sense of history and a sense of belonging. Just as the story of La Gribouille must be understood in the light of the trials of the generations that preceded her own, in *Les Cordes de Bois* the story of la Piroune and her daughter la Bessoune (the Mercenaires, an almost entirely female clan known as "les Cordes-de-Bois") begins generations before their births. "Pour débrouiller les fils d'une histoire nouée par tant de mépris, haine, colère, et chicanes épiques entre deux clans d'un même pays, il faudrait remonter quelques générations" (CdB 17). Maillet has given the story of the Mercenaire women an historical context and epic proportions. And yet the seeming oxymoron of "chicanes épiques" evokes the paradox that is the Mercenaire clan.. They are not epic heroines, or even heroines in the classic or traditional sense of the term. Their actions may take on epic proportions, but they also remain "chicanes."

Another contradiction of the Cordes-de-Bois women is that they both reject and oppose all the mores and traditions of the parish and community[24] while at the same time they incarnate the very spirit of the foundational values that inform these mores. While they prefer the quays to church, and sexual freedom to the strictures of society, they

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prove at the auction of the poor that they surpass all other parishioners in generosity and compassion for others. Putting the sanctimonious parishioners, and even the curé in their places, the Mercenaire women offer shelter to all the poor, crippled, orphaned "rejects" at no cost to the parish: "C'est ben, je le prendrai pour rien, qu'elle fit" (CdB 301). They prove themselves willing and able to give of themselves and their homes, sacrificing even their most valued belongings to help those in need. Their story includes such acts of heroism, and equally grand acts of outlawry. Although unlike a traditional epic hero, they do not embody (or even accept) the values of their society, they do represent the free-spirited rejection of authority that allowed Acadian society to continue to exist after the deportation. The adventures of the Mercenaire women form part of the Acadian tradition: "et justement, les Cordes-de-Bois allaient devenir la cause de cette lutte qui devait durer une couple de générations et assaisonner la petite histoire d'un pays déjà bien avancé sur le chemin de la gloire" (CdB 27). La Piroune and La Bessoune have joined Pélagie and the other heroines as icons of Acadian culture.

By the legendary quality of their lives, and the very fact of springing as it were from unknown and unseen fathers (as if they had self-generated), La Piroune and La Bessoune are separated from the ordinary folk/community. Whereas characters in Maillet's works are very often referred to in terms of familial relationships, (Maria à Gélas, la Veuve à Calixte, Pierre à Tom, etc.) the Mercenaire women are most often referred to by their names--Patience, la Piroune, la Bessoune[25]--or in terms of their land, "les Cordes-de-Bois[26]." The illegitimacy of la Piroune and la Bessoune has freed them from the constraints of patriarchal

society[27]. Moreover, they are physically set apart from the village, living on a butte which towers above the community.

> Ce qui n'empêche pas ces cordes, du haut de leur butte, de dominer la mer, le pont, et le village accroupi à leurs pieds. Et c'est là où l'écharde s'enfonce dans la chair . . . chaque fois qu'un homme respectable du Pont veut crier des noms à ces effrontés, il doit dresser la tête pour les voir. (CdB 20)

They stand above the village, physically and morally, and it is from this privileged position that they will add to the history of their country.

While the Cordes-de-Bois women have many admirable qualities, including their generosity toward the poor, they are in fact, a divisive force in the community. They divide it into two camps; the side of Ma-Tante-la-Veuve and the side of the Cordes-de-Bois. They even manage to turn the vicaire and the curé against each other; the vicaire having been, in the eyes of the village, seduced by la Bessoune. While they have ostensibly rejected all the values of family and society, they do in fact live by certain standards that are admirable. They value freedom, and self-expression, not conformity and they are not controlled by hypocrisy. Their beliefs are deeply felt, and they are absolutely true to these beliefs. These are the qualities that allowed Pélagie to fight back from deportation, and which allowed generations of Acadians to continue to think of themselves as Acadians. The Mercenaire women offer a new paradigm of Acadian identity.

Like the Acadians, the people in *Don l'Orignal,*[28] the "Puçois," are also engaged in a battle for land and for respect. The bourgeois mainlanders feel threatened by the Puçois, whose island, "l'Ile-aux-Puces," surged forth one day from the ocean, and want to put them in

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their place (DO 14). *Don l'Orignal* tells the tale of the conflict between the bourgeois and the "Puçois," as the two groups are engaged in a fight to the death, the bourgeois trying to destroy the Puçois, who in turn, are fighting to survive (Godin 29). *Don l'Orignal* has been called a fable, a myth, an epic, an allegory, and a "Rabelaisian fantasy" (Fitzpatrick, *Search* 5). The tale of the Puçois people has elements of all of these. Marjorie Fitzpatrick maintains that "Maillet created in *Don l'Orignal* an Acadian myth" (Search, 5). The style and the characters in *Don l'Orignal* are quite different from those novels such as *Mariaagélas*, *Les Cordes-de-Bois*, or even *Pélagie-la-Charrette*. The story of the Puçois must be interpreted as being mythical or allegorical. Melvin Gallant argues that "en ce qui concerne *Don l'Orignal*, on n'a pas besoin d'avancer très loin dans la lecture du texte pour comprendre qu'il s'agit d'une fable" (*Epopée* 287). And Jean-Cléo Godin states that "C'est . . . avec *Par derrière chez mon père, Mariaagélas* et, surtout, le merveilleux *Don l'Orignal* que ces personnages révéleront leur pleine dimension légendaire" (26). As a legend, *Don l'Orignal* offers a moral to the Acadian people.

Like *Crache à Pic*, *Don l'Orignal* is the story of "David contre Goliath," a significant myth for the Acadians, for they had nothing compared to the "English," nothing but their wits and their will. The situation of Don l'Orignal and his people can be compared to that of the Acadians. "Le lecteur le moindrement conscient de la situation, de la langue et de la mentalité des Acadiens est tenté de comparer ces derniers aux Puçois et d'associer les continentaux aux Anglais. Si cette hypothèse n'est pas réellement de fondemont dans le texte, elle demeure néanmoins vraisemblable" (Gallant, 293). As a fable, "destiné à illustrer un précepte" (Petit Robert 745), *Don l'Orignal* illustrates the indomitable

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spirit and inherent dignity of a seemingly insignificant people. Melvin Gallant points out, "par delà la fable, c'est de l'Acadie qu'il s'agit, de la grandeur de ce petit pays, de la réalité d'une nation qui refuse de mourir" (*Epopée* 293). *Don l'Orignal* is an Acadian epic that lauds the determination and ingenuity of a people.

The similarity between the Puçois and the Acadians becomes clear in the epilogue, when the narrator's cousin visits the town, which offers "le curieux spectacle d'une ville endormie pendant cent ans" (DO 141). Like the Acadian towns that regenerated after the Deportation, the town in *Don l'Orignal* has shifted to a more remote location, keeping to itself. The narrator, at the end, finds that the town in question "s'était légèrement déplacé; que la population se concentrait désormais là-bas, au bord de l'eau; que cette population d'ailleurs se trouvait renouvelée...complètement renouvelée" (DO 142). The town is no longer bourgeois, it belongs to the Puçois who have moved down, closer to the water. They have won the battle and claimed their town--and renewed themselves as a people.

The patriarch and leader of this people is Don l'Orignal, "un colosse barbu, poilu et encorné" (DO 13). While he rules his people benevolently and well, he is not the true hero of the tale. Michel-Archange, the "écuyer du roi" (DO 19) is the quintessential hero, predestined for great things (DO 36). He fights a battle with "un suppôt de Satan, le défunt Sam Amateur qui, au delà de sa tombe, était venu déranger la tranquillité du pays" (DO 21). This battle of good and evil (which precedes the battle of the Puçois and the bourgeois) begins over a hunting quarrel, and is waged even beyond the grave, after the death of

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Sam Amateur. Michel-Archange is the indomitable hero, who does not fear even supernatural foes.

The younger generation of Puçois men is represented by Noume and Citrouille, the sons of Don l'Orignal and Michel-Archange. Noume is the young sailor who has taken off on his own, and has seen the world. Now back home, he is the knight who leads his people against the mainlanders. Citrouille, in contrast, is the pensive romantic hero who falls in love with Adéline. It is Citrouille who--after being resurrected from the dead--pronounces his own version of Hamlet's famous soliloquy: "crever ou pas crever, c'est là la grosse affaire...autrement pourquoi c'est qu'un homme des îles endurerait de se laisser voler, pis casser la gueule, pis appeler des noms, pis siffler sa fille par le monde de la terre ferme?" (DO 78). Citrouille epitomizes the dilemma of the Acadians, marginalized by the anglophone community, yet nonetheless willing to work and even marry into it.

La Sagouine (better known as the eponymous heroine of the one-woman play writtten in 1971) is the cleaning woman and mother who through her intelligence and wit becomes the Puçois most valuable spy/combatant. "Sage interprète des deux 'villages', elle seule pouvait être le centre de l'un et de l'autre" (Godin 28). La Sagouine, with her pail and mops, is at home in both communities:

> Pour mieux camoufler son intention et faire oublier sa présence, la Sagouine s'était efforcée de s'identifier aux murs, au plancher, à ses seaux et torchons, et ainsi noyer son individualité et sa mission dans le grand baquet universel de toutes les lavandières du monde. (DO 51)

She has become invisible, her individuality lost in her wash bucket, but this enables her to infiltrate the bourgeois village, the enemy territory. La Sagouine's anonymity is that of all those Acadians who quietly went about their business in a world that was not their own, all the while maintaining their own culture and traditions.

Like la Sagouine, la Sainte is another character in *Don l'Orignal* who shows up with slight variations in many of Maillet's novels. Like Ma Tante-la-Veuve, La Veuve-à-Calixte, Marie-Pet, and la Sainte in other novels, la Sainte is the woman who takes it upon herself to be the community's moral voice. Besides her self-appointed guardian and example of morality, la Sainte also finds herself in charge of maintaining the community's history. She starts by saving the silk handkerchief that the bourgeois milliner dropped while on a visit to the enemy island. She suggests that it should be put in a museum, and thus "la Sainte fut nommé par le ministre culturel des on île, en ce lendemain de l'incursion des bourgeois en pays ennemi, la première conservatrice du musée de guerre de l'Ile-aux-Puces" (DO 81). La Sainte has been made responsible for the relics of war.

Pamphile, like the storytellers Bélonie and Jérôme, is also made responsible for the cultivation of his community's history and traditions. He is the chronicler, bard, and poet of the community, creating and passing down their stories.[29] It is Pamphile, "poète national" (DO 42) who makes the stories of his people into epics: "Pamphile, en l'honneur des plus belles oeuvres de ses confrères poètes de tous les temps, appela son épopée la *Puciade*" (DO 42). The Puçois, like the Acadians were for many years, an oral people. And they would have no myths, no legends, no stories, if it weren't for the bards. "Ce qui se passa ensuite...n'a été

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consigné ni dans les chroniques de l'Ile-aux-Puces, ni dans les archives du continent. La littérature orale de l'île se borne a rapporter..." (DO 92). Without the storytellers, like Pamphile, the legend of *Don l'Orignal*, like so many others would have vanished.

These characters in *Don l'Orignal*, who fight this epic battle for renewal, are the archetypes of Maillet's novels, who appear again and again in her works. "On peut dire que les personnages de *Don l'Orignal* s'insinuent un peu partout dans l'oeuvre d'Antonine Maillet, mais, tout en gardant leurs noms et leur personnalité ils réapparaissent le plus souvent à des époques et dans des situations différentes" (Gallant, *Epopée* 287).[30] These Puçois--Don l'Orignal, la Sagouine, la Sainte, Citrouille and the others--are the stock characters of Maillet's novels, characters who need no profound explanation, but who audiences can recognize and identify with. Jean-Cléo Godin writes:

> Les Pucois de *Don l'Orignal* constituent donc une société autonome, insulaire, à demi légendaire. Et dans cet univers aussi rigoureusement hiérarchisé que la cité médiévale, il est remarquable que chacun soit identifié par un surnom, tel un patronyme totémique: Noume, Citrouille, la Sainte, Michel-Archange, Boy à Polyte, Don l'Orignal lui-même. Cela tient du bestiaire et du petit catéchisme illustré, du livre de contes et de la fable. Mais c'est à travers eux qu'Antonine Maillet se rapproche d'une Acadie vivante et vraie. Seuls les Puçois, ne l'oublions pas, forment 'un peuple,' alors que ceux du 'continent' et 'qu'on appelle si scrupuleusement l'élite' ne sont que des 'gens de classe.' (DO 26)

These characters, who appear so regularly in Maillets' works, form a people, a legendary people. Barbara Thompson Godard writes: "in *Don*

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l'Orignal folk traditions have the appearance of history and history gains the heightened grandeur of legend" (52). And this legendary people will be a symbol of and for the Acadians, fighting themselves for survival.

In *Don l'Orignal* as in all her novels, Maillet has created strong and forceful characters, capable of surmounting the obstacles that surround them. And the women in particular will emerge as significant figures--as evidenced by the importance of la Sagouine in *Don l'Orignal* and by the number of leading female characters in her novels. Melvin Gallant maintains that Maillet "allait donner aux femmes un rôle à jouer que l'histoire ne leur avait pas donné. L'écrivaine allait leur restituer leur rôle de leadership dans la société" (Gallant, *Mythe* 79). And indeed, la Sagouine and Pélagie, Maria and Crache à Pic, la Gribouille, la Piroune and la Bessoune are anything but passive. They take charge of their destinies and those of others. In fact, Le Blanc writes that Maillet's works are "le portrait sans cesse retouché de la femme acadienne, héroïque sans le savoir, chaque avatar fondé dans un moment histsorique ou un milieu de lutte, résumant une réaction typique" (Le Blanc, *Oralité* 40). In these novels, Maillet creates a new image of Acadians, especially the women.

Cultural Icons

Without necessarily being epic heroes or heroines, or even engaging in adventures, some of Maillet's characters function as symbols or icons of the Acadian people. While the characters in all of Maillet's novels, epic and otherwise offer symbols of/for the Acadian people, two novels present a slightly different case. *Pointe aux Coques* and *Emmanuel à Joseph à Dâvit*[31], may lack the epic journeys and legendary

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adventures found in other novels, they nonetheless offer (the reader) two cultural icons. *Pointe aux Coques* is a modern journey back to a forgotten world and an abandoned culture. *Emmanuel à Joseph à Dâvit* draws on Christian biblical symbolism to present the image of a savior being born to Acadia. The characters in these two novels, though perhaps not "heroic," still function as symbols of the Acadian people and their struggle to maintain a sense of cultural identity.

Pointe-aux-Coques does not belong to the epic past, nor does it come from the legends of Acadia. It is clearly situated in modern times, an epoch of television and movies, and the story comes to us directly from the narrator, who recounts her own experiences. Like Pélagie, Mlle Cormier is on a quest. However, Mademoiselle Cormier is far less single minded in her quest than is Pélagie. And unlike Maria, Crache à Pic, La Piroune and La Bessoune, she does not engage in any adventures--epic or otherwise. And most importantly, Mlle Cormier's quest is personal, a journey to find her own place in the world. She is not bringing her people back to Acadia, she brings only herself. And though she eventually occasions her father's return as well, he has not come back permanently. Indeed he returns only for the funeral of his uncle and cousin, and the most he can promise is to come back once a year "manger des coques et du homard" (PAC 221). Thus Mlle Cormier's story would seem to differ from the legendary or epic milieu that characterises the stories of characters such as Pélagie and Mariaagélas.

Moreover, lacking the self-confidence and determination of Pélagie, Mlle Cormier cannot be the forceful heroine of an epic. Her resolve and enthusiasm are, to say the least, dampened by her first encounters with Nazarine, her hostess, and with her students: "Mais quand tout à coup je

me sentis en face de toute la réalité-...-je compris que Pointe-aux-Coques ne se résumerait pas à un lieu de villégiature ou d'exploration..." (PAC 41). Piqued by curiosity, Mlle Cormier has come to Acadia on what she terms an "adventure." She has come to explore her father's world. But she finds more than she has bargained for, and she discovers that she must rethink her plans, and so when Jean asks her why she has come to Acadia, she is incapable of responding. "Pourquoi étais-je venue à Pointe-aux-Coques? ...Je restai muette. Il me semblait que toutes mes réponses auraient sonné faux. Etais-je venue par aventure, par instinct, par impulsion? Etait-ce à cause de mon père? ...*Je ne savais plus.*" (PAC 287, emphasis added) The searching and confusion of Mlle Cormier's experiences are not those of the hero of an epic, but rather those of a person searching for themselves. So we can see that the young schoolteacher is learning about the world, and trying to determine the role she must play. Her story reflects the struggles of modern Acadians to find a new place for themselves in a modern society, to go beyond the myth of Pélagie and form new myths and new meanings.

Mlle Cormier's ideas and objectives evolve. This is the most significant characteristic distinguishing her from some of Maillet's more "epic" heroines such as Pélagie. She may arrive in Acadia, Pointe-aux-Coques, seeing everything through poetic rose-colored glasses, but it is not long before she experiences great disillusionment, sparked by the return of a young Acadian girl from the "States." She can at this moment see the village more realistically, as she explains:

> Après dix mois, je commençais à entrevoir le tout de Point-aux-Coques, où ne battait pas rien que le coeur des Muses. La vie des pêcheurs était une rude corvée dans son ensemble: le lever de nuit,

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Here she sees the "pays" for the first time as it truly is, a land that however beautiful, forces the inhabitants to lead a hard life. But unlike Pélagie's moment of realization (occurring at the end of the novel and at the end of her life), this is, for Mademoiselle Cormier, a turning point, a decisive moment. It is at this moment that her quest changes, or rather evolves, for it is at this moment that it becomes not an "adventure," not an exploration, but a determined decision to join in the village's struggle to survive. Thus instead of seeing a hero shape the destiny of his/her community, in Pointe-aux-Coques, we see an individual shaping her own future since, as her father tells Mlle Cormier "c'est a 20 ans que l'on choisit [sa vie]..." (PAC 221).[32] Mlle Cormier has drawn on the foundational myth of Pélagie and recast it for herself, repeating and renewing Pélagie's commitment to Acadia.

Pointe-aux-Coques is perhaps more clearly novelistic, and less an adventure or epic than many of Maillet's other stories. The novel, though, is the genre which, according to Bakhtine, "étant le seul genre en devenir, réflète plus profondément, plus substantiellement...l'évolution de la réalité" (444). As such, modern Acadians can see in Pointe-aux-Coques a reflection of their own struggles not to form or even to maintain a community, but to reconcile the past and the present and future. As a novel, Pointe-aux-Coques provides the readers with an opportunity for identification with the characters, and not simply legends or ideals. Pointe-aux-Coques reflects the harsh realities of life in modern Acadia, as well as the poetic beauty of the land. Moreover, it is a novel, not a

folktale, and is therefore experienced alone, and in silence.[33] It is an individual and not a community act. Therefore, whereas in *Pélagie-la-Charrette*, the conscious emphasis on the multiple levels of narration is essential because they serve to accentuate and validate the national and legendary aspect of the story, in Pointe-aux-Coques, the story must be told as directly as possible, narrowing the gap between "reality" and "narration."[34]

In modern "Acadia" there are perhaps no "epic" journeys to be made or battles to be fought. Rather, each person must choose for herself how to cope with the "reality" of life in Acadia, where the old ways of life become harder and harder to maintain. It is for these Acadians that Maillet's novels are written--for those who no longer sit around a forge fire to exchange tales. Pointe-aux-Coques is constructed on the same personal battleground where the modern struggle to maintain an Acadian cultural identity will be fought. Having returned from the deportation, and come out of their "cent ans dans les bois" (100 years of keeping to themselves so as not to "éveiller l'ours qui dort"), Acadians must now face the even greater danger of economic dispersion, and assimilation.

The characters in *Emmanuel à Joseph à Dâvit* face this very problem. In this story, due to the difficulties in maintaining small rural towns whose entire economic structure was based on fishing, the government is forcing the people to move to bigger towns where it can provide them with access to schools and hospitals. An entire village (Maisonnette) is being evacuated, its people forced to leave everything they've ever known. Joseph and his wife Mary (who is expecting a baby) hitchhike to town to ask the governor Harold for permission to stay in

their village. Their request denied, and finding no room at the "auberge de campagne," nor at the motel, they end up in an abandoned shack, where Mary will deliver her baby in the attached woodshed of which la Sainte declares: "ça ma tout l'air à moi d'être rien de plusse qu'un étable, c'te hangar-là" (EJD 114). They name their baby Emmanuel, and because they can't return to their home in the north, they leave for the south. The similarities to the story of the birth of Christ (as well as his name) would suggest the role of savior for this baby. And at the end, la vieille Anne, "tireuse des cartes," predicts that a new spring has begun: "le printemps qui vient, ben c'en sera un vrai, c'ti-citte, coume si i' fut le premier que j'arions jamais vu..." (EJD 142). Young Emmanuel à Joseph à Dâvit's story brings hope and heralds the dawn of a new era for Acadia.

Another novel which confronts the challenge of creating new paradigms of Acadian identity is *L'Oursiade*.[35] In this novel, which uncharacteristically features two male protagonists (and two corresponding male bear protagonists), Maillet explores the difficulties facing Acadians as they adapt to the modern world, and the dangers of assimilation and loss of tradition. Like la Piroune and la Bessoune the young hero of the novel is the illegitimate offspring of an unknown father, and like them, he lives on the outskirts of the community, next to the woods. As his position would indicate Tit-Jean, or Titoume, will not cling to traditions, but will forge new paths. He has as his mentors Simon le Métis and Ozite, an outlaw and a centenarian who will teach him to respect the past/his ancestors while still adapting to modern times.

L'Oursiade is unusual in another aspect; its protagonists are not only human, a clan of bears also functions as primary characters in the novel. The trio of main characters (Simon le Métis, Titoume and Ozite) is

mirrored in the bear world, where there are three corresponding bear characters, Revenant-Noir, Nounours, and l'Oursagénaire. The relationship of these pairs is the core of the novel. The bear, who, according to the *Dictionnaire des Symboles*, "est considéré comme l'ancêtre de l'espèce humaine" (Chevalier 717) also represents "une expression de l'obscurité, des ténèbres: en alchimie il correspond à la noirceur du premier état de la matière. L'obscurité, l'invisible étant liés à l'interdit, cela renforce sa fonction *d'initiateur*" (Chevalier 717). The bears in *L'Oursiade*, then, could be interpreted as symbols of the Acadians' ancestors, or their past. "Quant aux ours...Ozite prétendait que l'ours était l'héritage personnel de Simon le Métis, son protégé, son presque fils, par droit de naissance, droit acquis, droit tout court" (O 43). In forging relationships with the bears, Simon, Titoume and Ozite create a new strategy for maintaining Acadian identity, which differs greatly from that of their village.

The other characters in the novel treat the bears as either enemies, or objects of fascination. Zéphire, Grand-Galop and Loup-Joseph, the hunters, see the bears as possible trophies, monuments to their skill as hunters. The bears are in a precarious position, because at the beginning of the novel a forest fire has destroyed their home, and they no longer have food, nor adequate cover. They are forced to "invade" the human world, and graze at the village dump.

> Comment expliquer à la vieille l'étrangeté du spectacle des hommes qui se rassemblent là-bas, au trécarré, à l'heure où les ours vont s'y rassasier, hommes, femmes et petits d'hommes, se bousculant à qui s'approchera le plus des ours...comment expliquer le cirque

des homme à l'Oursagénaire qui ne les a jamais vus qu'en forêt, à la saison de la chasse? (O 69)

It is here that the dramatic clash of man and beast, present and past, comes to a peak. A young girl, "une étudiante, apparence" (O 93), provokes a crisis between humans and bears. "elle est sortie de sa petite Ford rouge. Avant même que les autres aient eu le temps de lui crier de point s'approcher des ours, la 'là-t-i' pas qui ouvre un grand sac et en sort une enregistreuse, t'as qu'à ouère! puis s'approche d'un petit ours. . . et entreprend de le faire parler. Le plus curieux c'est que l'ourson a l'air de répondre et de s'amuser comme un petit fou. Pas sa mère" (O 93-4). Bears and humans are poised on the brink of attack, when Simon le Métis intervenes. "C'est Simon qui saute dans la tranchée et ramasse la folle par le chignon au péril de sa propre vie" (O 94). As this incident shows, le Métis, as well as Titoume and Ozite serve as intermediaries between the humans and the bears. When the village plows over the dump, they feed the bears, thus keeping them alive for the winter. And again at the end of the novel, Simon intervenes in a confrontation between the bears and the villagers.

The continual tension between the bears and the villagers represents the clash between Acadian traditions and the realities of modern life. Revenant-Noir muses: "Chacun doit garder sa place. La difficulté c'est de trouver la frontière, de dénicher sous la feuillée la barrière entre le sauvage et le domestique. Certaines brousailles sont bien malaisées à défricher" (O 82). The frontier between past, present and future may be difficult to determine. Even more difficult for modern Acadians, is the question of what to do with the past—with culture, myths, and traditions. Do these have a place in modern life or must

they, like the bears in *L'Oursiade* be banished? The model proposed by Simon and Titoume is peaceful coexistence and understanding. For them, the bears are an important part of life, an opportunity for dialogue and understanding of the circle of life, past, present, future.

