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Finding an Undercurrent in Antoine-J. Léger's Elle et lui and Une fleur d'Acadie

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Résumé de l'article

Chez les communautés francophones marginalisées qui ont laissé peu de documents écritsdans les archives coloniales, la littérature du 20e siècle est confrontée aux absences et auxsilences résultant de la domination impériale dans les archives et des récits populaires. Cetarticle fait appel aux romans Elle et lui : tragique idylle du peuple acadien (1940) et Unefleur d'Acadie : un épisode du grand dérangement (1946), de l'auteur acadien Antoine-J.Léger, pour examiner comment les écrivains acadiens ont commencé à contester la stabilité des documents archivistiques et à renverser la domination exercée par la version desévénements imaginée par Henry Wadsworth Longfellow dans son poème Evangeline: ATale of Acadie (1847)/Évangéline : conte d'Acadie (1883).

Disrupting the Archives and Loosening the *Evangeline* Knot: Finding an Undercurrent in Antoine-J. Léger's *Elle et lui* and *Une fleur d'Acadie*

LEANNA THOMAS

Chez les communautés francophones marginalisées qui ont laissé peu de documents écrits dans les archives coloniales, la littérature du 20e siècle est confrontée aux absences et aux silences résultant de la domination impériale dans les archives et des récits populaires. Cet article fait appel aux romans Elle et lui : tragique idylle du peuple acadien *(1940) et* Une fleur d'Acadie : un épisode du grand dérangement *(1946), de l'auteur acadien Antoine-J. Léger, pour examiner comment les écrivains acadiens ont commencé à contester la stabilité des documents archivistiques et à renverser la domination exercée par la version des événements imaginée par Henry Wadsworth Longfellow dans son poème* Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie *(1847)/*Évangéline : conte d'Acadie *(1883).*

For marginalized francophone communities who left little written record in the colonial archives, 20th-century literature confronts absences and silences resulting from imperial archival dominance and popular narratives. This article mobilizes Acadian author Antoine-J. Léger's novels Elle et lui : tragique idylle du peuple acadien *(1940) and* Une fleur d'Acadie : un épisode du grand dérangement *(1946) to consider how Acadian writers began challenging the stability of archival records and subverting the dominance of the version of events imagined by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in his poem* Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie *(1847).*

DURING THE LAST 50 YEARS MANY HISTORIANS have engaged in critical debates over how literature can be employed as a useful source for historical analysis. In the 19th century and into the early 20th century, much historical scholarship had embraced scientific methodologies and aimed for objectivity, thus becoming separated from the field of literature.[1] This separation underwent a significant turn beginning in the 1970s through

1 Michael I. Carignan, "Fiction as History or History as Fiction? George Eliot, Hayden White, and Nineteenth Century Historicism," *CLIO* 29, no. 4 (Summer 2000): 396–7; Kuisima Korhonen, ed., *Tropes for the Past: Hayden White and the History/Literature Debate* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 10.

Leanna Thomas, "Disrupting the Archives and Loosening the *Evangeline* Knot: Finding an Undercurrent in Antoine-J. Léger's *Elle et lui* and *Une fleur d'Acadie*," *Acadiensis* 50, no. 2 (Autumn/automne 2021): 184–206.

the influence of post-structuralist, postmodern, and postcolonial scholars including Hayden White, Dominick LaCapra, and Edward Said. Such scholars drew attention to blurred boundaries existing between literary and academic historical narratives, and argued that literary analysis is useful in trying to decipher past conceptions of reality, to identify produced knowledge, and to reveal forms of resistance to engrained understandings.[2] Said and other intellectuals such as Nick Nesbitt contend that literary sources are of particular value for studying marginalized communities that endured imperial exploitation and displacement, and left minimal and/or scattered written records.[3] For many of these communities, 20th-century literature developed as a form of weaponry to confront not only present-day struggles rooted in their colonial experiences but also the absences and silences of their history resulting from their violently disrupted pasts and problems of colonial archives.

This article will address how Acadian society began using literature to confront such absences and silences tied to their experiences of the Deportation and colonialism. In the prospectus to the first Acadian newspaper *Le Moniteur acadien*, for instance, editor Israël Landry clearly identifies the written word as a form of weaponry. He writes how his press is a means for Acadians to "defend themselves against the base calumnies of their enemies they are subject to" and subsequent articles give similar reference to the role of the newspaper in uniting Acadians and in being a means of defense as "they have had to fight against many adversaries."[4] Landry's suggestion that the printed word is a weapon is less apparent in early Acadian literature, perhaps due to many of the Acadian elite aiming to preserve amicable relationships with the Anglophone majority. Nonetheless, select Acadian works in the early 20th century reveal

2 Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 6-7; Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 27, 43; Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (Autumn 1980): 17, 23-4, 27; Dominick LaCapra, "History and the Novel," in *History and Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 127-32; Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), xii; Dominick LaCapra, *History and Reading: Tocqueville, Foucault, French Studies* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 24.