In the end we realize that the bears (or at least Revenant Noir) are reincarnations of people, a theory that the Church, ironically and unintentionally, had inspired in le Métis early in the novel. When Simon again attempts to mediate between the village and the bears, and stop either side from killing, he receives a revelation:

> dans un rite quasi sacré, en silence, durant les longues secondes où le Métis avait tout l'air de parler à l'ours, comme si soudain le demi-sauvage avait reçu le don des langues. Les deux combattants [Simon and Revenant-Noir] se tenaient serrés l'un contre l'autre, à la vue des hommes et des ours, l'instant que tous comprennent qu'on ne se voulait aucun mal. (O 223)

Later, Simon shares the content of his revelation: "...en mourant, ton père s'est réincarné...la même année dans les bois" (O 229) he explains to Titoume. Thus the bears are in fact ancestors reincarnated into a different form, attempting to find a place in the modern Acadian world. The end of the novel finds the bears exiled "en forêt profonde. Les ours ne réapparaîtront pas au pays de la Rivière avant la prochaine génération de bouleaux blancs. Quand il retrouvera son ami, Titoume sera un homme et Nounours un ours. Et Revenant-Noir, son père, ne sera plus" (O 229-230). The model of peaceful coexistence of past and present offered by Simon, Titoume and Ozite is not possible at this particular moment in history, but the novel ends with the hope that it will be some day.

In creating the images and characters in these novels, Maillet has furnished her own vision of the Acadian people and history. "Tout le mystère est là. Antonine fera des simples de village, des personnages hauts en couleur, des héroïnes de légende, des êtres mythiques, portant les vertus de la race. Elle refera un type d'Acadienne opposée à l'Evangéline du poète" (René Le Blanc, *Maillet* 58). The characters of *Don l'Orignal*, like Pélagie, Bélonie, Maria, La Bessoune and the many others are new types of Acadians, new icons of cultural identity. They offer a different response to the hardships of deportation, exile, poverty and the threat of cultural assimilation. They are not passive and romantic, like Evangéline, rather, they are tough, competent and proactive. These are the role models Maillet grew up with. "Maillet parle la langue de la collectivité acadienne; elle traite aussi des personnages, de l'histoire et des réalités sociales de l'Acadie. Et elle cherche à insérer son écriture dans le devenir historique de son peuple" (DeFinney 17). Maillet's heroines are truly Acadian, they come from Acadian history and legend, and they give to the Acadian people a new generation of heroes.

That her characters can be such heroes, is due in large part to the fact that these characters are larger than life. Maillet contends that "le créateur a le génie de créer des archétypes qui dépassent les gens de la vie réelle" (Lamarche 29). And this in fact is what she herself has done. Her characters are archetypes because they serve as models, not just for their time, but for any time; models of courage, defiance, self-assertion and cultural identity. Her novels are epics because they have as their subject the rebirth and regeneration of a people. Maillet writes:

> I realized I was writing a kind of epic poem in the Acadian fashion. *Pélagie* is a reverse epic poem, and I love to do things upside down.

> The epic poem is the story of a people in the minute which precedes its birth. The return of *Pélagie* represents the 10 years during which it was going to be decided whether l'Acadie was going to go on existing or not. The cart would decide . . . So *Pélagie*, in spite of me, became an epic in the sense that it tells of the story of the boat-people of that time, but it is a reverse one because it tells of their return. (Jacquot, *Story-Teller* 95)

Maillet's stories of Acadia offer an epic view of a people and their struggle to maintain an identity. Her works forge a new myth, the "mythe de l'Acadie héroïque" (Gallant, *Mythe* 78), and her characters are the giants of these myths.

If Pélagie is the legendary folk hero who brings her people back from exile, and Mlle Cormier represents the real plight of more modern Acadians, driven from their homeland not by hostile British forces, but by economic necessity and pride, then it could be argued that the two novels are two incarnations of the same story. Perhaps the true heroine of these, and indeed of all Maillet's works is Acadia herself, who has braved the many dangers and fortunes of history to continue, if not as a nation, then as a people. And the moral for this society is perhaps, as Maillet herself puts it, that "Il y a une culture, dans le sens le plus général de culture, qui est l'expression de soi." (Smith, 256) The future of Acadian culture lies in the continuing expression of <u>both</u> its myths and legends <u>and</u> its experiences of modern life.

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Chapter 2

BEFORE THE LAW: OUTLAWS AND REBELS

Ecrire, pour moi, c'est rendre les impossibles, possibles.
Antonine Maillet

Antonine Maillet's novels are filled with adventures, and more often than not, the heroes of these adventures are women. Her protagonists are outlaws: rumrunners during Prohibition, women who defy deportation and brave revolution to return to their homeland, and rebels: women who challenge tradition and social norms to find and define their own place in the world. One characteristic all these women share is their refusal to let outside influences control their lives. This is precisely what Hélène Cixous would term a "feminine response." In "Extreme Fidelity," Cixous differentiates between what she labels the "masculine response" and the "feminine response," by likening the masculine response to the countryman in Kafka's short story "Before the Law" and the feminine to Eve in the Garden of Eden. When faced with "the law," Kafka's countryman "accept[s] its supremacy, interiorizing the threat of castration to remain circumscribed within its shadow" (Sellers 1). Eve, on the other hand, will "follow her desire and [refuse] to grant the law its power" (Sellers 2). The heroines of Maillet's novels choose the path of Eve, challenging the power of the "law" and reaching for the forbidden fruit.

In this paradigm, three principal forces form the story. There is the unknowable law, the challenger, and the prohibiting word that stands between them. The "law," nebulous entity that it is, is represented by guardians, or gatekeepers, as in Kafka's fable. Although, as with Kafka's story, there may be many guardians reaching back toward the law, often there is one immediate gatekeeper whom the challenger must face. The challenger, like Kafka's protagonist, comes with his or her own aspirations to the law. And because the "law" is distant and "unknowable," he must face not the law itself, but the guardian(s). And between the guardian(s) and the challenger(s) stands the prohibiting word, the interdiction that would keep the countryman/challenger from penetrating the space of the law.

But what is the law? In his analysis of Kafka's short story, Derrida discovers that

> one cannot be concerned with the law, or with the law of laws, either at close range or at a distance, without asking where it has its place and whence it comes. I say 'the law of laws' because in Kafka's story one does not know what kind of law is at issue--moral, judicial, political, natural, etc. What remains concealed and invisible in each law is thus presumably the law itself, that which makes laws of these laws, the being-law of these laws. (*Law* 191)

In Maillet's novels the "law" comes from three main sources: the government, the Church, and society. From each of these "institutions," reminiscent of Derrida's unknowable law, emanate the strictures, prohibitions and regulations that direct and control the actions of the people.

But these institutions are nebulous entities, especially for the people of the small coastal villages of Acadia. And so, just as in Kafka's story, the law comes to the countryman through its representative, the gatekeeper, in Maillet's novels, too, the distant, detached "law" comes to the people only through intermediaries. According to Derrida, the law "forbids itself and contradicts itself by placing the man in its own contradiction: one cannot reach the law, and in order to have a rapport of respect with it, one must not have a rapport with the law, one must interrupt the relation. One must enter into relation only with the law's representatives, its examples, its guardians. And these are interrupters as well as messengers" (*Law* 203-4). The guardians of the law in Maillet's novels are the police and customs officers, representing the government, the clergy, representing morality, and the self-righteous old women who take it upon themselves to uphold and defend the mores and conventions of society (not to mention the Church).

These then, are the gatekeepers or intermediaries, whom the Maillet's heroines must fight in their battle to subvert the power of the law. And their weapon of choice for the assault is language, for, as Cixous points out, "it is not the *body* that prevents the man from the country from going through the door, but the *word*. The law is but a word, not a real being..." (*Readings*, 14). This privileging of the word situates the struggle for power on a linguistic level. Whoever controls the word has power over others. We see this time and again in Maillet's novels as not just the protagonists, but entire communities set out to outwit and confound representatives of the law with linguistic contests. From these scenes come a sense of the liberating joy/pleasure derived from linguistically outwitting a foe. In many of Maillet's novels, we

witness the struggle between these guardians of the law, and those characters who dare to come before the law, ready to eat of the forbidden fruit.

In *Pélagie-la-Charrette*, the journey past the law to the forbidden fruit of paradise is inscribed on a physical level. Confronted by military and governmental forces, deported and exiled, Pélagie does not remain passive 'before' the law. Rather, she undertakes for herself, her family and others, the literal and physical journey past many 'gates', to return to the paradise from which she was torn. True, "elle est rentrée au pays par la porte arrière et sur la pointe des pieds" (PLC 9), but she nonetheless manages to survive drought, famine, and winter to return to Acadia, "le pays, le retour au paradis perdu" (PLC 17). Besides the many roadblocks in nature, Pélagie must also deal with many people who would keep her from her paradise. Defying "Lawrence, Winslow, Monckton, et le roi George dans toute sa joyeuse majesté, des lambeaux d'Acadie du Sud remontaient, tête entre les jambes, piaffant, suant, et soufflant des deux narines, une Amérique qui n'entendit même pas grincer les essieux de la charrette..." (PLC 65). The authority and power of heads of state is not enough to constrain Pélagie. They may try to deny her her homeland, but she disregards their interdiction as she disregarded her deportation. She, unlike Kafka's countryman, will not remain passive before the prohibition of the guardian of the Law. The journey begins with Pélagie's cry: "Pas moi! je planterai aucun des miens en terre étrangère" (PLC 15) and is supported along the way with the refrain of a folk song to which the group joyfully adds "et merde au roi d'Angleterre". There is a distancing irony about these recurring words that reverse the power structure, reducing the king and elevating the

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people. These words make the king seem ridiculous, and empower the people, who are able to flaunt the king's authority. The king, whom they have never met, has tried to impose his will on them, and they will have none of it.

In Charleston and in Maryland, Pélagie and her group encounter actual representatives of the law when they are thrown in jail for stealing one of their own who was being sold as a slave, and the slave that was chained to her. In escaping from the jail, the band makes use of their skills from the forge to unchain themselves, of their knowledge of herbs and potions to get the jailers drunk, but most importantly, of their gift of language to make their way out of prison:

> les geôliers, même armés d'arquebuses et de mousquets, n'étaient pas de taille à lutter contre le violon des Basques, l'élixir de Célina et le conte fantastique de Bélonie. Et rendus à l'anneau d'or, [the end of the story], ils ouvrirent toutes grandes les portes cochères, après avoir fait passer le peuple de la charrette par les couloirs et labyrinthes puants de la prison de Charleston. (PLC 83)

In this episode, we see that the metaphysical powers of the music, potion and tale have overcome the physical restrictions of the law. The opposition between the physical and the metaphysical is obliterated here, and the verb "rendre," literally meaning a physical move, here takes on a metaphysical sense. Thus it is the word which is triumphant. It is, perhaps, not accidental that the Acadians choose storytelling as their method of revolt, since "it could be said that all plots are plots against authority, that authority creates the scene of its own destruction, that all stories necessarily recount by their very existence the subversion of the father, of the gods, of consciousness, of order, of expectations, or of

meaning" (Johnson 88). Stories, fiction, subversively challenge traditional constructs or beliefs by offering alternate explanations, different "realities". In this area, the characters in Maillet's novels--and not just the women--excel.

Another character in *Pélagie-la-Charrette* who uses words to free himself from authority is the other hero of the story, sea captain Beausoleil Broussard. He risks his life and his stolen ship for deported Acadians but he is caught by the British navy. Beausoleil, who is "sorti...d'un peuple de chroniqueurs" (PLC 201), uses a story (and some whisky) to escape the British navy, and the punishment that awaits him. Like the "chroniqueurs," Beausoleil is writing history, but with the flavor of his whisky, he provides a different version of "history." He convinces the British captain that he and his men were the British crew of the boat originally named Pembroke, who had been stranded in the Arctic so suddenly that their words froze coming out of their mouths. And it was not until years later that a warm wind unfroze their boat, and blew words back into their mouths, unfortunately this wind had come from France, so the words it brought were French! The captain, overcome by this fantastic story, and by the shock of seeing a "phantom" vessel, lets Beausoleil and his crew go free. Thus it is clear that the Acadian men as well as the women of Maillet's novels are imbued with the desire to subvert and challenge the law. It is also clear that law can easily be subverted and that words are the tools to perform this subversion. The law complies with the demands of stories, making the law ridiculous.

Like Beausoleil, Pélagie and her band manage to circumvent many gatekeepers of the law. In fact, they even manage to pass unscathed through the American revolutionary war on their journey back. The two

constants in their journey are Pélagie's steadfast refusal to bow to anyone or anything that stands between her and the object of her quest for life and freedom, and the echoing refrain of their improvised song, "et merde au roi d'Angleterre."[36]

Unlike Pélagie, La Piroune and La Bessoune, the main characters of Maillet's novel *Les Cordes de Bois*, undertake no physical journey or quest, yet they nonetheless share her refusal to accept the prohibitions of the "law". The "law" La Piroune and La Bessoune defy is both moral and social, but the Mercenaire clan, the outlaw family of La Piroune and her illegitimate daughter, La Bessoune prove themselves worthy adversaries.[37] "La nouvelle population des Cordes-de-Bois . . . était composée exclusivement de hors-la-loi: de ces hors-la-loi des années de la crise qui mangeaient dans les poubelles et dormaient dans les granges ou les wagons de marchandises. Comment la loi pouvait-elle s'attaquer à des hors-la-loi?" (CdB 125). Whether shockingly shortening their skirts, taking first communion without permission, or refusing to be confirmed, these women will bend to no laws or standards but their own. The new priest in the parish, in fact, compares them to Eve, "renonçant au paradis terrestre pour une pomme" (CdB 174). This is quite a negative moral judgement, coming from a priest; in comparing them to Eve, he is saying that not only are they "sinners," but they are also responsible for the fall of others. Like Eve, and like Kafka's countryman, they will not rest passively before the interdictions of the law.

Since the law that they confront is both moral and social, the Mercenaires must confront more than one gatekeeper. The first guardian of moral law is, of course, the Church, a powerful presence in Acadian society:

> on s'est toujours montré plus féru de justice religieuse que civile au pays des côtes. Sans doute parce qu'on payait plus de dîme que d'impôts. Sûrement aussi parce que l'autorité la plus proche, la plus visible, restait celle de l'Eglise. Et puis la justice des hommes, on peut la contourner, la déjouer, mais qui oserait se défiler devant l'oeil de Dieu?
>
> ---Les Cordes-de-Bois. (CdB 162)

The Mercenaires dare to challenge God himself, but they do it through a constant battle with his intermediaries, the priests since, like Kafka's countryman, they must deal with the gatekeepers of the law. And they confront these guardians despite the conventions of society that would hold them apart: "Taise-toi. On ne parle pas des prêtres, au pays. Et pour être sûr qu'on n'en parlera pas en mal, on rien parle pas du tout. C'est un sujet interdit" (CdB 202). As the eyes, or representatives of the law, the priests are kept safe from assaults via language (the challenging word), by societal convention that upholds the Church "law."

A more formidable opponent is Ma Tante-la-Veuve, a self-appointed guardian of both moral and social law. Her name, in fact, grounds her firmly in the patriarchal system of family and society. She has no name of her own; she is defined in relation to others, especially in relation to her (dead) husband. She is an aunt and a widow, and she defends with all her resources the codes of the patriarchal society that defines her. But although Ma Tante-la-Veuve exercises a strong influence on her relatives, and the rest of the village, she cannot seem to touch Les Cordes-de-Bois. These heroines act on the pleasure principle, and they live in the here and now. They refuse to be constrained by external standards of morality. "For Ma-Tante-la-Veuve, the sexual behavior of

the Mercenaires is a thing apart, a sin-in-itself, a violation of all the old guilt-inducing strictures of Church and polite society. For la Piroune and la Bessoune, however, sexual gratification is not an avenue into which they are reluctantly channeled for want of freedom, but a perfectly natural manifestation of the freedom they already joyously feel" (Fitzpatrick, *Epic* 147). And each of these parties (the Mercenaires and Ma Tante-la-Veuve) is absolutely incapable of submitting to the alien codes of the other.

For Ma Tante-la-Veuve, les Cordes-de-Bois and the boat docks are the sources of everything bad in the village. They represent, respectively, the disrespect of the laws she makes and upholds, and the influence of strangers who do not (necessarily) maintain these same priorities. When the Mercenaires show themselves more charitable than anyone else in the village by taking on all the poor outcasts without asking for any money, Ma Tante-la-Veuve takes it as an affront to her morality, as is everything the Cordes-de-Bois clan does. And yet they do not do this to challenge Ma Tante-la-Veuve, or even the priests; it is their natural instinct to have pity on the poor people being auctioned off. In fact, the Mercenaires, being already "hors-la-loi," confront the representatives of moral and social law only when these representatives attack them. And until they are attacked, they blithely go on their way, not caring when the vicar finds them on the docks soliciting sailors, and paying no heed to Ma Tante-la-Veuve as they carry their bootleg liquor through her property:

> Ma Tante-la-Veuve les a vus enfiler son barachois, tous les deux, les bras chargés de tout ce qu'il y avait à l'époque de plus défendu

par la loi, la religion, les convenances et la morale personnelle de Ma Tante-la-Veuve elle-même. (CdB 266)

The bootleg liquor takes on the epic proportions of Eve's apple, literally "prohibited" by society and religion alike. And the guardian of these prohibitions is Ma Tante-la-Veuve, whose personal moral code is even more righteous than those she draws from (religion and society). Unlike Kafka's countryman, the Mercenaires have charged right past the gatekeeper, without a moment's hesitation.

The battle between the Mercenaires and the priests and Ma-Tante-la-Veuve will also be waged on a linguistic plane. "Les Cordes-de-Bois auraient volontiers inventé des sons nouveaux et ajouté des lettres à l'alphabet si cela avait pu envenimer d'avantage leurs relations avec le Pont ou avec le pays" (CdB 16). Thus language will be one of the main weapons of the Cordes-de-Bois clan. And it is quickly seen just what type of language these characters control; from the very beginning of the novel, swear words (two in particular) are posited as the domain, the possessions or inheritance of the Mercenaires: "il est resté aux Mercenaire deux mots, prononcés à l'original, transmis fidèlement depuis 1830, et gardés comme des bijoux de famille: 'nenni' et 'tordieu'" (CdB 23). Thus it is not just language in general, or any average words that the Cordes-de-Bois control. This language that they control is subversive, "immoral," it runs counter to the moral conventions of the Church, and it represents the freedom of the Mercenaires from societal and religious restrictions. The parish priest tries in turn to control it, but by prohibiting these words, he provokes a rebellion not because of the prohibition, "les défenses du curé ne les avaient jamais touchés à point," but because by pronouncing these "sacred" words, he has stolen

what was theirs. La Piroune retaliates by sitting on the buoy in the bay, making its bell ring in time with the church bells, and perverting a holy sound with a very earthly one.

Moreover, one of the Mercenaires, Patience, attacks social order, and even the church by sending "valentines", witty and cutting poems, often accompanied by caricatures. Though ostensibly anonymous, (like the Law), everyone knows their source; they are, contradictorily "les lettres anonymes de Patience" (CdB 56). These poems subvert the standards, facades and power structures on which morality is based, and they will not be silenced. "Car les poèmes anonymes que la pauvre victime [Ma Tante-la-Veuve] se hâtait de brûler avec ses écopeaux, Patience en affichait des copies sur les poteaux de téléphone et jusque dans le portique de l'église entre les annonces paroissales" (CdB 56). By mocking the so called (and self appointed) model citizens, unsettling the guardians of the law, these poems upset social order--literally squeezing into the rightful place of church announcements--and give the "people" (especially in the forge) a chance to laugh at some of the faults and inconsistencies of "moral" people, drawing them into complicity.

The linguistic power of the Mercenaires is such that the narrator claims that "les heuh de la Bessoune m'en apprenaient autant sur la petite histoire du pays que toutes les archives conservées dans les voûtes du Parlement de Halifax" (CdB 157).[38] Thus simply by their laugh or a single swear word, the Cordes-de-Bois women shake loose the constraints of church and society--or in Kafka's terms, the Law.

Mariaagélas and Crache-à-Pic, heroines of the novels which bear their names, [though the English version of Crache-à-Pic is entitled *The Devil is Loose*] incarnate very clearly the rebellious spirit of Eve. The

conflict with the law culminates in these two characters who most openly defy it on all levels. In their chosen profession of bootlegging, they not only defy the law of the land (prohibition), they also defy societal norms by breaking into a traditionally male occupation--two traditionally male occupations, in fact, sailing and bootlegging. "Mariaagélas éviterait les shops et la prison. . . Elle se sentait la vocation d'un homme, Mariaagélas, quelque chose comme un pirate" (MG 26). And both, in the course of their adventures/adventurous lives, manage not only to challenge moral interdictions, but to use them to their advantage against others.

The moral, social and judicial laws that they cheerfully flaunt come to them through many intermediaries. The laws governing their trade, fishing (poaching) and bootlegging come from a distant government:

> Les côtes de l'Atlantique se sentaient très loin du pays. . .
> Mais les dunes et la baie, où les Gélas avaient planté leur cabane, étaient trop à l'écart pour vivre au rythme du pays. . . D'ailleurs la plupart des lois étaient faites pour les gros, les citadins ou les dirigeants du pays. Les Gélas et leurs voising n'étant rien de tout ça, ils se passaient de lois... (MG 33)

In fact, the law comes to the villagers only through its representatives, the constables (Martial and Quicksilver) and the 'customs' officers-Ferdinand. Maria and Crache-à-Pic beat these (sometimes) worthy adversaries, who either leave town, defeated, or die at the end of the novels. Thus the clashes between Maria and Crache-à-Pic best exemplify the conflict with the law, as in Kafka's story of inevitable mediation. Like the gatekeeper in Kafka's story, they are only the tip of the iceberg, the first and most visible of a long line of keepers stretching back to the

nebulous law. Yet as Maria and Crache-à-Pic discover, if they can get past these primary guardians of the law, they have practically free rein. So the "Law" seems to be only as strong as its intermediaries, or gatekeepers.

The purveyors or gatekeepers of "social law" take the form of self-righteous, "upstanding" citizens, in both cases, old widows. The fact that these women are identified, even *named* as widows (a word that defines them in relation to men) posits them as part of the traditional, patriarchal system. And they are in fact, defenders of this system. Marie-Pet and La Veuve à Calixte take it upon themselves if not to control, at least to censure Maria and Crache-à-Pic. They act as the voice of the law, expounding on what is proper and as the enforcers, keeping (or attempting to keep) tabs on the illicit actions of their adversaries: "la veuve à Calixte était une femme de métier. La garde des vertus et la conservation des coutumes et bonnes moeurs à l'échelon paroissial occupaient toute son âme et commandaient toutes ses actions. Allez résister à ça!" (MG 37). Oddly enough, the established bootleggers, outlaws themselves, also function as gatekeepers of traditional social order, since Maria and Crache-à-Pic must outwit them to break into the "male" domain of rum running. But this they do quite naturally. Bootlegger Casse-cou feared the devil alone, "pourtant il aurait bien dû savoir que le diable lui-même n'aurait pu rivaliser d'audace et d'ingéniosité avec Mariaagélas; et qu'une femme qui a eu raison d'une paroisse, et de la veuve à Calixte, ne saurait se trouver au dépourvu devant des douaniers" (MG 138). The battles of these *almost* equals, Marie-Pet v. Crache-à-Pic and Mariaagélas v. a Veuve-à-Calixte center on

a struggle for knowledge, a battle to see who can interpret the signs, and "read" the other, and become more powerful through the struggle.

In *Crache-à-Pic* the linguistic battle for power is particularly evident. The battle for bootlegging business hinges on a system of codes. Crache-à-Pic not only steals Dieudonné's[39] code, (obviously the name Dieudonné is not randomly chosen) she also makes up her own, changing it whenever it is discovered. She defies both the church and her rival bootleggers, stealing their idea, and disguising herself as a nun by the ridiculous name of "Soeur Marie de la Sainte-Crache de l'Enfant-Jésus," mocking both the institution of religion, and those who are silly enough to believe her story. And in the culmination of all the power struggles, at the trial of Dieudonné for killing the constable, (situated at the end of the novel), it is she who exerts the supreme authority, holding power over words, and thus over Dieudonné's life: "Elle a dit sa phrase. Un sujet, un verbe, un complément. C'est toute la salle d'audience qui est maintenant frappée de stupeur" (CAP 362). Crache-à-Pic instead chooses to use her power to banish her last adversary from the land, triumphing finally over the "law". The whole town does, in fact, come together to baffle the poor English-speaking judge--"le seul unilingue de la cour," (CAP 332)--and confound the law:

> . . . la vérité, toute la vérité, rien que la vérité, que Dieu me vienne en aide pour une fois.
>
> -----Silence! recommencez! la formule, rien de plus...
>
> -----Jurez![40]
>
> Et Melchior jura.
>
> -----Jésus-Christ du bon Dieu!

> La salle vrombit sous un formidable éclat. Le juge comprit et se carra dans son siège. (343)

The irony of this linguistic convolution of the law reaches its peak at the end of the trial when the foreman announces its verdict, "Il est mort de la main de quelqu'un" (CAP 368), and the judge is forced to call a mistrial. But it is Crache-à-Pic who has the last word, and who exercises the final power--she holds the power of her word over Dieudonné, forcing him to leave town, and if he ever dares to come back, she can defeat him again by simply letting the true story be known:

> Vous allez partir, quitter le pays, sans rien emporter. Que ça seye bien clair, Dieudonné, vous faudra plus jamais remettre les pieds au pays des côtes. Parce que ce jour-là, Ti-Louis le Siffleux crierait par toutes les buttes et les dunes la phrase qui est restée collée à son tympan d'oreille: Dieudonné, t'as tué Vif-Argent! Dieudonné, t'as tué Vif-Argent! (CAP 369)

Crache-à-Pic is the arbiter of the word, her own and Ti-Louis,' and thus has the power over Dieudonné and his life.

The guardians of the "law" are also often the rich (or the more well-off) or in the world of Acadian coastal villages "les gens d'en haut" who attempt to keep the poorer "gens d'en bas" in their proper place. The struggle between these purveyors of social "law" and the challengers, who would disregard it, takes on epic proportions in the novel *Don L'Orignal.* In this novel, the villagers, (respectable people like "the barber, the milliner, the merchant, the schoolmaster, the banker..." and the lighthouse keeper) led by the mayor (a woman), find their respectable village threatened by the encroachment of the "Flea Islanders," the people of the little hay island which

prit rapidement des proportions importantes. Car rien ne se peuple aussi vite qu'une terre isolée, ingrate et négligée de tous, les bonnes terres demeurant de droit le lot des gens de classe, de cette race rare et clairsemée qu'on appelle si scrupuleusement l'élite. En moins de temps donc qu'il en fallait pour édifier une famille honorable sur la terre ferme, la terre molle de l'île avait engendré un peuple. (DO 13)

These lower class islanders "n'avaient qu'une moitié de mer à franchir pour débarquer sur la terre ferme. Aussi la terre ferme se sentait-elle constamment menacée" (DO 13) The battle between the Flea Islanders and the villagers will take on epic proportions.

Although the respectable villagers feel threatened when the Flea Islanders want to enter their village end enter into/engage in commerce with them (buy/take some molasses) the sharpest threat comes when a lowly Flea Islander, Citrouille, falls in love with the respectable merchant's daughter. The boundaries, the limits of respectability are being threatened. The mainlanders will not give the islanders the coveted barrel of molasses that would go against the social law of which they must remain guardians. Yet when Citrouille suggests working for it "travaillons pour manger. Et pis si le poisson vient à se tarir, allons nous embaucher en face et gagnons-les, nos barils de mélasse" (DO 44), the other Flea Islanders jump on him "pour lui expliquer syllogistiquement que les gens de la terre ferme ne vendaient pas aux gens des îles; que les îles pouvaient bien crever sans faire lever un sourcil sur la terre ferme" (DO 45). They represent the interdictions of law. Like Kafka's and Derrida's "law" it is a nebulous, indeterminate law which would keep people in their place. This particular law pertains to

social order, or social conventions, class status, fashion trends, and morality. The Flea Islanders are completely outside this "law" which is set to keep them there (outside). This is not something they understand they comprehend only that these things are forbidden them, a prohibition that they cannot accept. Refusing to accept passively a law that is not their own, they challenge both verbally and physically the guardians of this law, the respectable villagers of the mainland.

Unlike Kafka's gatekeeper, however, the mainlanders do not remain passively verbal in their interdiction. Though it is in fact a battle of wits (as with the countryman and the gatekeeper), the struggle between the Flea Islanders and the Mainlanders is physical as well. Rather than accept the interdiction of the guardians of the law, the Flea Islanders, like so many of Maillet's characters challenge and even subvert this "law."

The social "law" which the Flea Islanders confront is a rigid system of conventions and mores which are controlled by the more respectable citizens of the town:

> L'organisation matérielle du plébiscite fut confiée au barbier et à la chapelière qui se partagèrent le bourg: la rive gauche revenant à l'habile homme, la droite à la digne et respectable dame du magasin de chapeaux. On distribua à chaque domicile les bulletins de vote accompagnés d'une abondante littérature sur les démocraties modernes, la sauvegarde du foyer, la préparation au mariage, la protection des animaux, les bienfaits de la sobriété, l'art de parler en public,[41] l'aide aux pays sous-développés. Tout cela revu et augmenté par l'éloquence du barbier et l'exemple vivant de la chapelière. (DO 122)

These respectable villagers are shocked by the Flea Islanders who lack all these trappings of civilized social behavior, and yet want to mingle with the "elite."

Nonetheless, as the irony of Maillet's words emphasizes, these "guardians" of moral and social law are in fact people whose selfish petty jealousies set them against each other and allow the Flea Islanders to break into their ranks and kidnap Adeline. Because the milliner was jealous of the Mayor's and of Adeline's hair, she deliberately set the merchant and the Mayor against each other, thus dividing their forces. The "uncivilized" Flea Islanders, however, manage to present a unified front, remaining loyal to each other and to their island. The irony of Maillet's words along with the irony of the actions of the mainlanders show the guardians of the law and thus perhaps the law itself to be essentially flawed and unworthy and, therefore, deserving to be challenged.

On yet another level, Maillet is herself challenging the "law" with the words of her novel. In her humorously satiric "epic" *Don l'Orignal*, she portrays the challenge of the countryman (or the Flea Islander) before the law as a holy war, and as usual in Maillet's works, the law is not a worthy opponent, and "peasants" of Flea Island end up victorious. When the holy war is over, and more than a quarter of a century has passed, the "Flea Islanders" have in fact taken over the town that once symbolized the social order which ostracized them. "le bourg s'était légèrement déplacé. . . la population se concentrait désormais là-bas, au bord de l'eau. . . toute cette élite avait fait place à une race de poilus et de barbus, crachant dru et jurant par tous les diables" (DO 142). And not only have the "Flea Islanders" (who have now become mainlanders)

penetrated the physical space of the law, they have also taken possession of the "spirit of the law" for we find at the end that roles are completely reversed and the "les barbares pénétrèrent dans les mystères de la civilisation: ils découvrirent le bridge, le corset, le plum-pudding, la sauce aux champignons, l'étiquette de table, le protocole d'église, la hiérarchie sociale, le jeu des forces diplomatiques et ministérielles"(DO 143).[42] They have taken over the town and its social customs. And the civilized mainlanders in turn have been relegated to the island where they built beach homes, and where "le temps effaça peu à peu de leur mémoire le souvenir des années grasses et de la civilisation" (DO 143).

At the end of the story we find that "lentement, le monde se transformait, renversait les classes, poliçant les barbares et barbarisant les peuples policés. Tout cela, par la faute d'une petite île de foin et de puces qui un jour avait surgi de la mer" (DO 144). Thus the story of Don l'Orignal and his people the Flea Islanders shows clearly the result of challenging "the law". It is to maintain order, class structure, "civilization" that the strictures of the law exist, and once challenged, all this is at risk. In *Don l'Orignal*, we see the far-reaching conclusions of a people who would not remain passively before the law, but who instead chose to challenge the prohibitions which confined them and to make their own rules.

Simon le Métis, in the novel *L'Oursiade,* is yet another character who makes his own rules and lives by his own code. Though uncharacteristically male, this protagonist is, like La Piroune and La Bessoune born outside of patriarchal law:

> Enfant naturel de père inconnu et de mère indigne, orphelin de naissance, élevé à l'écart de la paroisse et à l'orée du bois, il avait

> grandi en marge. En marge même des quatre ou cinq villages qui jalonnent la Rivière. Il logeait--quoique ce mot-là résonnât faux aux oreilles d'un sans-logis--tout en haut, presque à la source, où la rivière s'appelle encore un ruisseau, le Ruisseau-de-la-Rivière, en l'occurrence. (O 12)

From the moment of his birth, Simon le Métis is set apart from society, marginalized. Not only does he lack a father to instruct him in the "laws" of society, he lacks even the name of a father to legitimize him and give him a place in this society. "La loi du sang, ce hors-la-loi l'a mise au rang de toutes les autres. Une loi c'est une loi. Simon est né dehors" (O 12). Like Kafka's countryman, he finds himself outside the law. But unlike the countryman, he seeks no admittance. He lives by his own law.

As his name suggests, Simon le Métis is a hybrid, someone who straddles two groups, and his dwelling place symbolizes this, perched as it were on the border between the woods (or nature) and civilization (society) yet not truly inhabiting either. More completely outside the law than any other character, le Métis does not experience the same confrontations with representatives of the law that we see in other novels. He has no clashes with the clergy, though his protégé Tit-Jean (Titoume) refuses to be confirmed. When his friend and protector Ozite dies, he and Titoume quietly bury her by the woods, next to the old bear she had befriended, supplanting the religious ceremony for which they substitute a coffin and a block of wood, so that people will think she had a proper burial "pour forme, et pour faire taire les mauvaises langues qui plus tard seraient capables de s'en prendre à Tit-Jean" (O 231). Similarly, though he contests the traditional religious view of life and

death by embracing a belief in reincarnation[43], he does so without disturbing or confronting anyone, though he does communicate it to Titoume. He acknowledges the law of others, and for the sake of Titoume does not openly flaunt it, but he does defy it quietly and confidently, just as he acknowledges that there are laws which would imprison him for killing Marguerite's "suborneur" but would do it anyway if he could.

The way in which he circumvents the "proper" burial of Ozite is representative of his relationship with the law. Unlike that of some other characters, le Métis' relationship with the law is not situated on a linguistic plane; he wages no battles of words. Instead, the conflicts in *L'Oursiade* are physical rather than verbal. Simon le Métis' actions reveal his struggles far more eloquently than do his words. The principal action of the novel centers on his fight to keep the bears alive, a cause that contradicts his originally posited status as an unparalleled hunter, "l'homme est un chasseur...pas n'importe quel chasseur. C'est le Métis. L'Ours l'a reconnu. Et le Métis sait braquer, viser et tirer dans moins de temps que ne peut frapper Revenant-Noir" (O 29). Yet this "hunter" contests the primacy of man's position of power over bears, offering instead the hypothesis that the men have no right to simply kill the starving bears when they come into the open; rather hunting should be a fair fight between two worthy adversaries. And Simon and his companions, Ozite and Titoume work all through the autumn following the forest fire to transport food into the woods so the bears will not starve, especially after the village burns over the dump to keep the bears from grazing there. They go agaist society, and against the laws of nature to provide the bears with the sustenance they need to survive the winter.

Like the rebels Mariaagélas and Crache à Pic, he even defies gender laws, eschewing the traditional role of the male in society. It must be noted, however, that his maleness does endow him with a freedom that would most likely not be available to a woman. Though he is known as an unparalleled hunter, unlike Loup-Joseph, Grand-Galop and the other men of the village, he sees animals as equals. He hunts in his own way, following his own philosophy of hunting. Rather than following the "beaten paths" like the other hunters, Simon le Métis makes his own way:

> le Métis surgira comme d'accoutoume à l'improviste, en dehors des sentiers battus par une douzaine des chasseurs respectueux des lois. Mais le Métis ne s'est jamais soumis à une loi trop petite pour lui. Rien ne le détournera de l'ours qu'il chasse depuis qu'il est au monde, depuis une douzaine de saisons avec encore davantage de rage et de ruse, comme s'il avait trouvé chez l'ours, l'ours seul, un combat digne de lui. (O 52)

As his name and his fatherless status would suggest, he goes against the traditional patriarchal society, challenging the view that man is superior to animals and can therefore do whatever he wants, just as he challenges the need to live in society. He shuns traditional schooling as he does religion. In fact, in the end he finds he can more closely identify with the bears than with the townspeople.

Simon le Métis not only resists the traditional patriarchal order, he trains his protégé Tit-Jean to do the same. In fact, he deliberately refuses to talk to Titoume about his origins, thus keeping him in the dark, perpetuating the lack of roots, which frees him from societal/patriarchal laws. Rather, he teaches Titoume to be marginal

and to make his own laws, rather than abiding by those of "civilized" society. Unlike the other villagers who fear and hunt the bears, Titoume, Simon and Ozite respect and befriend them. Titoume is learning how to be part of the natural world and to not be governed by the rules of others. He nonetheless wants to understand where he comes from, he seeks knowledge of his parents, and of his place in the world. And in the end, when Simon has come to understand what happened, and his words have been loosed by alcohol, Tit-Jean finally learns what became of his father. Instead of confirming his place in society, however, this knowledge pulls him even further from mainstream society; his father, who died before his birth, was reincarnated as a bear, Revenant Noir, transgressing laws of religion, science, even life and death. Like le Métis, Titoume belongs to two worlds. Thanks to his parents as well as to those who raised him, Tit-Jean is truly an "hors-la-loi."

Another of Maillet's characters, Radi, is also an "hors-la-loi." Two novels, *On a mangé la dune* and *Le Chemin Saint-Jacques*[44] both feature the young heroine Radi. Although Radi is born into a respectable family from the right side of town, she rebels against all the forces that would limit her. *Le Chemin Saint-Jacques* takes up essentially the same story as *On a mangé la dune*, but whereas the latter tells only the story of part of Radi's childhood, the former spans almost her whole life. In *le Chemin Saint-Jacques,* (as well as in *On a mangé la dune,*) both young Radi[45] and the more mature Radegonde encounter many guardians of the law.

The "law" which Radi confronts in *Le Chemin Saint-Jacques* and *On a mangé la dune* is a paternal one--both literally and figuratively, since it comes not only from her father, but also from a patriarchal society--stemming from the societal norms or conventions which denied many

opportunities to girls. Radi felt this keenly, and raged/balked at the 'powers' that bestowed all the privileges on the boys. The guardians of the social and paternal law which Radi must confront are society as a whole, and in particular her teachers and her own family. Her teachers, parents and even her brothers and sisters enforce the strictures that would confine Radi to girls' roles. She can't throw stones, can't join the scouts and go camping, and when Arbor Day comes each year she must stay inside with the other girls cleaning the school while the boys are free to go outside and plant trees. And as she finds out, the society in which she lives is doubly restrictive; it restricts her both as a female and as a francophone.

In a patriarchal society that limits the options given to women, the people who provide Radi with the means of challenging and overcoming these boundaries are women; the aunt and mère Jeanne de Valois offer her an education without which she cannot get ahead; mademoiselle Pâris tells her about her ancestors who built Notre Dame, introduces her to Madame Primeau, and helps open to her the libraries of Paris; Aliénor encourages her to dig into the mysteries of oral history; and even before that it is Sophie who first encourages Radi, "T'en fais pas, toi, t'es née juste à temps. Puis la guerre ne va pas durer toujours et va sûrement changer beaucoup de choses... beaucoup de mentalités" (CSJ 174), assuring her sister that life will offer her more opportunities than Sophie had. And in the end, it is Sophie who, continually asking to hear the story of Radegonde's travels, incites her to bring it all together. And Radegonde, the adult, profits from the struggles of the young and adolescent Radi, who has challenged the guardians of paternal law and has broken free.

It is not insignificant that Radegonde's struggle should culminate by her writing a novel, since from childhood Radi had fought to be able to express herself in her own language, and had found comfort and hope in the words of other writers. Although Radi glimpses this "country of words" when she is but a child listening to stories, it is Radegonde who, after losing her mother and father, and who ancestrally has been deprived of her country truly enters the "country of words" in the novels she writes.[46] While still very young, Radi realizes that her key to escaping or circumventing the doubly restrictive society in which she lives, is education. Words, stories, and writing will be her escape, and to achieve this she must have an education, something usually denied to girls. But thanks to women Radi does finally receive this education. Her mother's death "liberates" both Radi and Céline from the household, and two nuns, one named Mère Jeanne de Valois, (with the possible intervention of Radi's sister Geneviève) offer these two young girls the opportunity to go study "un cours classique" in Memramcook.

If it is her mother's death that affords Radi the opportunity to leave home and get an education, it is her sister Sophie's impending death that spurs the creation of her novel. Thus death is a positive, creative force in the novel. "My voice repels death; my death; your death; my voice is my other. I write and you are not dead. The other is safe if I write." (Cixous, *Coming* 4). It is in just this way that Radegonde pushes back Sophie's death, she, like Scheherezade spins out the tale of her journeys, postponing the tale Sophie continually asks for until the last possible moment, until her time is up and the story must yield to a greater power, death. But while Radegonde's voice/story can in the end do nothing to stop Sophie's death, it does successfully keep in abeyance the death of

two significant "others", Radi, and Acadia. "Radegonde" is writing for the child Radi who stood before her teacher and proclaimed "J'écrirai, en français!" (CSJ 212) and is also the voice of Acadia and her people, not quite silenced, even after more than a hundred years without an actual "country", a hundred years of being forced to use words which were not their own.

"We move away from and approach Death, our double mother, through writing, because writing is always first a way of not being able to go through with mourning for death. ... And I say: you must have been loved by death to be born and move on to writing. The condition on which beginning to write becomes necessary--(and)--possible: *losing everything*, having once lost everything" (Cixous, *Coming* 38). Young Radi may cry "Je veux écrire en français!" but it is not until she has truly lost almost everything that she can come to writing. She must lose her family, her home, leave her friends and her familiar places, leave even her non-existent country before she can find her writing voice, for "writing begins without you, without I, without law, without knowing, without light, without hope, without bonds, without anyone close *to* you" (Cixous, *Coming* 38). Thus it takes Radi some time before she can admit and accept her vocation:

> C'est ainsi que plutôt que d'avouer ouvertement mes ambitions d'écriture--comme j'avais su le faire si spontanément à douze ans devant une classe ébarrouie et une maîtresse scandalisée--je justifiai mes fouilles sous le lâche et coûteux prétexte d'une thèse de doctorat en lettres...les géants me servaient de couverture... (CSJ 260)

It is only when Radegonde connects with Radi, the young rebel, "mon double, ma muse, ma guide intrépide" (CSJ 286), that she can find her power over the written word, the same power that defiant Radi had over the spoken word as a child.

As a young woman, Radi faces many challenges from society, for as Hélène Cixous maintains:

> 'woman,' well imprinted with the sociocultural heritage, has been inculcated with the spirit of 'restraint.' She is in fact "restraint" itself, socially. (Or, if you wish, the repressed, the controlled one.) She restrains herself, and is restrained, by a thousand bonds, hitched, conjugated, strings, chains, nets, leash, feeding dish, network of servile, reassuring dependencies. She is defined by her connections, *wife of*, as she was daughter of, from hand to hand, from bed to niche, from niche to household, woman as the complement-of-name has much to do to cut free. (*Coming* 40)

But like many of Maillet's heroines, Radi cut the bonds, strings chains that would define her socially. She will not be forced into one of the three roles her sister Céline tells her she has to choose. Céline is so young she does not even know the words she mispronounces, but she has already figured out the restrictions society places on women: "T'as trois choix, qu'elle fit...Trois, répète Céline: mère de famille, willy-gieuse, vieille fille" (CSJ 33). At a very young age, Céline already realizes what Radi does not realize, and refuses to accept: that society offers very few options to women. But Radi will not be content with these choices: "Je choisis le quatrième, qu'elle fait...Ça exisse" (CSJ 33). Like Mariaagélas, Crache-à-Pic, La Piroune and La Bessoune, she will make her own way in

the world, choosing her own profession, not conforming to society's choices. But unlike some of Maillet's characters, including Mariaagélas and her "mentor," la Vieille Lamant, Radi is not defined (nominally at least) in relationship to a man, husband or father. Mariaagélas's name links her inextricably with her father, Gélas, and since she will never marry, she will always be "daughter of" in society's eyes. Likewise la Veuve à Calixte and la Vieille Lamant are defined forever by their dead husbands--the midwife, friend and mentor to Radi is the "veuve en dernier veuvage d'un dénommé Lamant Cormier qui n'avait laissé à sa femme pour tout héritage qu'un prénom qui la définissait de la tête au pieds" (CSJ 42). This is what Radi, or perhaps more accurately Radegonde rejects, she refuses to be defined, chooses her own way "le quatrième". And like so many of Maillet's characters, it is through stories, *writing* that she circumvents the "law."

For Radi, the guardians of the law are largely teachers, her parents (to some extent) and society as a whole. Interestingly enough, it is Radi's mother more even than her father who represents the strictures of tradition. Her mother, then, has internalized the law and it is she who ultimately keeps Sophie from leaving with Gerry, an anglophone Protestant, to join the army nursing corps. And it is after the mother's death that Radi is liberated from her household, and given an education, the key to further flights. Her father, terminally ill early on in the novel, is not a strong opponent. In fact, Radegonde gets a blessing from him before she leaves for Europe to embark on her literary journey.

Rather than repressing her the Church offers her two important opportunities--one disappointing and one fruitful. Young Radi is excited when the parish priest comes to school and asks for all the girls to be let

out to join a special "crusade," traditionally a man's undertaking. For the first time, the girls, and not the boys are the beneficiaries of special opportunities. But Radi's excitement is short-lived, not only because she realizes that this crusade will not truly measure up to the excitement and adventure of a boy scout camping trip, but also because she comes face to face with the other side of exclusivity--Helen cannot take part, because she is Protestant. But as this disappointment fades away, another opportunity takes its place--the opportunity to continue her education, once again offered through the Church. This time, perhaps because it comes at the hands of women, the experiment is successful and Radi finds not only an education, but also her life.

Unlike Kafka's countryman, Radi has many guides on her journey past the law. One of Radi's first teachers is la vieille Lamant, the old midwife who delivered her. La vieille Lamant teaches Radi to "lire entre les lignes"/"lire à l'envers," in other words, to see things as they could be not as they are. Thus it is from a woman that Radi first learns to challenge, to question. And it is reality itself which she is questioning. How then can she passively accept the dicta of a society that would deny her choices, deny her self-expression? Thus at a very early age, Radi chooses the path of Eve. She cannot be content with the outside--of the law or the apple--she wants to taste the inside. The role models bequeathed to her in the books her brother gives her are Joan of Arc and Evangéline. In Evangéline she finds an expression of the beauty and pride of being Acadian, but Evangéline is an unsatisfying heroine; she is passive and plaintive, and she does not fight back as Radi's mother would have: "sa mère ne se serait pas laissé déporter ni brûler par personne, elle se serais défendue à coups de hache, à coups de gueule..."

(CSJ 232). In Joan of Arc, however, she sees a heroine who is willing to fight for words, for the right to speak her own language. "Radi, métamorphosée pour la première fois en Jeanne d'Arc, avait l'intention de les bouter tous, du premier au dernier, libérant sa race et sa langue à jamais" (CSJ 76). Like Joan of Arc, she fights successfully for the maintenance of her language, but unlike Joan of Arc, Radi does not end up burned at the stake. Thus Radi has overturned another legend, another law, reversed history in a way, a history which was made and written by men.

Along the way, she chooses/seeks companions who also challenge the order of things, who help and encourage her quest to see the other side. Young Radi finds a friend in Katchou, a girl from the wrong side of the tracks:

> Radi, à l'insu de sa famille et de l'école, se lia d'amitié avec la fille d'en bas...Et malgré l'interdit, elles franchirent allègrement la frontière entre le monde qui faisait sécher ses mouchoirs sur la corde, au milieu des draps et des taies d'oreiller, et celui qui se mouchait à ses manches. (CSJ 89-90)

Radi is drawn to Katchou because she seems to go quite naturally against the grain, to "lire à l'envers." "Une fille d'en bas," she does not conform to all the social and moral obligations Radi faces. And having taken Katchou as her friend, "Radi avait le chemin libre. Elle marchait sur des oeufs, mais elle marchait toute seule" (CSJ 90). Like la Vieille Lamant, Katchou will encourage Radi along the path of resistance and questioning, away from the passivity encouraged by society.

But Radi needs very little encouraging. She quite naturally rebels against the choices given her by society. As a child, she is driven by a

desire to regain paradise; something which is out of her reach. But she can and she does use her imagination to overcome the boundaries of the world around her:

> Ça faisait longtemps assez qu'elle payait pour être fille...Pas le choix: la pire des calamités! Avant tout Radi voulait des choix. Depuis qu'elle a l'âge de se souvenir, elle refait le monde au gré de son plaisir. (CSJ 41)

In *On a mangé la dune*, Radi standing on a rock pile announces "C'est moi, Dieu, je vas créer le monde" (OMD 115). It is this same Radi who (in *Le Chemin Saint-Jacques*) refuses to play with a baby carriage because she realizes the sad fact that it represents the wife and mother role forced on women by society. And it is this same Radi who defies her schoolteacher at the age of twelve and stands before the class to declare her choice of the fourth or "other" option: "J'écrirai, en français!" (CSJ 212). She will not accept the assignment to write about her own funeral, but in English. But Radi refuses. "Les mots sont la matière même avec laquelle Radi s'est fabriqué une vie, une vie unique, non interchangeable. Elle n'a pas de vie de rechange et ne saurait donc renoncer à rien de ce qui la constitue essentiellement" (CSJ 213). It is at this moment that the seed of her career as a storyteller and writer takes root.