3 Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, xxii, 212-14; Nick Nesbitt, *Voicing Memory: History and Subjectivity in French Caribbean Literature* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), xii–xiv; Nesbitt, *Caribbean Critique: Antillean Critical Theory from Toussaint to Glissant* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 10.

4 Israël Landry, "Prospectus du Moniteur acadien," *Le Moniteur acadien* (Chatham), 5 March 1867; "Notre journal," *Le Moniteur acadien*, 8 July 1867 (Shédiac); "Causerie," *Le Moniteur acadien*, 8 July 1867; Un jeune Acadien, "Court traité sur l'éducation," *Le Moniteur acadien*, 3 August 1867.

the beginnings of an undercurrent running in opposition to dominant historical narratives as Acadians attempted to "assert their own identity and the existence of their own history."[5] This article mobilizes Acadian author Antoine-J. Léger's novels *Elle et lui : tragique idylle du peuple acadien* (1940) and *Une fleur d'Acadie : un épisode du grand dérangement* (1946) to consider how Acadian writers began challenging the stability of colonial archival records, as well as subverting the dominance of the version of events imagined by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in his poem *Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie* (1847).[6]

Born in Memramcook, New Brunswick, in 1880, Antoine-J. Léger attended the Collège Saint-Joseph and after graduating in 1903 he went on to study law and to open a legal practice in Moncton in 1907. Over the course of his career, Léger also became involved in politics and served in the Canadian Senate from 1935 until he passed away in 1950. He proved a proponent of Acadian nationalism, advocating for the preservation of their language and culture as well as their rights as citizens of Canada.[7] While pursuing his legal and political careers, Léger showed an avid interest in literature and in history. His first publication, *Les grandes lignes de l'histoire de la Société l'Assomption* (1933), documents the founding and development of the Société, a cooperative organization where he acted as a member of the executive committee.[8] Later, while serving in the Senate, Léger wrote *Elle et lui* and *Une fleur d'Acadie* – books that earned the author the accolade of being the first Acadian novelist.[9]

In these novels Léger underscores the faults of members of the British Empire when it came to the Acadian Deportation (1755-1763), and he exhorts his fellow Acadians to strive to be heard in the present-day as they work to overcome a former "passive existence" with an "active life."[10] He encourages Acadians to resist going unaccounted for or wrongly represented as a result

5 Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, xii.

6 Antoine-J. Léger, *Elle et lui : tragique idylle du peuple acadien* (Moncton, NB: Notre-Dame de l'Assomption, 1940); Antoine-J. Léger, *Une fleur d'Acadie : un épisode du grand dérangement* (Moncton: L'Imprimerie acadienne, 1946); Henry W. Longfellow, *Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie* (Fredericton: Goose Lane Editions, 2004). There are no English translations of Léger's novels available, so all translations are the author's.

7 Cécile-Marie Maillet, "Antoine-J. Léger, premier romancier acadien" (MA thesis, Université Laval, 1966), 9-10, 7-8.

8 Antoine-J. Léger, *Les grandes lignes de l'histoire de la Société l'Assomption* (Québec: Imprimerie franciscaine missionaire, 1933); Maillet, "Antoine-J. Léger," 10.

9 Beginning in the late 1970s discoveries of other works led to some debate over who deserves this title; see Maillet, "Antoine-J. Léger," 8 and Marguerite Maillet, Gérard LeBlanc, and Bernard Emont, eds., *Anthologie de textes littéraires acadiens, 1606-1975* (Moncton: Éditions d'Acadie, 1979), 367.