As her rebellious choice of careers would indicate, the way that Radi will challenge the "law" is with language. Radi, who as a child learned words "par osmose," (CSJ 18), uses these words and the images they conjure, to make her own world. "Radi préfère l'imaginaire à la raison. En s'appropriant les mots, elle les a déjà transformés en images qui s'allument comme des bougies pour éclairer sa vie de l'intérieur..." (CSJ 27). She knows well the power of stories to take her into another

world, when she brings home a story she hears at the forge, she realizes that she too can possess the power to narrate. Unfortunately, despite its success, the story scandalizes her parents who decide that the forge is not an appropriate place for a young girl. "Elle perdait la forge, mais aquérait la conviction qu'elle serait un jour conteuse" (CSJ 111). She continues to revel in the joy of narrative, regardless of the familial and societal conventions that would keep her from associating with the men of the forge, or the lower-class Prudence and Katchou. And in the end she realizes that if she is to fight against the Anglophones, and keep Acadia alive, it will be with her writing: "Je soupçonnais que si jamais je devais lire mes noms familiers, je devrais les écrire moi-même, d'où le cri spontané arraché à ma gorge de douze ans: 'Je veux être écrivain, en français!'" (CSJ 276). In writing, then, she finds her ultimate defiance.

The heroines, and heroes, of Maillet's novels constantly challenge and subvert authority, and therefore the law, in order to redistribute power. These rebel characters incarnate the exact attitudes that allowed Acadia to survive and rebuild after the deportation: a refusal to accept defeat and a firm belief that each person has the right to choose his/her own way of life. And Maillet gives her readers the same opportunities as her protagonists to challenge the law, and to take an active role. The reader of Maillet's text need not sit passively before it, waiting for it to divulge all; there are many points of entry. Her stories are often told by not one but several narrators, who interrupt and challenge each other's versions of the "truth," leaving it to the reader to decide what to believe. Often these interruptions are ambiguous remarks like "heuh!" "hi!" or even "comme si!" which challenge the story without offering any alternative explanation. Sometimes Maillet projects the questions of the

listener/reader into the text: "--Vous voulez dire?..." and sometimes she uses ellipses, or ellipses followed by a question mark physically to mark the gaps in the story where the reader must jump in. Thus Maillet gives the same freedom to her characters and to her readers: the freedom to challenge authority and to defy the law.

Chapter 3

Storytellers, Conteurs, Menteurs, Menteux, and Défricheteux de parenté: Maintaining the Oral Tradition

Contons, mais contons bien; c'est le point principal, c'est tout.
-La Fontaine

Vous apprendriez bien des choses,
avec ces conteux-colporteux-rabouteux-arrêteux-de-sang-
et défricheteux de parenté. Tant pis pour vous
si vous avez choisi de vous instruire dans les livres.
-Antonine Maillet

Reading Antonine Maillet's novels, it becomes clear that the character of the storyteller is of prime importance. The storyteller (conteur, jongleur, menteux), has traditionally played an important role in Acadian society, and the society portrayed in her novels is no exception. And although most of the characters in Maillet's novels tell stories at some point, there is usually one character--like Jérôme in *Cent ans dans les bois,* or Bélonie in *Pélagie-la-Charrette*--who does nothing but tell stories. This person is never the main character of the novel yet he/she plays an important social role, for he is not only an entertainer, but also the guardian and transmitter of local news, history and tradition.[47] Such a storyteller was essential to the oral tradition in which the Acadian people were situated for many years. Maillet herself states that: "Acadia exists because of its storytellers. . . they were the ones who literally made the history. The oral tradition is really that important" (Smith 262-3).

The stories bring the Acadian people together by keeping their culture alive:

> à travers les contes s'élaborait, sans doute, tout un monde, drôle et mystérieux, fabricateur de héros et de légendes, inventeur de farces; inévitablement, l'identité y était liée au sens de la terre, d'une patrie qui n'était pas celle des livres, des états-nations ou des idéologies, mais un sens d'appartenance profond qui permettait d'identifier le paysage, de s'y retrouver, de le nommer. (Paratte 295)

The storytellers have maintained for the Acadians a sense of their past, of their culture, and a sense of belonging.

Storytellers such as Bélonie kept the history of an oral people alive, and this role is clear in Maillet's novels, especially *Pélagie-la-Charrette.* She "impresses upon the reader that the storyteller is no mere entertainer. He can also be the one great link between a people and its past" (Fitzpatrick, *Search* 9). This is an important function of the traditional storyteller, who flourished in past epochs when these stories drew people together into a community.[48] But this does not mean that the storyteller is a mere archivist, who simply repeats historical messages. On the contrary, storytellers, especially those in Maillet's novels, are artists who create worlds with their words. In an essay entitled "Mon pays, c'est un conte," Maillet insists that the traditional storyteller does more than recite history: "Je m'insurge tout de suite contre la définition du conteur oral traditionnel qui aurait pour seule fonction de répéter, transmettre fidèlement un récit reçu en droite ligne de l'homme de la caverne" (79). This definition neglects an important aspect of the storyteller's craft, the artistry:

> Et tout l'âme qu'il y déverse, et l'intonation, et l'interprétation, et les transformations, et les sourires en coin, et les ajouts, et le style enfin, ce n'est pas de la littérature ça? Non, justement, ce n'est pas de la littérature, comme nous l'entendons; c'est de la littérature orale, celle qui s'inspire de la vie et de ses rites, et qui se situe aux racines mêmes de l'autre. (79-80)

The traditional storyteller, then, is the precursor of the modern author. And the oral tradition, the body of narratives belonging to the Acadians--or to any other culture--both finds its inspiration in the life and rituals of the community, and enriches its life and rituals.

The many levels of storytellers in Maillet's novels prove that they are firmly established in this oral tradition. The stories are passed down from generation to generation "comme un fief" (PLC 11). In some novels, like *Pélagie-la-Charrette,* this heritage is evidenced by the embedding of each layer of storytelling inside another. The stories that Bélonie tells are part of the story that the generation of Pélagie-la-Gribouille tells, and glosses, which in turn the narrator tells and glosses. In all her novels, however, there are multiple storytellers, apart from the narrator who frames the work. Storytelling, then, is an important part of Acadian community life in which everyone can participate, listening, commenting, even telling their own stories.

Although storytelling is something that everyone can share, there still remains a distinction between the casual storytelling that many of Maillet's characters do, and the serious or professional activity of storytellers such as Bélonie or Jérôme. These are the traditional storytellers who kept the Acadian stories and traditions alive through the Deportation and during the century of isolation that followed. Without

Jérôme, the narrator of *Cent ans dans les bois* says, "ne me demandez pas comment l'histoire serait sortie du bois, en 1880, et nous serait parvenue aussi fière et gaillarde" (CA 13). Bélonie and Jérôme preserve and pass on the history of their people. Without storytellers like these, an oral and isolated people like the Acadians would have no history. When the narrator of *Pélagie-la-Charrette* says "après ça, venez me dire à moi, qui fourbis chaque matin mes seize quartiers de charrette, qu'un peuple qui ne sait pas lire ne saurait avoir d'Histoire" (PLC 12), the true significance of storytellers like Bélonie and Jérome becomes evident. History is not just what is written in books or stored in archives. It is the traditions and culture of a people, the stories that link their past, present and future.

Community participation is an integral part of the act of storytelling, just as community participation is essential in perpetuating a cultural identity. In the communities portrayed in Maillet's novels, storytelling involves a give and take between the storytellers and the listeners, especially when the subject matter directly concerns them and their history. The interruptions, embellishments, and personal testimonials make of the story not the work of one mere person, but the work of a community. And everyone, not just the "professional" storytellers gets a chance to tell their stories. Thus the cultural identity perpetuated by the stories is the work of everyone involved. And although one person is often designated as the "storyteller" or keeper of stories and traditions, everyone participates in building and maintaining the Acadian culture.

But why is storytelling so important to the Acadians? According to J. Hillis Miller, "the human capacity to tell stories is one way men and

women collectively build a significant and orderly world around themselves. With fictions, we investigate, perhaps invent, the meaning of life" (69). Through their stories, the Acadians of Maillet's novels attempt to order the chaotic world around them, make sense of life and of their "history." Radi, the storyteller who actually becomes an author, says she wants to "créer le monde."[49] She can sense, then, even as a child, that the ability to narrate is a very powerful one indeed. The narrator of *Le Huitième Jour*,[50] too, knows the power of a creative imagination in an "unfinished world" (HJ 3). As she says: "the only hope lies in the eighth day" (HJ 3) (of creation), the day when storytellers can remake the world. As Maillet maintains:

> Les plus grands poètes acadiens furent les chroniqueurs, les composeux de complaintes, les défricheteux de parenté, les conteux de contes et de légendes. Ceux-là savaient vraiment rebâtir le monde pour qu'il se mette à ressembler à leurs souvenirs et à leurs rêves. (Major 23)

Though the stories in Maillet's novels do entertain, and do preserve a rich oral tradition, they in fact serve an even larger purpose, and that is to give voice to the Acadians' struggle to understand and maintain a collective/social identity. As this is a task that must be shared by the entire community, past, present and future, is it any wonder that this struggle is not voiced by a single narrator? Maillet's works echo with the polyphony of voices that compose the Acadian story. The voices of the various storytellers in Maillet's works perpetuate Acadian cultural identity by keeping the myths, stories, and "History" alive.

Professional Storytellers

Pamphile is the official poet of Don l'Orignal's Pucois kingdom. He is called the "poète du royaume" (DO 36), or the "poète national" (DO 40). As the poet of his people, his role is both to chronicle their history in story and verse, and to entertain the public by telling these stories and epics. He is also present at important occasions such as the inauguration of the stolen barrel of molasses. Unlike other storytellers, Pamphile has an officially recognized position of "national poet." Like those of the official court poets of ages past, his stories have purpose and distinction. The stories or epics he recounts will also become an official part of the people's history and culture. And though the people are familiar with these stories of their past, they never tire of hearing them; Pamphile recounts the great epics, such as the "Iliade de l'Ile-aux-Puces" to mark momentous occasions. Through repetition, the stories become part of the people's collective identity.

One of the stories that he tells is the epic of Don l'Orignal's island, a story that recounts the battle of the forces of good and evil, featuring the hero of the island Michel-Archange. Camped out the night before a battle,[51] the Puçois soldiers are regaled with Pamphile's epic:

> Ainsi se termina la célèbre épopée de l'Ile-aux-Puces, telle que chantée par son poète national aux troupes bivouaquant du chevalier Noume, le soir qu'apparut aux gens du continent le mystérieux bateau fantôme. Pamphile, en l'honneur des plus belles oeuvres de ses confrères poètes de tous les temps, appela son épopée la *Puciade*. (DO 42)

This title which he has given his work, (to honor the greatest of his fellow poets) establishes Pamphile in the tradition of the ancient Greek epic poets. The nature of the battle (good versus evil) and the tradition in which it is placed elevate the story of Michel-Archange to the status of an epic.

The Puçois people show Pamphile the honor and respect due a national poet. His stories are not interrupted or embellished by his listeners, as are those of his compatriots Bélonie or Jérôme, for example. His storytelling, nonetheless, does follow certain conventions of interaction with the audience. His epic follows a certain rhythm, with appropriate pauses for Pamphile to refresh himself and for the audience to encourage him to continue:

> Pamphile ici fit une longue pause. Voyant qu'il ne reprenait pas, ses auditeurs alléchés crièrent tous ensemble:
>
> --La suite, raconte la suite! (DO 40).

The audience's encouragement is an important element in Pamphile's storytelling, as it shows him that he and his stories are respected and appreciated.

As a respected poet of the kingdom, Pamphile is not only responsible for storytelling, but also has the honor of speaking--and even prophesying-on important occasions, as does Bélonie. The return of the Puçois warriors with a stolen barrel of molasses is just such an occasion. He pronounces a beautiful oration, inaugurating the barrel, but is unfortunately interrupted by a more prosaic villager: "Il allait entreprendre la péroraison à l'adresse des vaillants soldats, quand ses vers furent étouffés sous la prose dramatique de la Sainte qui venait de constater l'absence de Citrouille" (DO 58). Though he may be

interrupted by the dramatic course of events, the versification of Pamphile will not soon be forgotten. His creations, having represented a people at their most significant moments, will be part of the oral tradition of the people for generations to come.

But though his stories live on, Pamphile is not immortal. The narrator points out toward the end of *Don l'Orignal* that though the subject matter was worthy of an epic, she has not presented it as such, since the epic poet Pamphile was no longer available to create one.

> Ce qui se passa ce jour-là dans mon pays, sur la terre ferme et dans l'île, mériterait bien les honneurs d'une nouvelle épopée, digne de la plume du grand poète épique de l'Ile-aux-Puces, Pamphile. Mais les poètes vivent ce que vivent les roses, et Pamphile comme la plupart des grands héros de ce drame, n'est plus. (DO 72)

Pamphile has not only been given the honors due to a "grand poète épique" here, he has also been elevated to the status of a hero, equal to the other heroes, Michel-Archange, Citrouille and Noume, though Pamphile never engaged in battle. Like the other storytellers in Maillet's novels, Pamphile merits the title of hero because of his creative genius, and his service to his community. He is more honored than Don l'Orignal, and at the official inauguration, it is he who presides, not Don l'Orignal. In a society that is attempting to preserve its culture and history, and yet has no written history, the storyteller is someone to be honored and venerated.

Le vieux Bélonie, "conteur et chroniqueur de son metier" (PLC 10), is one of the main characters in the novel *Pélagie-la-Charrette.* Bélonie is a traditional storyteller; one who practices storytelling as a profession

and a way of life, who keeps the stories of his people alive. "Sans ces conteux et défricheteux de Bélonie, fils de Bélonie, fils de Bélonie, l'Histoire aurait trépassé à chaque tournant de siècle" (PLC 11). The history that Bélonie keeps even precedes the settling of Acadia.

> Il pouvait tout vous raconter, dans un seul souffle, les ancêtres comme les descendants, vous dérouler tout un lignage sans rater une maille, et vous crocheter l'histoire d'un peuple qui allait de France en Acadie, en passant par l'exil, durant une petite génération... (PLC 69)

Bélonie's stories remind his people of where they came from, and what they have endured.

While Pélagie is the heroine, literally bringing her people back from exile, Bélonie wages the same battle on a figurative plane. While Pélagie fights hunger, mud, delays, and even the American revolutionary war, Bélonie is engaged in an ongoing battle of wills against the "charrette noir" or death. While Pélagie brings her *people* back to Acadia, giving them a future, Bélonie brings his stories back, and in doing so gives them the gift of their past. This mission is so important that Bélonie cannot die until he has passed on his stories--which he does after miraculously finding a grandson whom he thought was dead. "Si jamais un homme depuis le début des temps, a éprouvé l'ombre d'une douleur de l'enfantement, c'est le Bélonie de la charrette. A cent ans, ou presque, il venait de mettre au monde sa lignee" (PLC 278). Bélonie had thought that he was the last of his family and that his stories would die with him. When he finds his grandson, he knows that his family and his stories will survive. In finding someone to whom he can leave his lore, he finds a

key to the future, and he knows that the history and traditions he has preserved will not die with him.

Not only does Bélonie keep the history of his people, the folktales and traditions that he has preserved reach all the way back to France. They are not only the stories of the Acadians and their experiences, but also the legends and histories that they inherited from their French ancestors. In the novel, for example, Bélonie tells the tale of the Baleine Blanche, an old tale which Maillet has changed: "the story of the White Whale is based on an actual tale--the man who runs after the hen, who runs after the fox, etc.--but I doctored it up to my own taste" (Smith 268). And the Acadians themselves "doctor" the story to suit their own purposes so that in the end, they have created their own story and their own history: "Et c'est comme ça que je sons encore en vie, nous autres les exilés, par rapport que j'ons consenti à sortir d'exil et rentrer au pays par le cul d'une baleine!" (PLC 84).[52] And the last story that Bélonie tells, la Dame géante de la Nuit, is a story which Maillet points out is a conglomeration of several old tales (Smith 268). These tales entertain the people, but also keep their folk history alive. When he tells his stories, Bélonie establishes himself in a rich literary tradition.

As the "conteur," Bélonie enjoys a privileged position in the refugee community. He is not only the entertainer, and keeper of their history, he is also the patriarch and as such is put in charge of baptisms, funerals and weddings, in the absence of a priest. He brings peace when the small community is fighting. But he is also a "voyant", one favored by visions. He is the one who sees/recognizes the "vaisseau fantome" of Beausoleil-Broussard (PLC 88), and he alone can see (or rather hear) the presence of the "charrette noire" of death. And he can predict the future:

"Bélonie sourit en fronçant le crâne: la terre tournait à l'envers du cadran solaire, en ce jour de septembre de fin de siècle, et risquait fort de basculer au premier faux pas. Tenez-vous bien, tout le monde!" (PLC 133). Even in a society as superstitious as that of the Acadians, this power is not given to everyone. Thus Bélonie is not only capable of preserving the past but also of seeing the future. As a storyteller and as a visionary, Bélonie has managed to transcend the boundaries of time that restrict most people to the here and now.

In fact, Bélonie even manages to fight and triumph over death, the ultimate transcendence of time. He tricks "La Mort," "la vieille garce" into letting Beausoleil-Broussard live by distracting her for just a second. "J'ai réussi à te distraire une seconde, une petite seconde, c'est tout ce que ça prend pour se glisser entre le temps et l'éternité...hi, hi!" (PLC 291). The laws of nature don't seem to constrain Bélonie, he exists on another plane not bound by time or even death. "Il était présent partout, le Bélonie...Hi! hi! hi! partout! La nature était envahie du Bélonie" (PLC 314). He and his stories have slipped between time and eternity. Even after he dies, or rather disappears, he lives on in his stories.

Like Pamphile and Bélonie, Jérôme, of *Cent ans dans les bois*, makes a point of placing himself in a long line of other storytellers. Unlike Pamphile, however, he does not attribute his stories to himself: "car ce menteux qui a si bien su transmettre les mots des autres, en les agençant, juxtaposant, les triturant pour en extraire tout le jus, ne s'est jamais attribué à lui-même une seule idée primitive" (CA 14). Jérôme is not a national poet or a composer of epics. But he is a master storyteller who knows how to transmit the words of others, extracting from them every bit of meaning. He is the keeper of the words, the stories of his

people, and as the narrator points out, "sans lui, ne me demandez pas comment l'histoire serait sortie du bois, en 1880, et nous serait parvenue aussi fière et gaillarde" (CA 13). Jérôme is perpetuating his people's culture and history, not by inventing stories, but by passing on the stories that others have lived and composed.

This is not to say, however, that Jérôme the conteur or the menteux does not play an important role, or exercise creative genius. The words and stories of others, and even time, are the material with which a storyteller such as Jérôme creates his masterpieces, in which anything is possible. "Un menteux a tout son temps. Il en vit. Le temps est au menteux ce qu'est le bois au menuisier: avec du temps, un menteux professionnel vous rebâtit le monde" (CA 25). The storytellers, conteurs and menteux of Maillet's novels are not simply spokesmen. Although they often do not attribute their stories to themselves, carefully situating them in the context of a long line of history, they nonetheless add their own creative touch to every narrative. And skilled storytellers have no end of material with which to create. For Jérôme, "trop d'événements naissent chaque jour de par le monde pour qu'un colporteur du calibre de Jérôme s'amuse à raccommoder les pièces usées" (CA 138). The world he lives in, as well as his creative talents, provide Jérôme with a limitless supply of stories. And with these stories, storytellers like Jérôme are capable of changing the world itself. The storyteller, then, plays a crucial role in the perpetuation of and shaping of a sense of an Acadian identity. They will be the ones who recreate the Acadian world with their stories.

There are many skilled techniques involved in recreating the world through stories. A professional storyteller such as Jérôme[53] does not simply sit down and tell a story. The stories, and indeed the trade, are

much too important. Each storyteller, and especially the professionals must follow certain rituals, as described in *Cent ans dans les bois*: "à lui maintenant de s'emparer du tabouret, de saluer bien bas la compagnie, de huiler sa langue de salive, et d'amener petit à petit son monde à le suivre, loin sur l'empremier, au-delà de leurs pères et grands-pères" (CA 27). In addition to these, a good storyteller must pay careful attention to "les mises en garde, les étapes, les péripéties, les clins d'oeil, les digressions, les commentaires" (CA 27). These techniques are well known to their audiences, who are collaborating in the whole process, like the Puçois encouraging Pamphile to continue. The listeners are willing participants who know that they, too, have their role to play, and will have their turn for input. The ritual act of storytelling is a community activity, with conventions that must be respected.

Jérôme is a traveling storyteller who brings news from many of the surrounding communities, thus linking the isolated Acadian villages. He brings them news of the LeBlanc treasure (and even a map), news of a discovery of a branch of LeBlancs related to Borteloc (a townsman) one of whom is a schoolteacher, and the news of the first Acadian national convention. He also tells stories which the Acadians of Fond-de-la-Baie know as their own. Although Jérôme is Acadian, the people of Fond-de-la-Baie see his as an outsider; at first Jérôme is "un étrange, " and the first one "hors-les-côtes" (outside their village, that is) to hear their stories in a hundred years (CA 34). Yet when he tries to tell the villagers a story, they immediately take over the telling of it, since their own ancestors lived it.[54] In the end, characters such as Pélagie-la-Gribouille will realize that these stories are shared among the Acadian communities. Jérôme is the keeper of the true Acadian treasure, the

stories that hold the key to their culture, and that tie them together as a people.

Such preservation is the most important function of Jérôme or any other storyteller; he is the person who above all others is responsible for the preservation of Acadian culture. He holds the stories that will give them a sense of their history, and of their identity as a people. And when Jérôme is faced with problems he confronts them with his stories. For him,

> conter ne voulait point dire brailler et pleurnicher en regardant dérouler devant ses yeux les dix plaies d'Egypte. Il était grand temps qu'il reprenne le tabouret et le crachoir, le Jérôme, et détourne le cours de l'histoire; grand temps qu'il largue au mitan de la place une autre de ses bombes qui relancerait le pays à la recherche de son avenir et de son identité. (CA 297)

It is obvious here that storytellers are not merely archivists, or keepers of the past in Acadia, they also play an active role in the development of their people's identity. They may show up at dull moments to entertain but they also have a more proactive function that is to function as a catalyst of thought and change.[55]

At the end of the novel the importance of Jérôme-le-Menteux becomes clear, when the narrator contrasts him to all the annalists, journalists, ethnographers, mythographers, historiographers, sociologists, archeologists, and even philosophers (CA 337) who have written about that first Acadian national convention. She, however, is the only one to date who has allowed Jérôme to tell his story: "Mais personne encore n'avait donné la parole à Jérôme-le-Menteux. Pourtant lui seul, de tous ces conteurs, rapporteurs et chroniqueurs, fut témoin,

de ses yeux vu, de la convention de Memramcook telle qu'aperçue des gens du Fond-de-la-Baie" (CA 337). Jérôme was a witness to the convention and to the lives of the Acadians of his time--another important function of the storyteller. Through their stories, they observe and testify to the realities of Acadian life. And the narrator of *Cent ans dans les bois*, establishing herself in the tradition of Acadian storytellers, offers the testimony of Jérôme as her contribution. The stories of the convention in *Cent ans dans les bois* are told "au dire de Jérôme" (CA 342); he is given the opportunity to give his own testimony. This testimony has become part of the Acadian oral tradition, through which it reached the narrator and then the reader.

The Acadian oral tradition has endured for centuries, although, like the society itself, it has evolved over the years. Le vieux Clovis, the storyteller in *Crache à Pic*, is a traditional storyteller similar to Jérôme and Bélonie, but living in more modern times. Though respected for his storytelling talents, and endowed with the nickname "Clovis le conteur" (CAP 23), Clovis is not the respected patriarch that Bélonie is, nor the national poet that Pamphile is. Clovis does, however, live during the epoch of bootlegging, a glorious time for the adventurers and the storytellers along the Acadian coasts. And, operating from the forge, he chooses storytelling rather than blacksmithing as his profession:

> Parce que ce pays-là était plus bavard que laborieux, au tournant du siècle, parce qu'il révélait moins de génie pour gagner sa vie que pour raconter, Clovis, fils de Clovis le forgeron, apprit de la forge le métier de conteur et non la forgerie. (CAP 82)

Although the Acadian society of Clovis' time has some modern conveniences at their disposal, and is less isolated than the people of

Cent ans dans les bois, the storyteller is nonetheless still an important part of their community.

Like the other "professional" storytellers, Clovis also follows certain techniques and conventions: "le vieux Clovis se spécialisait dans les feintes, les provocations, les je-sais-tout-mais-ne-vous-dirai-rien, et aurait trouvé en-dessous de sa condition de se mettre à conter de A à Z" (CAP 208). As the town storyteller, Clovis possesses a certain amount of power. The narrator explains that everything, stories, legends, even gossip passed through Clovis: "Mon père a bien connu la forge et le vieux Clovis, et aurait pu vous en parler. Jamais une légende ne circulait librement dans le pays sans la sanction préalable de la forge. Ni légende, ni proverbe, ni ouï-dire, ni fable, ni commentaire, ni commérage, rien, pas un mot" (CAP 82). Clovis is portrayed as the keeper of the word, such that every piece of information or (entertainment) is sanctioned by him. And at the end of the novel, Clovis is made the foreman of the jury at Dieudonné's trial, and in this role he is also keeper of the word, or in this case the verdict: "Il est mort de la main de quelqu'un" (CAP 386). As foreman of the jury, he has the responsibility of pronouncing the statement that summarizes and concludes the trial, and of pronouncing the fate of Dieudonné. His role as storyteller also posits him as keeper of the word. He is the source of the story itself, since it comes to the narrator from her father who got it from old Clovis himself. In the last chapter, the narrator passes control of the story over to Clovis, and the trial is recounted from his perspective, in the first person. So in the end it is the storyteller Clovis who has control over the story of the trial as well as of the verdict.

Non-professional/Amateur Storytellers

Besides the "professional" storytellers, like Clovis, Bélonie, or Jérôme, there are many other, less traditional storytellers in Maillet's novels. Many of the characters in her novels are "conteurs," "menteurs," "menteux," "colporteurs," "défricheteux de parenté" and "composeurs de complaintes." In *Crache à Pic*, for example, several other characters tell stories within the larger context of the story that Clovis is telling (through the narrator). At Clovis' New Year's party, Crache à Pic tells a story of her ancestors, and Vif Argent tells the story of evolution and the dawn of time. These narratives serve to entertain the other characters, but also to provide background on Crache à Pic and to advance the plot. Vif Argent and especially Crache à Pic are drawn more closely to each other because of the stories.

Crache à Pic has long been fascinated by creative power. At the age of three, she would create worlds from the pebbles in her yard, naming them, grouping them, creating villages and exercising her power over them, "distribuant des tâches et des titres, sans souci de droits et de justice mais selon son bon vouloir, comme Dieu accordant dons et faveurs à ses favoris. Elle réparait la création. . . à sa mesure" (CAP 36). Young Crache à Pic, or "la petite Girouette" as she was known then, has already discovered the power of storytelling to create.[56] Like Clovis, she holds the power of the word. A more mature Crache à Pic finds herself drawn to Vif Argent, as he tells of the "fin mot du mystère caché de l'autre côté de l'horizon" (CAP 252). Vif Argent, for his part, has found the words that have captured Crache à Pic's heart.

Another story within the novel *Crache à Pic* --itself an "epopée de la contrebande" (CAP 107)--is the story told by the vagabond Barrabas.

Barrabas tells Black Willy (and the readers) about Crache à Pic's adventure as a nun, smuggling bootleg liquor across the American border, "l'odyssée toute fraîche et pas encore touchée par la légende" (CAP 185). This story both advances the plot and completes the story of Crache à Pic's adventures for the reader; it puts the story in the voice of a direct witness, Barrabas. Though not a storyteller by profession, he holds court as if he were, knowing that his knowledge, his story give him power over Black Willy who is anxiously waiting to hear the end. Storytelling is not just for those who have made it a career.

The presence of a professional storyteller such as Jérôme does not stop a local storyteller like Bélonie-le-Gicleux or even a villager like Pélagie-la-Gribouille from telling their own stories. In *Cent ans dans les bois*, there are even two rival "composeurs de complaintes"--Moustachette, who is from the mainland, and la vieille Lamant, from the island. These two rivals compete to create the most striking ballads, fighting for the subjects like Adélaïde's death on her wedding day. It is believed that these "composeurs" have special powers just as the storytellers do: "le pays a toujours cru que les conteurs et composeurs de complaintes communiquaient entre eux par l'esprit. C'est ainsi qu'ils se passent leurs chansons et leurs contes" (CA 217). The ballads of Moustachette and la vieille Lamant, set off from the prose narration of the other storytellers, form a sort of musical refrain to *Cent ans dans les bois*, expressing in verse the most poetic and poignant moments in the novel, the deaths of Adélaïde and Capitain Poirier, and the petit ponchon, for example. Their ballads repeat in song the stories familiar to everyone.

Another storyteller in *Cent ans dans les bois*, who also appears in *Pélagie-la-Charrette*, is Bélonie-le-Gicleux. He is a descendent of Bélonie-

le-Vieux, the storyteller in *Pélagie-la-Charrette*, and a contemporary of Jérôme and la Gribouille. Bélonie-le-Gicleux, though overshadowed somewhat by Jérôme, still manages to assert himself, and to drop his own bomb, the news that some LeBlancs from other villages were sending representatives to the United States to search for the LeBlanc treasure. He also plays an important role in the handing down of the story of Pélagie, adding, embellishing, and adjusting the story as he tells it. The stories that are handed down from generation to generation bear the marks and influences of the various storytellers who have handled them along the way. Each storyteller leaves his or her own mark, and makes a personal contribution. The narrator of Maillet's novels is always careful to emphasize this line through which her stories pass and in doing so she situates them; it becomes clear that the stories told in Maillet's novels are not the work of one author or storyteller, but the work of generations of Acadians, whose voices can all be hard in the stories she tells.

Although there are no "traditional" storytellers in *Mariaagélas*, there are several characters, including Maria herself, who tell stories. And the stories are a valuable source of entertainment for the villagers: a traveling peddler, "the little Syrian, " was always a welcome sight since he told great stories. Some of the stories, like those of the Syrian, or Boy à Polyte's hunting story, are told for entertainment, but more often the stories are told to explain something to the listener/reader or to give a moral. The story of the phantom ship, for example, which the sea captain tells, is a tragic story, which also explains a common Acadian legend, the sighting of a burning ship before a storm or trouble. And the

story that Sarah Bidoche, the card reader, tells is meant to give Maria a lesson.

But the story that Maria tells is meant not merely to entertain but to mislead. When she returns from her bootlegging adventure in the States, she has to account for her three-day absence. Maria goes about this skillfully, knowing how to tell a story that was fantastic and entertaining but that would not be immediately dismissed as purely fictional. "Allez trouver comme ça une explication qui tranquillise en même temps le désespoir de la mère Gélas, l'inquiétude de la vieille Crochu, les doutes de la veuve à Calixte et la curiosité du reste de la paroisse" (MG 133). Maria keeps her story brief so that it will be more believable (MG 134), yet incredible enough to explain her complete disappearance for three days. Although some doubt remains as to the veracity of her tale, Maria's story does satisfy the villagers and keep them from guessing how she had spent her days. Maria uses of her storytelling talents to deceive and to conceal. For Maria, storytelling holds the power to make people believe.

Maillet posits storytelling as an essential characteristic of the Acadian people, and thus a trait shared by all. So it is not surprising to find that Bélonie may be the main "conteur" in *Pélagie-la-Charrette*, but he is not the narrator, nor even the only storyteller. The stories Bélonie tells are contrasted with those of Pierre à Pitre, whose stories "étaient de pures inventions, tout le monde le savait, et on ne les écoutait que pour se divertir" (PLC 304). And even members of the group who are not "storytellers" use stories for their own purposes. In a Charleston prison, the group combines its storytelling talents to literally story their way free, and another character, legendary sea-captain Beausoleil-Broussard

creates his own fantastic story to escape the justice of the British navy. These are the storytellers who are the actual focus of the story, which is "framed" by a 'contemporary' narrator who got her story from her cousin, a descendant of Bélonie. But there is yet another set of narrators, situated in time about halfway between the story of the first Pélagie and the time of the narration. These ancestral intermediaries have their say as well: "Et laissez mon cousin Louis-le-Jeune vous dire qu'aucune generation de Belonie ne laissa passer une si belle occasion de dire son fait à la generation suivante" (PLC 191). Thus the story of *Pélagie-la-Charrette* as presented to the reader is not a simple story but rather an intricately woven multi-dimensional narrative that boasts a direct line of ancestry but that has, at the same time, several layers of interlocutors. Like the medieval bards, all Maillet's storytellers, even the narrators, are careful to place themselves in a well-established tradition.

NARRATORS

One of the most important storytellers in each of these novels, and yet the storyteller who remains the least clearly presented, is the narrator herself. The narrators in Maillet's novels are almost never characters in the stories, instead, they tell the stories which have been handed down to them. Like Bélonie, Jérôme, and the others, the narrator in Maillet's novels is careful to place herself in the context of a long line of storytellers. Maillet's narratives are punctuated with "au dire de," "selon mon cousin," and many other sayings which indicate to the reader that the stories are not mere inventions of the narrator. Just as the narrator of *Cent ans dans les bois* makes use of Jérôme's experience at the first national convention, the narrators in Maillet's other novels

use the stories they have heard from their ancestors, and the stories that have been handed down from generation to generation. And like the storytellers in the novels, the narrators put a little of themselves into the stories they tell, adding their own twists and offering interpretations. The narrators occasionally recount stories for which they openly admit there is no oral account, as does the narrator of *Don l'Orignal:*

> Le récit de l'ultime bataille qui fut livrée sur l'Île-aux-Puces ne paraît dans aucune chronique, aucunes archives, ni aucune parti des mémoires pamphiliennes. Et, fait curieux, on ne trouve nulle page déchirée dans les annales nationales du continent à la date du x . . . où se déroulèrent, selon toutes conjectures, ces déplorables événements. C'est donc qu'on a tout simplement enveloppé de silence cette campagne historique pour des raisons dont je n'arrive pas à percer le mystère. (DO 129)

In order to recount an event shrouded in silence, the narrator is forced to rely on what she terms secondary sources; "telles l'archéologie, la numismatique, l'héraldique, l'épigraphie et la sigillographie" (DO 129) as well as her own creative talents. So even the narrator is a part of the tradition of storytelling which is such an integral part of the Acadian culture.

Although the stories that the narrators tell are written, and not declaimed before an audience like those of Jérôme or Bélonie, the narrator nonetheless follows some of the same conventions that these storytellers do, giving Maillet's novels a decidedly oral aspect. Like Jérôme, Maillet's narrators often start out by addressing the audience, and leading them, "petit à petit" into the story. Occasionally anticipating the disbelief of their readers, they reassure them that the stories they tell

are true. And during the course of their narrative, they allow for interruptions by other auditors to whom they pass the narrative, and even by the readers, for whom the narrator voices anticipated objections (and subsequently responds). These techniques give Maillet's novels an open, dialogic aspect, in keeping with the Acadian storytelling tradition.

In each instance the narrator is, in fact, the last storyteller, and an important link between the oral and written traditions. As the last person to give the stories *voice*, (as opposed to written *form*), the narrator in Maillet's novels is the ultimate storyteller, and the voice speaking most directly to the reader. Though the author's hand is giving form to the story, it is the narrator's voice that the reader "hears."[57] As the last "voice," or the last storyteller, the narrator figure is an important link in the Acadian oral tradition. Maillet maintains that "le conte appartient à une tradition," and this is no different for the stories her narrators tell. Though they may take different forms and approaches, the narrators of Maillet's novels share a function: passing on the stories of old, "de sur l'empremier," entertaining the reader and passing on the traditions and stories of Acadia.

Maillet's works reflect a variety of narrative voices or styles. In some of her novels—such as *Pointe-aux-Coques*, and *l'Oursiade*—the stories are told by one narrator, who is also a character. In others, the stories are presented by narrators who do not themselves take part in the action. (*Don l'Orignal*, *Emmanuel à Joseph à Dâvit*) and in still others, there are both narrators who are characters (like Jérôme and Bélonie) and narrators who are not characters, but who frame the stories of others. There is, usually, however, one narrator who provides a unifying voice to these novels--at the same time both a base story/voice to which

the others can add and build from, and a voice that ties together the multiplicity of narrative voices which constitute Maillet's novels; these in turn represent the multiplicity of voices and the diversity in the Acadian experience.

Several of Maillet's novels represent the voice, or consciousness, of only one individual Acadian. *Pointe-aux-Coques*, one of the few instances of first-person narration in Maillet's work, is the story of a young woman who returns to Acadia to discover for herself the land and traditions her father chose to leave.[58] The story that she tells represents a personal journey[59] and search for meaning. The storyteller narrates her own story. *On a mangé la dune* and *l'Oursiade* are also told only from the perspective of the main character--Radi and Titoume, respectively. But these stories are told in the third person, so despite the stories being told from their perspective, the reader is distanced somewhat from the hero. In fact, the narrators of *Pointe-aux-Coques*, *On a mangé la dune*, *l'Oursiade*, and *Emmanuel à Jospeh à Dâvit* are progressively more distanced from the reader. *On a mangé la dune* is told from Radi's perspective, but in the third person, by someone who has privileged access to her thoughts and feelings but who does not formally identify herself with Radi. The story of *l'Oursiade* is told by a omniscient narrator who only at the end claims the identity of the young protagonist, Titoume[60]. And the story of *Emmanuel à Jospeh à Dâvit* is told by one narrator, not a character, who remains outside the story inasmuch as he is not an actant therein, but who is nevertheless culturally connected to the events. Though the narrators of *Pointe-aux-Coques* and *l'Oursiade* do not clearly situate themselves in the Acadian oral tradition, as some of

Maillet's other narrators do, they nonetheless represent a fundamental aspect of that oral tradition, which is the telling of one's own story.

In other novels such as *Mariaagélas, Le Huitième jour*, and *Don l'Orignal*, the narrator, like that of *l'Oursiade*, carefully blends the stories of others into her own, so that it seems almost as if there were only one narrative voice, when in reality the stories come from other sources as well as the narrator. In these novels we find what Marjorie Fitzpatrick terms a "secondary narrator" (Search 7), which Maillet will use in several other novels. In *Mariaagélas, Le Huitième jour*, and *Don l'Orignal*, however, the presence of the secondary narrator is barely discernible. As Fitzpatrick notes, "the character that fills that role in *Mariaagélas*--Soldat Bidoche's elderly fortuneteller mother--is so unobtrusive and appears so infrequently that we often forget her existence" (Search 7). The narrator of *Mariaagélas* gives way to the stories of Sarah Bidoche so subtly that they almost become one. The same is true of the novels *Le Huitième jour* and *Don l'Orignal*, the narrators of these works subtly cede their place to that of a secondary narrator from whom the story originates. In *Le Huitième jour*, this shift is marked by subtle, unobtrusive statements at the very end of the prologue and at the very beginning of the epilogue: "'Are you coming in or aren't you?' croaks a flayed voice that reminds me of that of an old servant of ours, whose stories always began with the words: *Once upon a time...*" (HJ 6) and "*...and so our two heroes lived with their mother and father ever after, and had many children.* The old servant's dry voice fell silent" (HJ 272). This last line is the only indication that the story does not originate with the narrator. Through the secondary narrator--the old servant--the narrator of *le Huitième Jour* is able not only to pass along a story of the type that

informed her childhood but also to call attention to the importance and power of storytelling to create new worlds. The narrator, in the prologue and epilogue, can stand back and comment on the story of the secondary narrator, the old servant.

One last example of such mediated narration appears in *Don l'Orignal*. Although only one person seemingly narrates the story, we discover in the end that the narrator has received the story from other sources, her cousin and her cousin's ancestor. In these works, it would seem that the narrator has so completely absorbed the stories she has heard that they in fact become her own. Like Jérôme (or even Bélonie) these narrators are passing on stories which they have not invented, but which thanks to the oral tradition nonetheless belong to them. The narrator is part of Acadian oral tradition; as part of this tradition, the stories of the past *are* her stories. She is part of a whole, a continuum, a community and a tradition that consists of the past, present and future. The narrator of *Cent ans dans les bois* discovers that she was there, "sur l'empremier" long before she was born: "c'est ainsi qu'avant l'âge de raison, j'avais vu déjà, par les racines, l'histoire qu'un jour je vous raconterais" (CA 10). She was there in her ancestors, her "grand-grand-mère." And just as the stories of Titoume's mother, father, or the people who raised him are part of Titoume himself, the stories that constitute the narrator's culture are an integral part of her as well. That is an essential feature of the oral tradition--and over the years it has given the Acadians their own legacy.

Multiple levels of narration

A further development of this technique of "secondary narrators" appears in the novels *Les Cordes-de-Bois*, *Pélagie-la-Charrette*, and *Cent ans dans les bois*. In these novels, there are several narrators or levels of narration, and many voices each tell their own stories, while the "narrator" frames and orchestrates the stories, giving them cohesion. Marjorie Fitzpatrick finds this to be Maillet's best narrative technique "for satisfying the two narrative needs concurrently: she appears as a first-person narrator, but the story is recounted to her in the voices of two secondary narrators who are more closely tied than she to the times, the events, and above all to the people of the novel" (Search 6). Thus the "story" in these novels comes to the reader in the same way that it is passed down through the oral tradition: told by those who were closest to it, though narrated by someone who is closer to the listener. "Acadia thus speaks to us at a variety of levels at once" (Search 6).

One novel in which it is clear that Acadia is speaking at more than one level is *Cent ans dans les bois*. Although there is a primary narrator, the story is often told in the words of Jérôme, the travelling storyteller of the novel. Nowhere is this more evident than at the end of the novel when the narrator "allows" Jérôme to recount the convention in his own words:

> personne encore n'avait donné la parole à Jérôme-le-Menteux. Pourtant lui seul, de tous ces conteurs, rapporteurs et chroniqueurs, fut témoin, de ses yeux vu, de la convention de Memramcook telle qu'aperçue par les gens du Fond-de-la-Baie. Jérôme vous dirait . . . (CA 337)

The narrator cedes her place to an eyewitness, allowing him to "speak" directly to the reader. Jérôme's perspective brings the reader closer to the events recounted and helps readers to understand the personal, not just the historical aspect of the first Acadian national convention.

> Ainsi, le récit non seulement emprunte-t-il souvent la forme de conte, mais il se réclame de lui sur le plan génétique. . . En donnant la parole à Jérôme-le-Menteux, la narratrice confronte deux versions de l'histoire acadienne, celle du conteur populaire qui renouvelle et réinvente sans cesse son récit, le seul aussi à avoir été témoin oculaire des événements, et la version, figée par l'écriture, que présentent "les historiens..." (CA 86-7)

The narrator tries to present as complete a perspective as possible, using both the testimony of an eyewitness, and including actual fragments of speeches from the convention, as well as linguistic and cultural explanations. In this way, the narrator offers the reader an inside view of Acadia seen "par les racines" (CA 10). She tells a story which "les plus savants des historiens n'ont jamais vue que d'en haut" (CA 10), but she tells it from below, where all the action happens. The reader is thus privileged to hear the story from the epicenter, and not from far away.

The narrator of *Les Cordes-de-Bois* is also aided by witnesses to the action described--Pierre à Tom and Ozite. The narrator does not hide the fact that she gets her story from different sources, often having to search for her information, and occasionally choose between two sources of information. "La suite me fut rapportée à la fois par la forge, Pierre à Tom, et exceptionnellement par la conteuse Ozite qui daignait s'arracher à ses souvenirs centenaires pour descendre cette fois jusqu'aux années 30" (CdB 130). Ozite's and Pierre à Tom's stories are related directly to

the narrator (who turns narration over to them, thus giving the story directly to the reader). The narrator here is presenting the stories of figures who have become legendary thanks to the oral tradition. Once again the narrator is channeling other Acadian voices; gathering stories, or pieces of stories to pull together and present to the reader. Ozite and Pierre à Tom each present the narrator with one perspective that the narrator then forges into a cohesive story. The two witness/storytellers do not interact, however, as do the various narrators of *Pélagie-la-Charrette,* the narrator is the sole arbiter of the stories.

In *Pélagie-la-Charrette*, however, there are several levels of storytellers involved, which more clearly shows the functioning of the oral tradition over generations. Bélonie is the main storyteller in the novel, but the main narrator gets her story from her cousin Louis à Bélonie who in turn has received it from his father:

> l'Histoire continue . . . Elle continue encore dans la bouche de mon cousin Louis à Bélonie, qui la tient de son père Bélonie à Louis, qui la tenait de son grand-père Bélonie--contemporain et adversaire de la Gribouille--qui l'avait reçue de père en fils de ce propre Bélonie, fils de Thadée, fils de Bélonie premier qui, en 1770, fêtait ses nonante ans, assis au fond de la charrette même de Pélagie, première du nom. (PLC 12)

The story has become a legacy, passed from one generation to another. The version presented to the reader is, in fact, the product of three generations, and three sets of narrators, Bélonie, the original storyteller, his descendent Bélonie, and the modern narrator. As Eloise Brière points out, these three versions are woven together as the various narrator-storytellers interact.

> Les trois versions de l'histoire de la charrette--1780, 1880, 1979--ne sont ni consécutives ni chronologiques, mais plutôt tissées dans une tapisserie; elles s'interrompent mutuellement lorsqu'elles passent au point central de la narration qui est le "je" de l'écrivaine/narratrice de 1979. (Brière 105)

The stories of Bélonie-le-Vieux are interrupted by the commentaries and glosses of la Gribouille and Bélonie, whose stories are again glossed by the cousin of the narrator. Each set of "narrators" offers his or her own interpretation of events. And yet the events of the novel give the impression of being narrated by the characters involved: "on a toujours l'impression d'entendre le fait comme par la bouche de ce personnage, qui semble nous le dire lui-même" (LeBlanc, *Maillet* 60). Though there are in fact several levels of narrators passing on the stories of Pélagie and Bélonie, the stories themselves shine through all their interpretations and glosses. Maillet's narrative technique allows the reader to experience the stories as part of the oral tradition, coming from not one omniscient narrator, but from various eyewitnesses, and passing through other levels of storytellers. In *Pélagie-la-Charrette* it becomes clear how the oral tradition functions as a conduit for the stories that bind the Acadians together as a community.

The use of such secondary narrators brings the story more directly to the reader and allows the primary narrator to search for the "whole" story, not just one perspective. As she does her "research," she assembles the stories of more than one "conteur," often going from relatives, to the forge, to the old fortuneteller. Though the narrator allows others to tell their stories, she does retain control over these stories, editing them together into a coherent totality. And as Marjorie

Fitzpatrick points out, the narrator can also assume another role when secondary narrators are present, that of the questioning reader. "she acts as our surrogate, asking leading questions, challenging inconsistencies, and setting the secondary narrators off on their chains of reminiscence" (*Search* 6). The primary narrator, then, does what the reader cannot, delve into the matter, seeking the best possible representation of the story. She also frequently supplies background information that a non-Acadian reader might not possess. The primary narrator orchestrates the many voices of the Acadian past, providing the reader not only with the stories of Acadian culture but also with some understanding of the workings of the Acadian oral tradition so essential to this cultural identity.

Even though the storytellers and narrators in Maillet's novels often turn their stories over to others, they still maintain some control over the narratives. Each storyteller, and ultimately the narrator frames the story for the listeners. Thus the narrator provides a unifying voic; at the same time both a base that the others can add to and build from, and a force that integrates the multiplicity of narrative voices in the novel. The presence of multiple storytellers accentuates the difficulty in identifying a uniform narrative voice. While traditionally the narrator has an authoritative voice, here that authority is shared with other storytellers. The narrator gathers the stories of old and passes them on to the reader, much as the traditional storytellers passed their stories on to their listeners. In so doing, the narrator sacrifices a certain amount of ostensible control, dividing the narrative authority among the storytellers.

However, as this multiplicity of storytelling voices shows, total control on part of the narrator is a misrepresentation, as the reader can

ultimately read, not read, interpret, misinterpret, even burn the text. In her own thesis *Rableais et les tradition populaires en Acadie*, Maillet notes how the storyteller can allow for this: "Le conteur. . . laisse toute grande ouverte la porte du conte pour que d'autres, un jour dans l'avenir, y mettent aussi leur nez. Et ainsi se continuera la tradititon..." (184). The stories are meant to be interactive. An essential aspect of the oral tradition is that it is a living tradition. It is not merely history, but rather a cultural exchange from one generation to another. Each generation has the opportunity to "stick their noses into" the stories of others, interpreting them, commenting on them, and thus making them their own as well. And Maillet's novels, as part of this oral tradition, have not only incorporated the interventions of different generations of storytellers, they also leave the door open for the reader to intervene, by asking questions, doubting, or deciding for himself which version he believes. Her narrators always leave room for interpretation.