10 Léger, *Elle et lui*, 110-11, 117, 119, 201 (quotation on 201).

of colonial records being "lost, falsified, and destroyed by those who had an interest in hiding the truth."[11] Through his research, Léger provides lists of place names to help readers identify locations that shifted from French to British control, a chronology of the establishment of parishes in Acadian communities, and a brief overview of significant changes in voting rights and political participation for Acadians in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.[12] Most significantly, Léger weaves into his dramas of Acadian displacement primary source documents from French and British colonial records. By situating archival sources in a different context apart from archival collections, as well as putting into print new accounts of shared Acadian suffering and resilience, Léger's works challenged the authority of narratives produced by those outside of the Acadian community – including Longfellow's *Evangeline*.[13]

Léger's novels have been criticized for their literary "style and composition." His texts conform, for instance, to the post-Renaissance Acadian elites' "hyper-idealization" of their 18th century ancestors, which often emphasized Acadian ties to their Catholic faith, love of their homeland, and devotion to their families.[14] Yet these idealizations by elite member Léger also help mask other attributes of his texts that reveal how he was taking significant steps in terms of the rewriting of Acadian colonial history. Léger weaves archival materials into his stories in ways that show Britain's objectification of Acadians, yet also, conversely, make Acadians active participants in imperial exchange and negotiation. To confront problems of absences in the archives, Léger's texts reveal local traditions of cultural heritage while highlighting the importance of women in Acadian society and providing deeper context for the meaning of "land" than may be found solely in archival documents. Moreover, in both novels, Léger reimagines the *Evangeline* icon by populating his stories with a

11 Léger, *Une fleur d'Acadie*, 128.

12 Maillet, "Antoine-J. Léger," 8; Bernard Haché, "Elle et lui : Tragique idylle du peuple acadien," in *Dictionnaire des oeuvres littéraires de l'Acadie des Maritimes, XX^e siècle*, ed. Janine Gallant and Maurice Raymond (Sudbury, ON: Éditions Prise de parole, 2012), chap. E.

13 Other works include those by American Francis Parkman, *Montcalm and Wolfe* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1884) and Québécois Henri-Raymond Casgrain, *Un pèlerinage au pays d'Évangéline* (Québec: L.J. Demers & Frère, 1887), http://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.00528/5?r=0&s=1.

14 Maillet, LeBlanc, and Emont, *Anthologie de textes littéraires acadiens*, 367; Robert Viau, "L'épée et la plume: La persistance du thème de la Déportation acadienne en littérature," *Acadiensis* 36, no. 1 (automne 2006): 60. Concerning "hyper-idealization" of the past, see Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 79.

variety of characters, including female heroines whose choices, decisions, and actions pragmatically benefit the broader Acadian population.

Problems of colonial archives and the "Evangeline knot"

Leading up to the Seven Years' War, French settlers in the north Atlantic region lived in precarious circumstances due to Britain's concerns over their allegiance to the British Crown and heightened tensions between Britain and France. Beginning in 1755 British soldiers violently forced Acadians onto ships, destroyed their homes, and separated thousands of men, women, and children from their families and communities.[15] Some Acadians escaped British captivity and went into hiding further north, while those dispersed around the Atlantic seaboard in British and French colonies, as well as in England and France, struggled to survive in the midst of illness, religious prejudices, and labor exploitation.[16] As the Seven Years War ended, Britain reversed its policy for Acadians to live in Atlantic Canada. Those who had escaped into frontier regions to avoid being deported began to rebuild communities, and some exiles in British colonies further south returned north to the Maritime region.[17] Settling throughout parts of Maine, Québec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island, Acadians struggled to survive through to the late-19th-century Renaissance period – the period when greater social and ethnic cohesion developed among scattered Acadian communities. Acadian society also underwent significant changes with the emergence of a printed

15 Through his research, Stephen White estimates the Acadian population to have been at 14,100 in 1755 and Carl Brasseaux estimates that approximately 6,050 were forced onto ships, while others escaped; see Stephen A. White, "The True Number of the Acadians," in *Du Grand Dérangement à la Déportation: nouvelles perspectives historiques*, ed. Ronnie-Gilles LeBlanc (Moncton: Chaire d'études acadiennes, 2005), 56, and Carl A. Brasseaux, *"Scattered to the Wind": Dispersal and Wanderings of the Acadians, 1755–1809* (Lafayette, LA: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1991), 7.

16 Brasseaux, "*Scattered to the Wind*," 9–11, 12, 15; Christopher Hodson, "Idlers and Idolators: Acadian Exiles and the Labor Systems of British North America, 1755–1763," in *Religious Refugees in Europe, Asia and North America 6th–21st Century*, ed. Susanne Lachenicht (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2007), 200; Christopher Hodson, *The Acadian Diaspora: An Eighteenth Century History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 6–7, 96, 110–11, 199–200.