In fact, just as the storytelling in her novels is meant to be an interaction between storytellers and listeners, so, too, are her novels an opportunity for interaction between reader and narrator and author. Maillet has stated that:

> Le public est un complice dont mes personnages ne peuvent se passer. C'est à lui qu'ils s'addressent, qu'ils se confient, qu'ils prennent à témoin de leurs réflexions, de leurs agissements, de leurs souffrances et de leurs joies. (Lamarche 30)

The public--Maillet's readers--are necessary accessories to her characters' testimonies. Jonathan Culler, in his book *Framing the Sign*, has maintained that "the fiction of a reader is absolutely central to the reading of fiction"[61] (204). This claim could be made for storytelling as

well, because the practice of storytelling depends on the existence of an audience. Often the "fiction of a reader" is posited by the author or narrator alone. But Maillet has created characters who are also aware of the existence of an audience. The Acadians in Maillet's novels seek witnesses to their life, their sufferings, their stories, their traditions, their culture. The reader functions as such a witness, privy to the thoughts and actions of the characters.

However, as Phyllis Wrenn points out, storytellers like Jérôme and Bélonie have a different audience than do narrators: "Le *conteux* dessert un public informé et engagé, sa performance l'emporte donc souvent sur la narration et la transmission cohérente de l'information. Le narrateur dessert, par contre, un public extérieur (nous, le lecteur non-initié)" (8). The narrator, unlike the traditional storyteller, is not speaking to an audience who knows and feels connected to the stories she tells. There is, therefore, a greater burden on both the narrator and the reader. The narrator must provide more information to the reader, "initiating" him into the ways of the culture she presents. And the reader must necessarily take a more active role in coming to understand the stories related. It is for this reason that Maillet posits dialogue or interaction between the reader and narrator/story. It is through the questions and the other openings in her text that the reader can actively participate, as would the audience of a *conteux*.

When Maillet maintains that "Acadia exists because of its storytellers" (Smith 262-3), it becomes clear that one important aspect of both the oral tradition and Maillet's novels is cultural survival. Through the oral tradition, through storytellers like Bélonie, Jérôme and the others the Acadians maintained a sense of cultural identity long after

Acadia ceased to exist geographically. And Maillet's works perpetuate this oral tradition. "Au coeur de la préoccupation centrale de Maillet est l'oralité, dans la mesure où l'oralité reflète la nature et l'identité de la culture acadienne" (Wrenn 8). Orality and the oral tradition are a decided focus of Maillet's works because she feels that orality is integral to Acadian culture. If there is a rapport between the oral tradition and cultural survival, then there must be a link between cultural survival and the stories told by Maillet's narrators. The narrator must not only pass on the stories, but ensure that the reader understands the role of the oral tradition: "la voix narrative que nous entendons tout au long du récit, l'interrompt afin de résumer, d'appuyer sur un point, de s'assurer que le lecteur a bien saisi le rapport entre la tradition orale et la survie culturelle" (Brière 105). The modern narrator of Maillet's novels intervenes to assure the comprehension of the reader. The reader must understand not only that the Acadians survived as a people and a culture, but also how they survived, through their oral tradition. And Maillet's novels are the modern vestiges of that oral tradition

These stories, this oral tradition which has kept the Acadians connected to their past, in fact creates a forum for a dialogue between past, present and even future. For storytellers of all generations seem to share some of Bélonie's ability to conquer time--they tell stories, and attribute meanings and feelings, to characters/people as if they had been there themselves. Perhaps it is the stories themselves that confer this transcendent power. After all, these stories have surmounted the boundaries of time. The stories Bélonie tells, like that of Tit-Jean Quatorze or the Dame Géante de la nuit, were told by his ancestors since before they came to Acadia. "Il n'avait rien perdu de son vieux fonds

gaulois, le Bélonie, sorti de Jacques, sorti d'Antoine, sorti de Paris au temps des chansons et contes drôlatiques" (PLC 83). The Acadian stories are built on a rich tradition, which is not limited to one time or place.

Maillet's stories combine the rich history and the fascinating legends of the past with modern considerations, and an eye to the future. Her stories, like those of the storytellers of old, create new worlds, worlds that transcend the boundaries of reality. As the narrator of *Cant ans dans les bois* says,

> J'ai compris très tôt que les menteux seuls gardaient au fond de leur besace assez de paroles entières ou fractionnées pour reconstituer le vitrail où se vire le monde. A la condition de le regarder à la lumière du levant. Heureusement pour mon pays qui se réveille à l'est. (CA 14)

It is the storytellers who have the vision and the words to create a new Acadia. And for Maillet, Acadia is a story: "We are a story, almost a legend. . . sometimes and epic...partly a comedy, but never a farce, no never...we have been a little bit of a tragedy but we never took things so tragically" (Maillet, From Oral to Written Literature). The storytellers of Acadia have kept, and will continue to keep the Acadian story alive.

Chapter 4

FROM ORAL TO WRITTEN LITERATURE

Ecrire, c'est une certaine façon de vouloir la liberté.
Jean-Paul Sartre

For many generations, it was the storytellers who kept Acadia alive. But as Acadia moves into the modern world, as their small communities dwindle in number and their way of life changes, the storytellers give way to writers, who have adapted to this new age, and to the new societal demands made by it. These writers have the same mission as the storytellers of old: to reflect and transmit the stories of Acadian culture. The concept of a collective Acadian culture, as Henry-Dominique Paratte points out, would hardly be possible if it were not for the storytellers: "dans la constitution d'une identité collective, l'expression artistique--création ou interprétation--occupe indiscutablement une place importante" (300).

Writing, it turns out, will prove just as important as the oral tradition in the shaping of Acadian culture. The writers portrayed in Maillet's novels represent more than simply a new generation of storytellers; their experiences reflect the new challenges and dangers of modern times, as well as the high price of freedom or of social recognition. With their words, Acadian rebels like Jeanne de Valois and Radegonde will try to change their worlds, and they will make history by

writing about themselves. The first generation of Acadian writers--like Maillet herself[62]--will combine the oral and written traditions.

Because of their geographical isolation and their lack of schooling, the Acadians remained an oral people for centuries. In *Cent ans dans les bois*, which takes place at the end of the nineteenth century, the oral tradition and the written word first come into conflict. Jérôme-le-Menteux, the professional storyteller in this novel feels threatened by Renaud, the "Français de France" who not only knows how to read and write, he teaches others to do so as well. Jérôme is perhaps the first of the Acadians to understand the change that Renaud brings with him, and he is not comfortable with it. After all, Jérôme's life and profession revolve around the oral tradition, so he naturally feels threatened by the advent of writing. There is, between Jérôme and Renaud, a certain competition for respect and authority. When Jérôme brings news of the Acadian convention, Renaud tries to enlighten the villagers about what will really happen, but Jérôme insists on his own version of the story, calling the convention a "frolique" and insisting on the lighter aspect of the gathering. Denis Bourque points out that "la dichotomie intrinsèque entre discours populaire et discours consacré est soulignée par le fait que [Jérôme], en annonçant au pays ce rassemblement, refuse obstinément de lui reconnaître un caractère officiel" (92). Jérôme, who represents the popular or oral discourse, sees things differently from Renaud, who can read and write, and who thus represents official or formal discourse. Jérôme also feels somewhat displaced by the honor and attention given to Renaud, who is not even Acadian:

> Jérôme s'arrache les cheveux. Pas assez qu'on le déshérite de son trésor, qu'on lui rafle sa plus belle légende, qu'on sabote son

> honneur de premier conteur et chroniqueur du pays, mais on s'attaque à sa transmission orale à coups de liasses d'écritures. (CA 303)

Jérôme is concerned about the preservation of his way of life, an oral culture.

For his part, Renaud is fascinated by the oral people he has found on the coasts, and is trying to observe and record his findings, which is his way of preserving the culture that he sees. He discovers quickly that, "ce n'est pas la mémoire qui manque au pays des côtes" (CA 221), but he can find no written record of the songs, stories, grammar, or facial expressions of the Acadians whom he finds so fascinating. The Acadians, however, are not comfortable with his attentions. They find themselves self-conscious and tongue-tied when he starts to write down their expressions, and analyze their grammar:

> les gens du pays, qui en avaient plein la goule de la syntaxe, prirent peur devant la dissection de leur propre pensée et se bouclèrent les lèvres. Ils s'étaient très bien fait comprendre durant trois siècles, sans se soucier de l'accord des participes. Mais tout à coup chacun sentit sa langue coller à son palais. (CA 299)

Renaud tries to explain that "il n'avait d'autre but que la sauvegarde du français ancien, cette merveilleuse langue conservée au chaud sur leurs côtes durant leur long isolement" (CA 299) but Jérôme merely laughs at him. And when he tries to draw Jérôme's face to record his expressions, Jérôme becomes angry: "Renaud changea de crayon et esquissa sur son papier les multiples expressions qui couraient sur la figure du Menteux qui, à son insu, fournissait au Français les plus éloquents échantillons d'indignation acadienne" (CA 300). Renaud may feel he is honoring the

Acadians, their language and culture, but they understand little and distrust his motives.

The Acadians of Jérôme and Pélagie la Gribouille's generation must endure many growing pains, including the introduction of literacy into their culture. Though Renaud teaches them to read and write, when they have a chance to communicate with their neighbors on "l'île Saint-Jean," (Prince Edward Island), they find themselves at a loss.

> Les Acadiens qui avaient trois siècles de mémoire collective, en 1880, n'auraient pas su, même en apprenant à lire, écrire en colère, écrire souriant, écrire surpris, écrire fort, écrire hébété, écrire moqueur, écrire tendre, écrire tout bas. Ils ne savaient point faire passer leur génie de la gorge aux doigts. (CA 234)

The people of *Cent ans dans les bois* are not quite ready to pass from an oral to a written culture. In the end, Jérôme leaves for more northern territories, Madawaska, "un terrain vierge pour un colporteur d'histoires et de menteries. Et là, au moins, le Renaud ne le précéderait pas" (CA 353). But the Acadians of Fond-de-la-Baie and other villages will remain an essentially oral people for generations to come.

It was not, in fact, until the latter half of the twentieth century (a century after the action of *Cent ans dans les bois*) that Acadia moves into the realm of written literature. And even then, the transition was not an easy one. As Hans Runte points out: "against formidable odds, great strides have been made on the road to Acadian literary identification. Materially, Acadian writing had to be created *ex nihilo*" (*Literary Topos* 28). Maillet's first writer character, the Acadian nun Mère Jeanne de Valois, travels this road when she writes about herself and the century in which she has lived in *Les Confessions de Jeanne de Valois*.[63] In writing

her story, Mère Jeanne is not only writing herself, she is also writing Acadia. As Runte maintains: "il fut un temps où la littérature créait l'Acadie et l'Acadie était sa littérature, où écrire équivalait à écrire l'Acadie, et où l'indéfinissable Acadie se concrétisait enfin, et peut-être pour la première fois, dans la littéréalité de ses textes" (*l'Ultime Déportation* 109). Like the many Acadian authors whose work helped to give solid shape to Acadian culture, Mère Jeanne's *Confessions* manifest the realities of Acadian life. She, like Radegonde in *Le Chemin Saint-Jacques*, represents the new generation of Acadian storytellers--writers, who have adapted to a new age, and to new societal demands made by it. These writers have the same mission as the storytellers of old, to reflect and transmit the stories of Acadian culture (as well as to entertain). The fact that they are writing is both a reflection of and a product of a changing Acadian society.

Mère Jeanne de Valois, the protagonist writing her own story[64] in *Les Confessions de Jeanne de Valois*, is part of this new generation of Acadian writers. Born in 1899, Mère Jeanne sets out to tell the story of the century in which she has lived.

> Je n'ai pas l'intention avec mes gribouillages de rédiger un traité de morale ou de philosophie. Même pas de raconter l'histoire d'une vie. Non. Tout juste de confiner sur mes larges feuilles détachées la mémoire, telle que je la porte, d'événements qui émergent de mon siècle comme des îlots ou des basses en bordure d'océan. (CJV 9)

Like Jérôme and Bélonie, she is testifying to the events she has witnessed during her lifetime, events that have dramatically shaped Acadian society. Mère Jeanne writes, tells her story, because she feels

that she is the only one who could tell it: "une vie, ça colle tellement à l'âme que pour la connaître à l'envers comme à l'endroit, il faut avoir habité cette âme-là" (CJV 11). She is the only one who can tell her story, which coincides so well with that of her century, because she has lived it. Her story, her life, and the transformations she goes through are representative of Acadian society as a whole. As a child, she points out, she was lucky to be from a good family, "ce qui dans l'Acadie au début du siècle se résumait à une saine alimentation, des vêtements chauds en hiver, l'école à six ans, une vie familiale sans scandales et sans heurts" (CJV 11). This helped her survive the many childhood diseases prevalent at the time, a time in which one child out of two or three never reached the age of five (CJV 11). Yet as long as she can remember, Mère Jeanne felt that she, like Acadia herself, was driven by a "détermination de vivre" (1CJV 2).

Moreover, Mère Jeanne feels that her life reflects not only the difficulties of her people, but also the history of the Catholic Church in Acadia[65]. For example, when she decides to become a nun, she does not have the option of joining an Acadian community, as they did not exist at the time. She must choose between two congregations, an Irish one, in which she would forsake her native language, or an order from Québec which, though French-speaking, would most likely require her to leave Acadia. She chooses the Irish congregation, because she cannot ignore the call of her country: "j'avais entendu l'appel du pays avant celui de Dieu" (CJV 46). For Mère Jeanne, becoming a nun means more than devoting her life to God, it means devoting her life to the betterment of her people through teaching and nursing. Later, she leaves with a group of Acadian nuns to found the first Acadian francophone convent of her

order. As she helps to found this convent, and the first francophone Acadian school for girls, and as she negotiates the changes brought by the second Vatican council, Mère Jeanne's story parallels that of the Catholic Church in Acadia. As she writes, she wonders how she can separate the two:

> par quel biais aborder cette page de ma vie qui se confond à ce point à l'histoire de l'Eglise acadienne, j'ose dire de l'Acadie tout entière, qu'en l'écrivant, j'ai le sentiment d'apercevoir ma propre figure dans le coin d'une verrière représentant l'épopée d'un peuple? (CJV 64)

She realizes that her life is so entwined with the life of the Church and of Acadia, that they can't be separated.

Mère Jeanne, in fact, sees herself as part of an epic, the epic of her people. She has lived through an extraordinary time in Acadia, and she realizes that in telling her story, she is telling the story of her people. Further, as she points out to another nun, "nous avons construit jour après jour notre propre épopée, cette page de vie qui décide ou non de la naissance et de la survie d'un peuple" (CJV 321). In her view, an epic is something active, and the epic of her people is one that they have created for themselves. She even sees her *Confessions* as turning toward the epic: "peut-être me faudra-t-il prendre quelques jours de réflexion et de consultation avant de poursuivre des *Confessions* qui ont l'air de vouloir tourner au récit épique" (CJV 203). The story she tells, then, is not insignificant. She may have started out simply recounting the events of her century, but she soon realizes how important these events have been in the shaping of Acadian society and culture.

Despite their epic tendencies, Mère Jeanne's mémoires, or "Confessions," more closely resemble diary, or even epistolary fiction. Like a diary, the *Confessions* are a first-person narration of her experience of the twentieth century and include many of her own thoughts, reflections and feelings. Unlike a diary, however, she posits readers other than herself, fully intending her confessions to speak to a public audience. In this respect, the *Confessions* resemble epistolary fiction; they posit a reader and acknowledge the absence of this addressee but try nonetheless to overcome it. Mère Jeanne's acknowledgement of a reader and the dialogue she creates with that reader contaminates the one-sided aspect of a "memoir," while keeping intact the idea of a confessor, someone to receive the confessions. Mère Jeanne often refers to her writings as memoirs; she seems to make little distinction between memoirs and confessions. She nonetheless calls them her "Confessions." She may not reveal anything terribly sinful or shocking, but she is revealing herself, her soul, which is the very essence of a confession. And since the transformations she goes through are representative of Acadian society, she is also, it could be argued, discovering the soul of Acadia.

Like many diary/journal writers, Mère Jeanne is committed both to being frank, and to telling the complete story, as best she can: "j'ai juré de tout vous dire" (CJV 318). And she maintains not only that she wants to tell all, but also that she plans to remain objective. Moreover, she decides to limit her reflections to those events which have directly touched her: "je veux demeurer à l'intérieur du cadre de mes confesssions personnelles, de mes souvenirs directs, je ne dois pas sortir de mon siècle" (CJV 51). In limiting herself to personal confessions and

direct memories, she reinforces her privileged position as an eyewitness testifying to the events that have shaped her generation; she legitimizes her authority. Moreover, Mère Jeanne feels that it is important for someone who actually remembers these "grands événements" (CJV 22) to testify, "pour ne pas les laisser sombrer dans l'oubli, et, par le fait même, les réduire au rang des vétilles et futilités de l'histoire (CJV 22). By telling her story, the story of Acadia, she is keeping it from being forgotten.

For whom is her testimony meant? As her memoirs progress, it becomes clear that her concept of the project is evolving as well. Toward the beginning of her project, she finds herself wondering exactly whom she is addressing, concluding that it must be herself, or God:

> Je m'adresse à qui qu juste? A qui est-ce que je parle? Il faudrait le préciser une fois pour ... puisque je m'éloigne sciemment de mes contemporains en reculant délibérément la date d'échéance de la parution de mes *Confessions*: je dois conclure que je ne parle plus qu'à moi-même... ou à Dieu. (CJV 16)

Here she is attempting to define her project, a struggle that is evident throughout the *Confessions*. She begins by simply writing down her memories of the century in which she has lived, which she originally sees as a rather private act, like keeping a diary, or praying.

As her work progresses, however, Mère Jeanne's project seems to evolve in a different direction, as she begins to direct her memoirs to an outside audience, positing readers from the year 2000, engaging them in her ideas on life and society, and anticipating their reactions to her writing. And though it becomes clear that she writes for outside readers, she maintains that she has no literary aspirations:

> De toute manière, je répète depuis le début que mes *Confessions* n'ont aucune prétention littéraire, même pas de but précis, sauf de permettre à celle qui aspire à planter son nez dans trois siècles de dévoiler aux plus curieux d'entre vous l'odeur particulière d'un temps qu'ils n'ont pas connu. (CJV 306)

Again, she insists that she is witnessing only one particular moment in time. She nonetheless fully realizes that her work will be read by her fellow nuns after she is dead, or after she has published it--two events which might coincide--and she also posits an outside audience, outside her convent, and perhaps even outside Acadia. She is careful to explain things that an outside reader would not understand, and she does not censor her reflections to suit the tastes or inhibitions of her fellow nuns.

> Tant pis pour les prunelles indiscrètes qui plongeront dans mes écrits sans y être invitées. Ce n'est pas à ces oies-là que je m'adresse. Mais aux autres qui viendront après, les curieux de la petite histoire d'une époque qui pourrait se révéler plus capitale que l'on pense. (CJV 13)[66]

During mère Jeanne's lifetime, Acadian society emerged from its isolation, offering educational and economic opportunities heretofore unknown. As a child, Mère Jeanne felt that she, and Acadia were "menacée de disparition" (CJV 39). Yet in her lifetime, "Acadia" has come to be recognized as a legitimate space, facing new dangers, perhaps, but no longer in danger of disappearing. Like the storytellers who came before her, she is offering her testimony, the story of her life and her experiences. For those who are curious, and who wish to understand the history of a crucial time in Acadian history, as one person experienced it, Mère Jeanne offers her memories of her life and times.

This is very much in keeping with the Acadian oral tradition, even if Mère Jeanne is writing, and not telling her story. For the oral tradition offered generations of Acadians the personal accounts of those who experienced important, even epic, moments in Acadian history, as Mère Jeanne does in her *Confessions*. Choosing herself as a worthwhile subject represents a recognition of the value of the present-day struggles and a break with the traditional focus on the past. But Mère Jeanne does not completely break with the oral tradition; her story retains many traditional characteristics of folktale. Not only does she posit interaction with her audience, her work also becomes a dialogue between her "narrated" self and her "narrating" self (Genette 217). At first, she sees herself as both the child that she was, and the adult that she is: "Il m'arrive même...de me dédoubler au point d'engager un dialogue entre elle et moi, sans plus savoir qui des deux je suis" (CJV 22). She realizes, then, that there is another part of herself that is accessible only through her story. The Jeanne de Valois of the mémoires has become, in fact, her alter ego: "je me suis laisser apprivoiser par mon alter ego, cette Jeanne de Valois en encre et papier, qui me donne chaque matin la réplique et me montre mon propre visage sous un angle qu'aucun miroir, analyse ni introspection n'auraient pu révéler" (CJV 155). In writing her story, Mère Jeanne textualizes herself, and the end result is that she becomes two people, Jeanne de Valois, and the author of the *Confessions*. Since she acknowledges that she has now become two--Mère Jeanne and the author of the confessions--the act of reading, and even ripping, becomes a dialectic between these two selves, the narrated and the narrating. When the author of the Confessions forces Jeanne de Valois in a certain direction, she is, in a sense, trying to shape history, just as Jeanne de

Valois did during her lifetime. To create her own epic, she must use force.

As with the stories of the oral tradition, then, Mère Jeanne's story posits interaction with the audience. The stories that she narrates offer the reader the opportunity to penetrate the text, and enter into her world. She is not, however, presenting readers with the objective truth, but rather with a forced, self-censored picture. Like the storytellers of old, she has the power to choose what she presents and how she presents it. But unlike these storytellers, she does not have a knowledgeable, interactive audience[67]. And her story is not a product of the community, but of herself alone.

Moreover, unlike the stories told by Jérôme, Bélonie and the others, Jeanne de Valois' story (and any interaction with her readers) takes place in silence, lacking the immediacy of the oral story. Since it is silent, and she is originally unsure of her audience, Mère Jeanne thinks at first that her writing might function as a sort of prayer, a conversation between herself and God, she soon realizes this is not the case: "après huit mois d'exercice, je me figure encore qu'écrire est un acte laïque qui ne saurait au même titre que la prière ou la méditation rendre gloire à Dieu" (CJV 103). While both prayer and writing are generally silent activities, as Mère Jeanne comes to see, the two have very different ends. And though she has spent her life praying and meditiating, it is writing that she chooses as the method she will use to look at her life:

> mon projet de *Confessions* est tout récent, et ne précède que de quelques jours son exécution. Mais au début des années 1970, alors que je m'efforçais par tous les moyens de digérer une réalité

qui m'était restée au travers de la gorge, j'avais songé à exorciser mes peurs et mes doutes par l'écriture. (CJV 258)

Writing is something that Mère Jeanne will do alone, in silence. Unlike the storytelling of generations past, which was a communal activity, emphasizing belonging, Mère Jeanne's writing will separate, even alienate her from those around her at the same time as it links her to future readers.

If Mère Jeanne is alienated from her contemporaries, it is because in choosing to write/textualize herself, she sets herself off from others. Writing, after all, according to Derridian theory, is based on difference--the difference of black letters on a white page or the difference between letters, words, and blanks, for example. Through writing, Jeanne de Valois can assert her uniqueness. This might seem contrary to the religious life she has chosen, as religion places value on conformity. However, Mère Jeanne comes to see her writing as secular, separate from religion, a liberty she feels is possible due to the relaxing of rules brought on by the Second Vatican Council. "Je n'ai pas l'intention de soumettre ma prose à l'*imprimatur* ou à la censure. On ne demande plus à Rome la permission de raccourcir son jupon" (CJV 14). Mère Jeanne has liberated her text-self from religious conformity in order to assert herself, to bring out her story from the epic of her people. Her writing does, however, conform to the pulse of her religious life; like everything else she does, it is regulated by the bells that call her to prayer, meals, and the many other aspects of religious life. Though religion may determine the rhythm of her writing, it does not however restrain the content. In textualizing herself, mère Jeanne asserts her difference from herself and from others. The dialogue between herself as subject and herself as

narrator, as well as the dialogue between Jeanne de Valois and her reader(s) would not be possible without this difference.

The presence of dialogue, however, does not obviate the question of power in and over the text. Mère Jeanne has given herself authority over her text/creation and this brings with it a good deal of power. In fact, the author of the *Confessions* chooses to exercise both her creative and her editorial power over the text/her narrated self, sometimes without bothering with dialogue, as seen above when she rips out pages without re-reading them. She has not limited her role or authority, rather she has elevated herself to an extremely powerful position: "je vais donc m'efforcer dans les pages qui suivent de reconstituer les événements comme si je les vivais à mesure, comme si je les regardais d'en haut, d'en dessous, d'en dedans. Me donner en quelque sorte la position de Dieu le Père" (CJV 65). As Radi will do in *On a mangé la dune* and *Le Chemin Saint-Jacques*, mère Jeanne has chosen the role of creator. She is putting herself in the place of God, having control over the creation and shaping of her text. Just as Jeanne de Valois has created her own epic through her life's work educating Acadian women, the "author of the *Confessions*" is now creating her own epic, the *Confessions* themselves.

But her power over her text (and over herself as text) will last only as long as she continues to write. After her writing project is finished, after her death--both her physical death, and her death as subject--all that will be left is the text, which will then be subject to the interpretation of others. The text thus becomes an object of mediation, between writer and reader. It is a physical presence that evokes the absence of the storyteller. The written text of the *Confessions* is that part of Jeanne de Valois which the reader can access. It both allows her

readers to come in contact with her and at the same time keeps them from knowing her, as they can only know/access the image of her in the text. As Derrida points out, "we are dispossessed of the longed-for presence in the gesture of language by which we attempt to seize it" (Supplement 78). In "seizing" the text of the *Confessions*, we are attempting to create a presence, that of Jeanne de Valois, but the text perforce distances us from her, only serves to make us more aware of her absence. Mère Jeanne's text functions, here, much as would Derrida's "supplement." According to his theory, "the supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the *fullest measure* of presence. It cumulates and accumulates presence" (83). Likewise, the *Confessions* represent the presence of Jeanne de Valois. But they also represent her absence: "but the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills, it is as one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence" (83). Mère Jeanne's text is filling a void, it is making it possible for her to tell her story, and the story of the Acadians to many people, cutting across barriers of time and place. Mère Jeanne's work also cuts across barriers of time, as her story represents a new epic, one focused not on the distant past, but rather on the present and the future of Acadia.

It is not insignificant that Maillet's first "writer" character chooses to express herself through the means of "Confessions," a very personal medium. While Mère Jeanne's style retains some characteristics of the traditional oral style--the aspect of personal testimony, the insertion of stories, etc.--it also breaks with these traditions to provide the reader a much more profound, intimate look at the life of one individual. As she

states, she is not writing History, but her own "petite histoire." The difference between these is a question of distance; the "petite histoire" of Mère Jeanne is a much more intimate work. The diary or "Confessions" is an easy medium for such a personal narrative. Moreover, it is also the logical choice for a writer who has no definite plans for publication. The journal/memoir form is accessible even to non-professional writers. Mère Jeanne de Valois' transition into the world of writing is a subtle one that neither truly challenges her, nor breaks down the barriers between oral and written literature. But she is, nonetheless, the first of Maillet's characters to make the transition to written literature.

This is true for Radegonde, in *Le Chemin Saint-Jacques* as well. Through her writing, she saves the stories she has grown up with, and allows others--like Mimo--access to them. But for Acadians like Radegonde and Mère Jeanne, writing has yet another important function, as a mediator between the real and the ideal. "We view narration and narrativity as the instruments by which the conflicting claims of the imaginary and the real are mediated, arbitrated, or resolved in a discourse" (White 4). Radegonde and Jeanne de Valois are both witnessing and testifying to the stories and events which have shaped Acadia's collective consciousness and attempting to create a new world, (re)creating themselves, and those around them. It is through their narration that they bring together their dreams and their realities. Like the storytellers, Jérôme and Bélonie, and the rebels Crache à Pic, Mariaagélas and the Mercenaire women, Radegonde and Jeanne de Valois are using their words and their stories to rebel against the history that would have been forced on them by the Deportation and to create their own history, "their own epic" as Mère Jeanne says. This new

generation of Acadian storytellers is once again using their narrative talents to create alternate realities for themselves, fusing together real and ideal.

It is only in Maillet's most recent novel, *Le Chemin Saint-Jacques*, that the main character--a young girl named Radi--actually grows up to be a writer. *Le Chemin Saint-Jacques* takes up the story begun in *On a mangé la dune*, the story of Radi's childhood and her beginnings as a storyteller. *On a mangé la dune* is narrated in the third person from Radi's perspective, and the almost stream of conscious style allows the reader to slip easily from 'reality' to the world of Radi's imagination and back again. The Radi of *On a mangé la dune* is a nascent storyteller, who prefers the world of her own imagination: "elle rentre en elle pour y chercher de quoi jeter les fondements d'un univers nouveau" (115). The Radi of *Le Chemin Saint-Jacques*, also a storyteller, is more complex. The first half of *Le Chemin Saint-Jacques* is the story of Radi, told in the third person. The second half of the novel however, is narrated in the first person by Radegonde--Radi who has become an adult and a writer. The differences between the two novels reflect the transition of both Radi and Acadia from an oral culture to a written one, from the world of a child's imagination to the carefully narrated world of an adult consciousness.

The most significant difference between these two novels is the addition of the adult narrator Radegonde in *Le Chemin Saint-Jacques*. Most of Maillet's novels follow the same model of multiple storytellers and narrators that shows the interplay of stories over generations. *Le Chemin Saint-Jacques*, however, presents a slightly different narrative model--one that more closely resembles what Derrida calls an "internal polylogue" (Attridge 34)[68]. Unlike *Pélagie-la-Charrette* and other novels that have

been passed down from generation to generation, the story of Radi passes only through her adult consciousness before it is narrated or written. Although there are other storytellers in *Le Chemin Saint-Jacques*--Tilmon, Thadée, Zélica, & Évangéline--Radi and Radegonde are the only narrators through whom the stories are filtered. But each storyteller, like Bélonie, takes the stories as part of himself and makes them his own. Thus in telling the stories of the past they are in fact telling the story of themselves, just as the story of Radi is part of Radegonde and their stories cannot be separated. As she says, "au fond de moi restait enfoui ce personnage qui ne m'avait jamais quittée tout à fait et qui s'appelait Radi. Mon double, ma muse, mon guide intrépide" (CSJ 286). When Radi the storyteller becomes Radegonde the author, she, like Mère Jeanne, has effectively doubled herself. She has become the two heroes Genette speaks of, the one narrated and the other narrating (217). The "character" of Radi, and all her stories, become a part of the Radegonde, who can write these stories.

Like the accomplished storyteller Bélonie, Radi the apprentice storyteller is somewhat clairvoyant--she has the power to neutralize time. She predicts or rather *sees* two deaths before they happen, and knows that another person presumed dead has not in fact drowned. From her privileged position, Radi (like Bélonie) can make connections that others cannot. And, later, Radegonde will make the connections between Acadia and Normandy (CSJ 301). She travels to France and connects her family name to the name of three brothers who worked on the cathedral Notre Dame, "les descendants des trois frères chefs de la guilde des maçons qui en 1250 sculptaient la façade de Notre-Dame et qui ont reçu cette année-là le nom de leur outil, le maillet" (CSJ 266).

Radegonde makes the connection between the "Old World" (France) and the "New World" of Acadia, as well as the connection between the oral and written worlds. Radegonde also has the power to connect and narrate the events of Radi's (and her own) life together into a coherent whole. This is the same power that the narrators of *Pélagie-la-Charrette* and other novels have--the ability to see what happened in the past, to see the importance and the meaning of the stories around them.

It is not surprising to note, then, that the defining moments in Radi's (and Radegonde's) life all revolve around narration. In *On a mangé la dune*, the father's illness forces economic changes on the family, and they must let their servant Joséphine go. This is a calamity for the children, especially Radi, since Joséphine told the best stories, one even lasted a whole hour! After the departure of Joséphine, Radi is forced to invent her own stories. In *Le Chemin Saint-Jacques*, Radi is introduced to the power of stories at the young age of three when a neighbor tells her the story of the three bears and she discovers another world. Radi cannot get enough of these stories.[69] "Le plus grand jour de ses trois ans fut celui ou elle comprit qu'elle pouvait même se passer d'Alice, puisqu'elle avait trouvé la clef des combinaisons qui introduit Cendrillon chez le chat botté, le Chaperon rouge chez la Belle au bois dormant...." (CSJ 29). Radi can now create her own stories. She has found in <u>imagination</u> the key that will allow her to create, to entertain, to <u>narrate</u>.

Avidly seeking more and more stories, Radi ends up in the forge[70], listening to the old men spin their tales. And it is through the forge that she learns that she too has the power to narrate. Radi begins to tell a story she has heard at the forge to her family; it is an immediate success and Radi revels in the joy of narration. Unfortunately, her family is not

pleased with the story's less than proper ending, and they move to censure Radi.[71] "Elle perdait la forge, mais acquerait la conviction qu'elle serait un jour conteuse" (CSJ 11). This realization of the power of narration will shape Radi/Radegonde's life. And it is not insignificant that this transformation happens in a forge, for to forge is to form and fabricate, which is after all the epitome of poetic action.[72]

Having already learned the value of storytelling, Radi will learn another crucial lesson when her teacher reads the class Daudet's story "La Dernière Classe." As Radi enters the world of "le petit Franz," she enters also into the world of literature. "Elle avait reçu *La Dernière Classe* d'Alphonse Daudet comme la foudre, mais une foudre qui l'avait soûlée, non pas anéantie. Elle entrait en littérature comme à trois ans dans les contes, tête première" (CSJ 134). And as she listens to Franz's teacher announcing the end of classes in French, and watches her Acadian teacher crying the same tears as the old Alsatian, Radi discovers that stories and storytelling are inextricably linked with another integral part of identity: language. Radi sympathizes with Franz, who will be forced to speak a language not his own. A seed has been planted in Radi: "cette histoire-là lui avait révélé le plaisir de la chose écrite" (CSJ 134). Although Radi has grown up a francophone in an English-speaking world, her reaction to Daudet's story marks an important moment in her development--a dawning awareness of the crucial role language plays in identity.

As an adult, Radegonde will master the linguistic codes that gain her recognition as an accomplished author. But even as she is becoming an apprentice storyteller, young Radi learns a sort of code that permits her to see the world from a different angle. Her neighbor, la vieille

Lamant, midwife and mentor for Radi, teaches her how to "read between the lines". This is, perhaps, for Radi, the beginning of a critical relationship with language, a relation that Hélène Cixous maintains is necessary for a writer: "they must invent new beginnings, remove themselves from the fixed categories and identities they have inhabited, explore the 'third body': which is neither the inside nor the outside, but the space between" (Shiach 26). This is exactly what Radi wants to do: liberate herself from the categories fixed by family and society and have more choices. She starts doing this by reading between the lines, adopting a divergent point of view which becomes a sort of code between Radi and her young friends, a code that older people, like her sister Céline cannot understand. But as she grows older, what began as a game becomes the key to Radi's success. She will take a critical look at the world, and free herself from the limitations forced on her as a woman and as a francophone.

It is Radi's critical approach to the world, as well as her refusal to accept limitations that will inevitably spur her to announce to her teacher that she wants to be a writer, in French. This is a crucial moment in Radi's development as a writer. When Radi's composition class is asked to write the story of their own funeral, Radi is excited, already imagining the tragic scene. But when the teacher furnishes the title "*My Own Funeral,*" Radi chokes: "mourir en anglais? Soudain sa mort l'étouffe. Elle veut raconter ses funérailles dans ses mots, ses propres mots, les premiers à s'être logés sous son crâne" (CSJ 211). At the age of twelve, Radi is confronted with the reality of being a francophone in an anglophone world as the teacher denigrates the French language, saying it will only close the doors to success. Radi

cannot and will not accept that the language of her ancestors, of Charlemagne, of Joan of Arc, of Daudet could hold her back. Suddenly the importance of language becomes clear to Radi, and she realizes that to turn her back on her own language, as the teacher has done, would be to deny her very self:

> Car si elle épouse la langue des autres, elle risque de perdre la sienne. . . Elle peut renoncer à tout, elle sait maintenant qu'elle devra apprendre petit à petit à renoncer à presque tout, mais pas à ça. Les mots sont la matière même avec laquelle Radi s'est fabriqué une vie, une vie unique, non interchangeable. Elle n'a pas de vie de rechange et ne saurait donc renoncer à rien de ce qui la constitue essentiellement. (CSJ 212-13)

Radi now senses how critical her language is, to her identity and to her story. It is this newfound knowledge--and the feeling that if she doesn't take a stand for her language now she will be forever silenced--that forces Radi to stand up to her teacher and profess her intention to make a career for herself: "J'écrirai, en français" (CSJ 213). In rebelling against her teacher and against the obligatory use of English, Radi has found the first stirrings of an ambition to make a life for herself with her words. But not until she is an adult does she realize that she can be responsible for the written expression of the story/history of her people.

Writing is the destiny to which Radi is born, coming into the world at the moment when the church bells are chiming the Angelus[73]: "*Et Verbum caro factum est*, hurlait l'angélus. Le Verbe s'était fait chair. Le verbe, le sujet, le complément, toute la phrase. Car Radi n'allait pas en rester là. . . " (CSJ 14). Born at the moment when the 'Word became flesh,' Radi is, herself, the word made flesh--she will give a physical

existence to the words of her people when she writes. She not only becomes an author, she makes herself her own subject--she textualizes herself. Radi's stories, her text-self, take on a physical form when she writes; her words become flesh.

At the same time that Radi fulfills her destiny to be a writer, she also grows into her full name, Radegonde. Though, as a child, Radi was never comfortable with her name, as says: "Je n'ai pas non plus changé de nom, l'âge m'a tranquillement fait glisser dans mon prénom complet..." (CSJ 242). That she changes to her full name is important: as a child she was not comfortable with her full name, and settled for using only part of it. But just as she must grow into her destiny as a writer, she must also grow into her real name. Her childhood was her "anti-destin" (CSJ 242), in her adulthood, she becomes "Radegonde," and realizes destiny as a writer.

Between childhood and adulthood is a period of Radi's education that passes largely unnarrated. This period is nonetheless critical in the development of Radegonde the writer. At the end of the first part of the novel, devoted to Radi's childhood, Radi's mother dies. Standing at the gravesite, watching her mother's coffin being lowered into the ground, Radi feels adrift in the world. Then thanks to her timid oldest sister (a nun) and two other nuns, Radi is offered the education that she has always known was the key to freedom of choice. Radi leaves her childhood behind to accompany her sister Céline to the first Acadian school ("collège") for girls in Memramcook. Education offers Radi not only the opportunity to choose a career other than wife, nun, or old maid (CSJ 33), it offers her the opportunity to break free of the familial chains that would restrict her development as a writer.[74]

Having thus shed her chains, Radegonde is free to explore the world. Her education opens new doors, and she travels to Louisiana and to Europe, following the stories passed down to her through the Acadian oral tradition and through literature.[75] She visits France because literature has inspired in her a burning curiosity about the past. But when she is there, she also realizes that all the books she was reading were leading her away from her homeland.

> Les livres, tous les livres venaient d'ailleurs. Je n'imaginais même pas voir de mon vivant, imprimés sur du vrai papier dans de vrais volumes reliés, mes noms quotidiens et familiers. Mon village qui faisait la gloire de nos côtes, mes collines, mes forêts, mes ciels étoilés, mes gens pourtant aussi pittoresques et gueulards que tous les héros de Balzac ou de Zola, mes rites et saisons, mes travaux et mes jours, ma vie propre ne figurait dans aucun livre. L'école m'avait instruite à même la vie des autres. Je soupçonnais que si jamais je devais lire mes noms familiers, je devrais les écrire moi-même, d'où le cri spontané arraché à ma gorge de douze ans: "Je veux être écrivain, en français!" (276)

Radegonde the adult is just beginning to understand what she has been chosen to do. In studying the stories of others, she realizes that if she wants to see her own culture in literature, she will have to write the stories herself. Radi the storyteller has finally become Radegonde the author, she has finally actualized her spontaneously chosen career. It is Radegonde who, like Maillet herself, gives written voice to the stories so essential to both her personal identity and--if they can be separated--her identity as an Acadian.

Having become a successful author, and after having returned to her hometown because her sister is dying, Radegonde re-encounters Mimo, the anglophone idol of her youth. Mimo was popular, pretty, and commanded respect, and as a child, Radi admired her for these qualities. But as she grew older, she abandoned Mimo, who represented the English-speaking world Radi was forced to live in. Instead, Radi chose as her idol Jeanne d'Arc, the French warrior whose goal was to "bouter les Anglais dehors" (CSJ 75). Radi is inspired by this goal, and makes it her own. When she again meets Mimo, in the cemetery, she understands that she has realized her dreams. She has, by publishing successful novels in French, contributed to the re-establishment of a recognized francophone Acadian identity. Mimo was once the girl to whom everyone would listen when she talked, as Radi observes: "Quand elle est là, le monde fait cercle autour d'elle; quand elle parle, le monde se tait et l'écoute" (CSJ 62). And now Mimo has read Radegonde's books. The tables have been turned and it is Mimo's turn to be quiet and listen. Like Jeanne d'Arc, Radegonde has secured (or helped to secure) for her people the ability to speak their native French in their homeland. Thus in Radi/Radegonde, we see that stories actually do have the power to shape lives. The story of the three bears changed Radi's life because she realized the power of narration and imagination, and later, the stories that Radegonde writes help to solidify and to disseminate Acadian culture.

This is, in fact, Radi's mission as a writer, given to her by her father's cousin Thadée when she is just an apprentice storyteller. Thadée is the person to whom Radi turns to tell and to hear stories. One day, he commissions her to become a spokesperson for Acadia:

-L'Acadie?

--Dans le mille! Enregistre ce nom-là dans ta petite caboche; un jour, tu pourrais en avoir besoin, on sait jamais.

Un jour, elle en aurait besoin.

--Pour quoi faire?

Thadée affile l'allumelle de son rabot sur une meule.

--Pour dire aux autres, qui nous avont oubliés, qui c'est que je sons, nous autres, et d'où c'est que je venons. (CSJ 165)

Through her stories, and her writing, Radi will witness to the Acadia that had been forgotten, she will bring it alive again. As a witness to both the oral and the written epochs of her community, Radi joins together these two different traditions. She is not only telling the story of Acadia, she is giving it concrete shape, making it a reality in her books. Her writings actually help to effect a new reality, a new Acadia in which Francophones are recognized, and it is not necessary to "bouter les Anglais dehors," as she had once dreamed of doing.

For Radi, stories are not only a way of giving meaning to the world around her, they are, in fact, a way of shaping the world, of molding it to her own taste. She can have the vacation at the beach that her family is deprived of, she can be God, creating her own world, and manipulating the people in it to suit herself.[76] For Radegonde this means that she can tell/hear her own stories and not be confined to those of other people and other cultures. Barbara Johnson maintains that: "all plots are plots against authority, that authority creates the scene of its own destruction, that all stories necessarily recount by their very existence the subversion of the father, of the gods, of consciousness, of order, of expectations, or of meaning" (Johnson 88). Both Radi and Radegonde use their stories to

challenge the world given them, a world in which there are few options for women and for francophones. In and through their stories, they exercise control over the world, they investigate and give meaning to life (Miller 69).

But there is an even deeper quest in Radi's stories and Radegonde's writings. As a young child, Radi is constantly trying to reconnect with her "past," the paradise she inhabited before she was born; and she is fascinated--and horrified--by the story of Adam and Eve, who renounced paradise for an apple. Her mentor, the Vieille Lamant, however, sets her on the path of an even greater quest, the quest for eternity. This quest, which the Vieille Lamant and Radi call "le chemin Saint-Jacques," will pull Radi/Radegonde throughout her life: "On s'attaquait à mes reins chaque fois que je m'éloignais du chemin tracé dans l'attique d'une iconoclaste. . . " (CSJ 358). "Le chemin Saint-Jacques," an Acadian expression for the Milky Way[77], is also the route that medieval pilgrims would take from Paris to Compostella, to obtain pardon for their sins. "Le chemin Saint-Jacques" becomes, for Radi/Radegonde, a sort of pathway to eternity, a pathway she will ultimately follow through her writing. Finally, before she leaves Europe to return to her dying sister, Radegonde is taken to the cathedral at Amiens, where she like other pilgrims who could not make the journey to Compostella can trace the pilgrimage in miniature, in a stone labyrinth:

> Dans le parcours complexe du labyrinthe d'Amiens, mes pieds ont tracé un dessin qui s'est mis à ressembler à mon voyage dans le temps et le pays qui s'est appelé successivement les Gaules, la terre franque, la France. Je regardais sous mes pieds la topographie pleine de reliefs et de configurations, et je

m'émerveillais de voir suspendu et fixé dans des monuments et des mots un morceau de temps infini. (CSJ 364)

In tracing "le chemin Saint-Jacques," Radegonde has glimpsed eternity.

Like the storytellers before them, the mission of Acadian writers like Jeanne de Valois and Radegonde is to keep Acadia alive, nurturing a sense of Acadian culture and identity. Jeanne de Valois and Radegonde represent a new awareness, however: the realization that their own stories, and the stories that surround them not only have value, they constitute the epic of their people. In both *Les Confessions de Jeanne de Valois*, and *Le Chemin Saint-Jacques*, there is a sense that is very connected to time. Mère Jeanne states that: "Nous avions hérité du temps, faute de lieu. J'ai déjà lu quelque part que l'Acadie n'était pas un endroit mais un envers" (CSJ 228). Acadia may not exist geographically, but it has a rich history, which goes back several centuries. This sense of history and time is a key concept in Maillet's novels. When Radegonde visits the Sistine Chapel in Rome, she sees that in Michaelangelo's painting "l'avant et l'après se rejoignaient. Le paradis retrouvé" (CSJ 361). This vision reflects her goal as an author as well. As Maillet herself says of her writing career: "Donc, moi, je fais chez moi aujourd'hui avec mes contemporains, je fais ce qu'on fait les petits-fils de Charlemagne, je fais passer une langue de l'oral à l'écrit" (*Discours* 14). In making the transition from oral to written literature, Radegonde, Jeanne de Valois and Maillet have joined the two ends of time together and have glimpsed eternity. Their works pull together the past and the future of Acadia, keeping the past alive and real for future generations.

CONCLUSION

L'imaginaire est ce qui tend à devenir réel.
André Breton

Like the works of her characters Radegonde and Mère Jeanne de Valois, Antonine Maillet's writings also keep the Acadian past alive for future generations. In her novels she has given voice to the epic heroines, the rebels, the storytellers, and even the writers who constitute the "petite histoire" of her people. As Marguerite Maillet states: "Antonine Maillet poursuit inlassablement un projet initié en 1958 avec *Pointe-aux-Coques*: récupérer la petite histoire de son pays et fixer les traditions populaires acadiennes" (128). Through her characters, she has provided readers with a tableau of the people and the traditions that color Acadian history. Her characters do this in different ways. The epic heroes and cultural icons such as Pélagie-la-Charrette, Pélagie-la-Gribouille or Mademoiselle Cormier provide the mythic framework around which a sense of cultural identity can be established. The rebellious characters like Mariaagélas and Crache-à-Pic embody the cheerful disregard for authority that allowed Acadians to persist in the face of the British determination to eradicate and assimilate them.[78] And, of course, none of this rich material would be available, even to Maillet herself, were it not for the generations of storytellers--and now

writers--who kept these stories alive. These characters give us a sense of what it meant to be Acadian in the generations following the Deportation.

But even if Maillet's 'project' ("récupérer la petite histoire de son pays") remains constant throughout her works, her approach undergoes some transformations. Although her earliest works take place in Acadia, and valorize the Acadian traditions, they are still more personal, less epic stories. *Pointe-aux-Coques*, Maillet's first novel, portrays a heroine returning to her Acadian roots, and championing the traditional Acadian village, but it is not rooted in the same legendary tradition that so many of Maillet's later works are. Written in standard French, *Pointe-aux-Coques* is a story which, though set in Acadia, could have happened anywhere. Its themes are universal. Maillet's second novel, *On a mangé la dune,* is also written in standard French. Despite its Acadian setting, *On a mangé la dune* is, at its simplest level, the story of a girl's evolving consciousness and imagination. The young heroine, Radi, is developing an awareness of the world around her, as well as the world of fiction--although for the most part, she prefers to see the world through her imagination. Here again, Acadia is the background or setting, rather than the principal theme of the novel. These two novels have a universal appeal; audiences of any race and culture could relate to the stories of Mlle Cormier and Radi. Maillet had not yet begun to focus on the wealth of material she inherited through the oral tradition.

Beginning with *Don l'Orignal*, her third novel (published in 1972), however, Maillet began to turn to this Acadian oral tradition as her source of inspiration, and as her subject matter. These novels are made of what Maillet herself calls the "matière d'Acadie...cette vaste matière des côtes, parallèle à cette matière de France et cette matière de Bretagne

qu'on avait apportées dans ses bagages trois siècles plus tôt" (CA, 227). Maillet's use of the "matière d'Acadie" makes of the works of this period a "geste acadienne" (CA, 227). Written no longer in standard French, but rather in the Acadian French that comes naturally to the characters, and reflecting the stories, songs and legendary adventures of the oral tradition, these works extol and at the same time help develop the identity of the Acadian people.[79] They have earned Maillet recognition as "a bard who in and through the telling of her tales is living, and is making us live with her, the birth of the genre and of a country" (Runte, 144). In works like *Don l'Orignal*, *Mariaagélas*, *Emmanuel à Joseph à Davit*, *Les Cordes de Bois* and *Crache à Pic*, readers witness the gestation of an Acadian identity.

The characters in the novels of this period are fighting to maintain their own society, to keep their culture alive. They return from deportation, they rebuild their communities, they brave economic and social obstacles, but continue to nurture their stories and traditions. Together the characters that populate these novels--the adventurers and heroes, like Michel-Archange, Mariaagélas, Crache à Pic, and of course Pélagie and Pélagie-la-Gribouille, the upstanding citizens like La Sainte and la veuve à Calixte, the bootleggers and outlaws like the Mercenaire women, and of course the storytellers like Pamphile, Bélonie, Jérôme and so many others--these characters make up what Mère Jeanne de Valois calls the "verrière représentant l'épopée d'un peuple" (64). They are part of the mosaic that is the Acadian people.

Even as the characters in her novels fight for their continued existence as a people, Maillet's novels themselves do the same. They share with the world the richness of the Acadian culture and help

preserve the kinds of stories and traditions that Maillet received from generations of storytellers. As Melvin Gallant maintains: "une littérature qui se veut nationale, c'est-à-dire qui cherche à exprimer l'âme d'un peuple, doit commencer par parler du pays, de son espace vital, des événements qui l'ont marqué et des gens qui l'ont bâti" (80). In the novels of this period, Maillet evokes the people and legends at the heart of Acadia. She creates a vital space where outlaws, rebels and heroes live, and she is sharing this space, which is Acadia, with the world.

In her last three novels, however, Maillet has begun to turn her attention to a more modern Acadia. The characters in *L'Oursiade* and her last two novels, *Les Confessions de Jeanne de Valois* and *Le Chemin Saint-Jacques*, are not legendary figures from the oral tradition, but rather modern Acadians facing the challenges of life in the (late) twentieth-century. Having come out of their isolation in often uneducated oral societies, these characters are facing different challenges than those in earlier novels. In these novels, we find that the vital, creative space of Acadia has long been established, but it is now in more direct contact and conflict with the majority anglophone community surrounding it. And though the characters in these novels, especially Radi in *Le Chemin Saint-Jacques*, are influenced by the Acadian oral tradition, this tradition does not play the same critical role that it does in Maillet's earlier novels. As we rediscover the Radi of *On a mangé la dune*, we find that she (as Radegonde) has effectively integrated the real and the imaginary. In fact, it was through the world of imagination and stories that Radi/Radegonde came to know the 'real' world. She had first to discover the world of fiction, and her study of this world of fiction led her around the world. Maillet too has progressed

through the imaginary world of Acadian legends, back to a world of everyday difficulties. These characters--Radi/Radegonde, mère Jeanne de Valois, and Titoume--will not be the stuff of oral legends. They are the generation that will move beyond oral tradition, into the world of formal education and of writing. No longer confined to one small village, their world has opened to include other villages, other provinces, other countries. In all of these novels, the characters struggle to balance tradition and modernity, still valuing their heritage but adapting to the struggles of life in modern Acadia. They keep the past alive, while still looking toward the future.

Throughout the various stages in Maillet's works one common thread remains: each novel, each character represents one small yet personal facet of the Acadian story. Each voice blends with the others, creating the "petite histoire" of the Acadian people. Maillet has not tried to create a general "History" of her people, but merely to give voice to the many characters who came to her through the oral tradition. These characters are Acadian, since Maillet is Acadian, but their stories go beyond the boundaries of time and space. Since her characters so eloquently portray the "petite histoire" of her people, Antonine Maillet has often been taken for a spokesman for Acadia, a role that she rejects:

> I don't even want to be a spokesman (*porte-parole*). I want to be speech (*parole*). I am one word of Acadia. But there is the whole language which remains aside, which remains to other writers, Acadian and quebecois. I haven't told everything. I've told myself. They must tell themselves. (Fitzpatrick, *Search* 12)

Maillet does not represent all Acadians, which is what distinguishes her writings or "petite histoire" from "History," the history of ethnographers,

mythographers, historiographers, journalists, etc. (CA 337). Through her characters she does however give voice, "parole," to some of the Acadian population; to those whose stories constitute Maillet's own story. As she states: "Quand j'écris, je sens que je suis l'aboutissement de cet immense chêne qui s'appelle le monde. Dans ce chêne, il y a une petite branche qui est la mienne, c'est l'Acadie" (Barrett, 34). Maillet's goal, writes Renate Usmiani, is "to express the universal via the regional" (71). Writing connects her to the entire world; in telling her story, which is the story of her ancestors, she joins her/their story with the story of all humankind. Maillet's novels have created a mythic piece of Acadia open to everyone. As Jeanne de Valois says: "j'ai compris...que la beauté du monde réside dans sa diversité, que la richesse culturelle universelle est composée de la différence des cultures multiples, qu'une seule Acadie qui s'éteint fait un trou dans la tapisserie du firmament" (JDV 47). The culture that the characters in Maillet's novels keep alive enriches the world.

Antonine Maillet deals in words. She uses the words of her people to tell her stories. Like the stories, the words have been passed down to her from generation to generation. These are the words which Rabelais used in sixteenth-century France, words like gorgoton, chacunière, dumeshui. . . which have never fallen into disuse in Acadia. According to Maillet, the Acadians have preserved all these words, which are no longer used in France: "Quand Rabelais a écrit ces Cinq livres avec 100.000 mots et deux siècles plus tard, le plus grand, Racine, écrit toute son oeuvre avec 5.000 mots, où sont passés les 95.000 autres? En Acadie, Mesdames, Messieurs" (Discours, 13). The richness of Maillet's works lies not only in the stories that they tell, but also in the words, the

language in which they are told. In the words of Eloise Brière, "Maillet has created. . . a linguistic homeland for Acadians. . . No longer silent subjects of discourse, Maillet's Acadian characters become speaking subjects" (3). Maillet's characters use their own words, words that were their heritage, to create both a story, and a linguistic identity.

Moreover, like her character Radegonde, Maillet is the word made flesh--she has taken the stories she has heard, and those she has imagined, and concretized them in her novels. Her word has also become "flesh" in the Pays de la Sagouine, a tourist attraction near her hometown of Bouctouche, New Brunswick. Here, on a tiny island (not unlike the "île aux puces" featured in several of her novels), there stands a tiny "Acadian village" where every summer Maillet's most famous characters, la Sagouine, la Sainte, and many others, come to life, and her stories are acted out for the myriad tourists who visit each year. Maillet has created an entire world, with her words and stories, and a portion of this "world" can be seen at the Pays de la Sagouine. Like Radi in *On a mangé la dune* and *Le Chemin Saint-Jacques*, Maillet has used imagination and legend as a basis for creating a new world. The patterns of imagination and consciousness that we see in Radi's life are reflected in the corpus of Maillet's work. By delving into the fantastic world of flea people (les Puçois), outlaws and other such legendary characters, Maillet's "world" has become real, both literally and figuratively, to the thousands of people who read her books and who visit the Pays de la Sagouine.

Maillet has stated that: "tout acte de création. . . est une lutte contre le destin, une sorte de tentative d'éterniser les choses et la vie" (Major 14). In telling the stories of Pélagie, La Sagouine and her many

other characters, Maillet has created a vision of Acadia and the Acadians that will endure. Through these characters she has battled a destiny which nearly silenced Acadia forever. The characters she has created may not speak for all of Acadia, but they are voices, telling their own pieces of the Acadian story. And, as Maillet points out: "Si nous n'avons qu'un cri à faire et que nous le crions avant de mourir, c'est déjà énorme. C'est déjà énorme qu'aujourd'hui on parle de l'Acadie, qu'on sache qu'elle est vivante" (Gay 21).

[1] The French colony known as Acadie was settled in 1604, and although as early as 1621 the English claimed it as their own (naming it "Nova Scotia") it did not officially become English territory until 1713.

[2] Although there were many complicated historico-political factors leading to the Deportation of the Acadians, their refusal to become anglicized, protestantized subjects who would fight against the French was probably the most decisive factor in the Deportation.

[3] This same demand was made successfully by the people of Quebec after the defeat of the French by the English in 1759. On that occasion, the English, feeling pressure from the independence movement in the American colonies, acted to obtain the neutrality of Québecois in the impending war.

[4] For a more thorough examination of the history surrounding the Acadian Deportation see N.E.S. Griffiths, *The Acadian Deportation: Deliberate Perfidy or Cruel Necessity?*, which gathers historical texts and analyses from the past three centuries, and *l'Acadie de 1686 à 1784: Contexte d'une histoire* which both attempt to provide a detailed, historical study of the situation in Acadia leading up to the Deportation.

[5] See Ernest Martin's study *L'Evangéline de Longfellow et la suite merveilleuse d'un poème*, Paris, Hachette, 1936, p. 150.

[6] Antonine Maillet, *Pélagie-la-Charrette*, (Montréal, Leméac, 1979), hereafter cited as PLC.

[7] Raoul Boudreau, "La Quête de l'identité en poésie acadienne," LittéRéalité. Vol. V, No 2, Hiver/Winter 1993-1994.

[8] Antonine Maillet, *Cent ans dans les bois,* (Montréal: Leméac), 1981 and *Les Cordes-de-Bois* (Montréal, Leméac, 1977), hereafter cited as CA and CdB, respectively.

[9] This "je-tu" opposition manifests itself on the individual level as well. Maillet's characters often pair off in diametrically opposed sets, such as Mariaagélas and la veuve à Calixte, and the Mercenaires and Ma Tante la Veuve. The oppositions between these rebelious heroines and their moralistic adversaries are examined in Chapter 2.

[10] But Acadian society was not (and is not) homogeneous. The difference between "self" and "other" also divides their society into "les gens d'en-haut" and "les Crasseux" or "les gens d'en-bas." The rigid distinction between these two groups is seen in almost all of Maillet's works, but most clearly in *Don L'Original* and *Les Crasseux.*

[11] In referring to "l'Histoire" with a capital H, Maillet seems to be positing a difference between History, and "la petite histoire" that she refers to in novels such as *Les Cordes-de-Bois* and *les Confessions de Jeanne de Valois.* The story of Pélagie, then, (as will be examined in Chapter 1), belongs to Acadia's epic past, and is therefore elevated beyond the realm of mere folktale.

[12] Antonine Maillet, *Crache à Pic* (Montréal: Leméac, 1984), hereafter cited as CAP.

[13] Antonine Maillet, *Les Confessions de Jeanne de Valois*, (Montréal: Leméac, 1992), hereafter cited as CJV.

[14] Bernard Aresu, in his introduction to a special issue of *Quebec Studies* devoted to Antonine Maillet, points out that the language she uses--the language of the Acadians--is, in itself, a form of cultural resistance: "This archaic French of the late Middle Ages and of Rabelais symbolizes, in a sense, a striking phenomenon of cultural resistance, fighting as it does, unlike the joual and chiac dialects, against the encroachments of the language of the conquerors. To the modern reader, it profices a rich insight into the cultural and historical development of an ethnic group" (232).

[15] Runte, in "L'Acadie de l'ultime déportation" distinguishes between "l'acadianité, américaine ou autre" and "l'acadianitude," implying a more profound understanding of Acadian identity (117).

[16] Mikhail Bakhtine, Esthétique et théorie du roman. Paris, Gallimard, 1978.

[17] "He really did save a ship with Acadians in it, or at least that's what the legend says. So I took the legend and I put it into my book and that's the reason it may seem a little less real than the others. Since I took as much of him from legend as from history, I stuck to the legendary Robin Hood part of his character. He seems like a character who is 'out of this world' in that he's already enshrined before the end of the story" (Smith 266).

[18] Beausoleil-Broussard and Pélagie meet after she has already begun her journey back to Acadia. She is determined to bring her people back to their land, and he has devoted himself and his hijacked ship to the transport of deported Acadians to the Caribbean islands and to Louisiana. Their missions will keep them separated, except for a few brief encounters.

[19] "Others defer to her [Pélagie's] natural leadership without question, as when, on a day when she decides to give her flagging troupe a pep talk, 'l'Acadie entière lève des yeux bleus suppliants sur son chef qui déjà s'empare de la tribune.' When she has finished, 'elle redescend de la tribune en se drapant dans sa cape comme un consul romain dans sa toge.'" (Fitzpatrick, *Epic* 148).

[20] These levels of narration will be examined in chapter 3, "Storytellers: Conteurs, Menteurs, Menteux and Défricheteux de parenté."

[21] Ironically she refuses to accept her daughter's decision to do what she herself did, marry a man from the island.

[22] Antonine Maillet, *Mariaagélas*, Ben-Z. Shek, trans. (Toronto, Canada, Simon & Pierre, 1978), *Crache à Pic*, (Montréal: Leméac, 1984), and *Les Cordes-de-Bois*, (Montréal, Leméac, 1977), hereafter cited as MG, CAP and CdB, respectively.

[23] This issue will be discussed at length in Chapter 2, "Before the Law: Outlaws and Rebels."

[24] This will also be examined in detail in chapter 2, "Before the Law: Outlaws and Rebels."

[25] La Bessoune is, in fact, a name pointing to a relationship, but La Bessoune has no twin, therefore the name refers to a non-existent relationship. Her name remains something of a mystery, the assumption is that her twin died at birth. And the narrator sees this as a sign of something important: "cette bessonne, qui devait réunir tant de vertus et de vices contraires, n'aurait pas pu, dès sa naissance, s'approprier seule la double part des bessons? Deux jumeaux en une seule personne: il y avait là de quoi faire rêver presque au Messie" (CdB 73).

[26] The land was not always called "les Cordes-de-Bois," when first owned by the Mercenaire family, "on disait la butte, le bois, ou plus couramment le haut du champ" (CdB 18). But a wealthy villager, MacFarlane starts to stack the wood for his trade on the butte, (and becoming angry when they use it), thus giving the butte its new name.

[27] See also Chapter 2, "Outlaws and Rebels."

[28] Antonine Maillet, *Don l'Orignal*, (Montréal: Leméac, 1972), hereafter cited as DO.

[29] The importance of storytellers in Maillet's works will be examined at length in chapter 3, "Storytellers: Conteurs, Menteurs, Menteux and Défricheteux de parenté: Maintaining the Oral Tradition."

[30] He further adds that: "'l'histoire de l'Ile-aux-Puces et des personnages qui figurent dans ce récit constitue en quelque sorte une plaque

tournante dans l'oeuvre d'Antonine Maillet. On y retrouve une atmosphère, un décor, des personnages et des thèmes qui reviennent dans un bon nombre de ses livres" (Gallant, *Epopée* 286).

[31] Antonine Maillet, *Pointe aux Coques* (Montréal: Leméac), 1977, and *Emmanuel à Joseph à Dâvit* (Montréal, Leméac, 1975), hereafter cited as PAC and EJD, respectively.

[32] In choosing her own destiny, she has also chosen, however, to join in the struggle to keep Acadia alive.

[33] In fact, in writing down Acadia's oral traditions and stories, Maillet has propelled them into a new realm. This issue will be examined in greater detail in chapter 3.

[34] Narrative technique will also be addressed in detail in chapter 3.

[35] Antonine Maillet, *l'Oursiade*, (Montréal, Leméac, 1990), hereafter cited as O.

[36] Interestingly, by having their improvised words in print, Maillet gives them more impact, and also concretizes them.

[37] La Bessoune is not only illegitimate, she is also the offspring of "un père inconnu"; she is thus completely free of paternal restrictions. But she also lacks the paternal ties and name that would legitimize her in society's eyes.

[38] This is the monosyllabic interjection that often punctuates the discourse of others.

[39] Dieudonné is the chief bootlegger on the coast, as well as the wealthiest man there, who has purchased or acquired most of the prime coastal land from the villagers. As his name would indicate, he seems to feel he has the right to whatever he can take.

[40] This play on polysemy indicates the true linguistic power of both the characters and the author.

[41] The importance given to *public* speaking indicates the extent to which verbal ability is valued in this society, and emphasizes as well linguistic component of the war between the two cultures.

[42] All of these customs, interestingly, are characterized by restraint, whether of a physical, moral or social nature. Thus having broken the restraint of the law, they in the end come to embody it themselves. Curiously, this restraint comes at the moment of their liberation from their geographically restrictive island. And conversely, the former mainlanders, now restricted to the island, have lost their sense of moral and social restraint.

[43] Interestingly, it is the Church itself that introduces Simon to the concept of reincarnation. "Un jour, il avait entendu condamner du haut de la chaire ce que le prêtre avait appelé l'hérésie de la réincarnation. Personne dans la paroisse n'avait eu vent de cette hérésie-là avant que l'Eglise s'en mêle d'en faire mention" (O 75). The Church is thus the agent provocateur of Simon's theological straying.

[44] Antonine Maillet, *On a mangé la dune*, (Montréal, Leméac, 1977), and *Le Chemin Saint-Jacques*, (Montréal, Leméac, 1996), hereafter cited as OMD and CSJ respectively.

[45] *Radi* becomes the root (radical) of the *writer*, Radegonde.

[46] This is Hélène Cixous' term; as she maintains, "at a certain moment for the person who has lost everything, whether that means a being or a country, language becomes the country. One enters the country of words" (*Coming* xx).

[47] Maillet is careful to distinguish between a storyteller, or "menteux" and a historian, however: "la différence entre le menteur et le menteux, dans mon pays, est la même qu'entre l'historien et le conteur: le premier raconte ce qu'il veut; l'autre, ce que vous voulez" (CA 13).

[48] "Au XIXe siècle, la chanson, le conte et les traditions sont au coeur de la vie collective" (Clarke 13)

[49] Radi will be examined in Chapter 4, since she--unlike Maillet's other storytellers--becomes an "author."

[50] The references here are to the English translation, (published as *On the Eighth Day,* Trans. Wayne Grady, Toronto, Canada, Lester & Orpen Dennys Ltd. 1986), hereafter cited as HJ.

[51] Noume's bivouacked troops hear the story of their country's epic battle, just as the troops of William the Conqueror heard the story of the Chanson de Roland just before the battle of Hastings.

[52] Their use of this story to escape from a Charleston prison is examined in Chapter 2, "Before the Law: Outlaws and Rebels."

[53] The narrator emphasizes his role as a professional: "c'est à son tour de conter, surtout que c'est sa profession à lui, comme qui dirait son métier, tout comme sa fonction. Les autres, ils content par surcroît; mais Jérôme..." (CA 28).

[54] Denis Bourque, in his article "Une Renaissance au pays du rire" designates this as the moment at which both story and storyteller are "tournés en dérision" as the storyteller is dethroned, and the whole community takes over his story, *deforming* it, and making it grotesque by with the insistance on the bestiary. It becomes "un vrai bâtard de conte d'animaux" (88).

[55] "Les menteux et colporteurs de nouvelles, c'est connu, ne surgissent qu'aux saisons mortes ou creuses" (CA 138).

[56] Radi, the heroine of *On a mangé la dune* and *Le chemin Saint-Jacques* also plays a similar game of recreating the world. This is examined in Chapter Four.

[57] The act of writing, or becoming an "author," will be examined in Chapter 4, "From Oral to Written Literature."

[58] *Le Chemin Saint Jacques* and *Les Confessions de Jeanne de Valois* also contain first-person narration, but they will be discussed in the context of Chapter 4, as their narrators are also authors.

[59] This is discussed in Chapter 1, "Epic Hero(in)es, Legendary Figures and Cultural Icons."

[60] In fact, Tit-Jean (Titoume) it turns out, is in the process of collecting the stories relating to him, and to his birth throughout the novel. In a sense, this is what all of Maillet's narrators are doing, collecting and presenting the stories which may not have originated with them, but which help to define their cultural identity.

[61] This follows Schopenhauer's theory that existence depends on a perception of / by a consciousness.

[62] In an interview with Martine Jacquot, Maillet states that: "je fais partie de la génération qui a fait le pas entre la littérature orale et la littérature écrite. Je suis la charnière dans le sens où j'arrive au tout début de la littérature acadienne contemporaine, dans les années 60, 70. Il y avait encore à cette époque des conteurs, donc je suis de la génération de ceux qui ont pu entendre ces authentiques conteurs, alors que mes successeurs n'ont peut-être pas eu cette chance. Je fais vraiment partie de ceux qui ont goûté aux deux domaines" (*Charnière* 253).

[63] Antonine Maillet, *Les Confessions de Jeanne de Valois,* Montréal: Leméac, 1992, hereafter cited as CJV.

[64] Mère Jeanne de Valois was, in fact, an actual Acadian nun who taught many generations of Acadian girls, and for whom a building at the University of Moncton is named.

[65] From the beginning of the colony of "Acadie," Catholicism was the official religion (Griffiths, *L'Acadie* 1) however, until the end of the nineteenth century, many Acadian communities did not have an established priest. In the early twentieth century, though the parishes had priests, they were largely Irish (Roy, *l'Acadie* 222) or Québécois. It is not until the 1940's that Acadian dioceses truly began to take hold, and Acadian schools ("collèges") began to expand their influence (Roy 223). After the second world war, religious institutions such as parishes, schools and convents flourished in Acadia. For more historical information on the Church in Acadia, please see *L'Acadie des origines à nos jours* (Michel Roy) and *Héritage d'Acadie* (Jean-Claude Dupont).

[66] The "petite histoire" is the story of the Acadians, not the "History" of Acadia, but a more personal view, an insider's view.

[67] The difference between the storyteller's audience and the narrator's audience is examined in Chapter 3. As Phyllis Wrenn points out, "Le *conteux* dessert un public informé et engagé, sa performance l'emporte donc souvent sur la narration et la transmission cohérente de l'information. Le narrateur dessert, par contre, un public extérieur (nous, le lecteur non-initié)" (8).

[68] In an interview with Derek Attridge, Derrida talks about what he terms an "internal polylogue" which motivates his writing: "the idea of an internal polylogue. . . was first of all the adolescent dream of keeping a trace of all the voices which were traversing me--or were *almost doing so-*

-and which was to be so precious, unique, both specular and speculative" (Attridge 34-5).

[69] As in *L'Oursiade*, the bears have almost magical powers to open new worlds.

[70] The forge, or blacksmith's shop, in the Acadia of Maillet's novels, is not merely a place of business, but a place where the men of the village would gather to tell stories. In an interview, Maillet talks about her childhood impressions of the forge: "In every country each village has a centre, a soul, a focal point. And in Acadia the centre was usually a blacksmith's shop... But what struck me most when I was a child was that the blacksmith's shop was a rather dark place, and also the fire and the anvil were quite mysterious--almost like an alchemist doing his experiments" (Smith 263).

[71] Here Radi is repressed by her family (and their morality); they are attempting to reign in her creativity and her exploration of the world. In fact, Radegonde will not--cannot--become a writer, until after she loses both her father and her mother, until she frees herself from her family and from the "law."

[72] This incident, which does not appear in *On a mangé la dune*, represents a critical moment in Radi's development as a writer. While *On a mangé la dune* reflects the development of Radi's imagination and her storytelling abilities, *Le Chemin Saint-Jacques* takes this one step further, examining the forces in Radi/Radegonde's childhood and adult life which

allow her to become not just a storyteller, but an accomplished author as well.

[73] Like Radi, Maillet herself was born at noon, "midi sonnant," the moment when the Angelus is rung. In an interview in *Les Amitiés acadiennes*, "Ce Jour-là," Maillet also recounts the story of how she, like Radi, stood up to her teacher and maintained that she wanted to become a writer, in French. She explains her compulsion to speak out: "c'était en classe de rédaction, et la rédaction se fait avec la langue, or la langue, c'était tout ce qui nous restait, à nous, pour nous distinguer, nous affirmer, apprendre à être... ce qu'on appelle aujourd'hui la recherche de l'identité" (5). Like Radi, Maillet received the same note in red ink on her finished essay in French: "Mademoiselle, si vous continuez à lire et à écrire, le succès vous attend" (5).

[74] Radi's insistance upon finding more choices is examined in Chapter Two, "Before the Law: Outlaws and Rebels."

[75] Radegonde's research takes her to the bayous of Louisiana, where she meets Madame Primeau, an old cajun woman who speaks only French and has never been formally schooled. Radegonde asks Madame Primeau to tell her a story, and Mme Primeau proceeds to recount the *Roman de Renart.* "Elle savait par coeur de grands pans du *Roman de Renart,* le chef-d'oeuvre du XIIe siècle que ses ancêtres avaient passés ou dérobés à la littérature écrite, transmis parallèlement de bouche à l'oreille de l'aïeul au rejeton durant huit cents ans..." (CSJ 263). Her

research also takes her to France and to Norway, to study the mythical giants that came to her through Rabelais.

[76] This aspect of storytelling is particularly evident in *On a mangé la dune*. In this novel, to an even greater extent than in *Le Chemin Saint-Jacques*, Radi's stories are the fantasy life that she creates for herself.

[77] According to "Le Glossaire acadien," the usage of the expression "le chemin Saint-Jacques" comes from either the Touraine or the Berri region (Poirier 107).

[78] Albert Dugas maintains that: "C'est l'assimilation qui était le premier but visé par la déportation. C'était cela l'objectif principal. La bataille fut publiquement et manifestement oubliée, mais la guerre, loin d'être terminée, fut reprise sous une forme beaucoup plus menaçante" (35).

[79] Eloise Brière finds that the choice of this language is "highly significant: the expulsion from Acadia and subsequent exile caused the vernacular to become the 'carrier' of *Acadiénitude*. . . Reclaiming the mother tongue is much more than reproducing a dialect or marshaling archaic vocabulary; it is an allegory of national rebirth, a strategy for finally producing congruence between language, geographic space and time" (8).

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