17 J.M. Bumsted, "Resettlement and Rebellion, 1763–1783," in *The Atlantic Region to Confederation: A History*, ed. Phillip A. Buckner and John G. Reid (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 164–5; Ann Gorman Condon, "Loyalist Arrival, Acadian Return, Imperial Reform, 1783–1800," in Buckner and Reid, *Atlantic Region to Confederation*, 198–9.

press, more pronounced political involvement, and the building of educational institutions.[18]

Prior to this Renaissance Nova Scotian judge and politician Thomas C. Haliburton published *An Historical and Statistical Account of Nova-Scotia* (1829), which recounted French and British warfare in the Atlantic northeast. His *Account* resulted in two developments that continue to be crucial to Acadian historiography.[19] First, it led to a contentious debate over whether blame for the Deportation should be placed on the British, the French, or Acadians themselves; in turn, this debate resulted in heated accusations concerning the use and availability of archival sources. Second, Haliburton's work influenced Longfellow's writing of *Evangeline* – an internationally renowned poem that recounts an epic tale of an exile's experiences that quickly became adopted and embraced by Acadians in the late 19th century.[20]

Concerning the onset of the debate over the availability of archival sources, in his *Account* Haliburton provides a single Acadian petition that was submitted by exiles in Philadelphia where they claim that "our papers, which contained our contracts, records, &c. were, by violence, taken from us." The exiles also elaborate on how their paper records were confiscated, stating that "not long before our being made prisoners, the house in which we kept our contracts, records, deeds, &c. was invested with an armed force, and all our papers violently carried away."[21] This repetition of the language of "violence" regarding the seizure of Acadian papers alludes to an imperialist desire to suppress Acadian voices, and immediately following this petition Haliburton provides a footnote concerning document "concealment" that goes on to trigger disputes among researchers. In his footnote, Haliburton states regarding the Deportation that "it is very remarkable that there are no traces of this important event, to be found among the records in the Secretary's Office at Halifax." He continues: "The particulars of this affair seem to have been carefully concealed, although it is not now easy to assign the reason, unless the parties were, as in truth they well might be, ashamed of the transaction."[22]

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18 Sheila M. Andrew, *Development of Elites in Acadian New Brunswick, 1861-1881* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 8–11, 16–17.

19 Thomas Chandler Haliburton, *An Historical and Statistical Account of Nova-Scotia*, vol. 1 (Halifax: Jospeh Howe, 1829), https://archive.org/details/anhistoricaland01haligoog/page/n4/mode/2up.

20 Longfellow, *Evangeline*; Joseph Yvon Thériault, *Évangéline : Contes d'Amérique* (Montréal: Éditions Québec-Amérique, 2013), 115, 338.

21 Haliburton, *Historical and Statistical Account of Nova-Scotia*, 1:184, 191–2.

22 Haliburton, *Historical and Statistical Account of Nova-Scotia*, 1:196.

This section of Haliburton's text that brings archival silencing to the surface stirred conflicts that ensued between Anglophone and Francophone historians captivated by British, French, and Acadian colonial history.

Following Haliburton's publication, researchers such as Thomas B. Akins, Francis Parkman, and Henri-Raymond Casgrain debated blame for the Deportation and accusations of intentionally hidden or selectively used archives triggered research that resulted in an increased availability of colonial sources concerning the event and the time leading up to it.[23] Still, this increase in sources uncovered by these late-19th-century historians cloak not only the initial suspicion of private records being seized by the empire to suppress Acadian claims but also the underlying problem of having comparatively minimal and scattered documents in the colonial archives written by or shared among Acadians themselves. Due to Acadian illiteracy and poor political representation during the 18th century, letters addressed from pre-dispersal communities to the British and French colonial governments are sparse in comparison to imperial trade and military documents.[24] In addition, Acadian delegates signed or marked letters sent to imperial authorities pertaining to land possession and liberties such as war neutrality yet these letters are undoubtedly tainted by petitioners' motivations to appease their reading audience. Such letters to the empire provide evidence of exchanges among Acadians, but they give limited first-hand testimony to Acadian daily experiences and sentiments, cultural and oral traditions, intimate relationships, or thought processes. Akins, Casgrain, François-Edme Rameau de Saint-Père, and Placide Gaudet, through to more recent historians Naomi Griffiths, John Mack Faragher, Jean-François Mouhot, Christopher Hodson, and Gregory Kennedy, have dug through colonial archives to learn more about Acadian history via notary registers, judicial cases, birth and marital records as well as petitions to colonial governments. But as historian Laurent Dubois observes,

23 Thomas B. Akins, ed., *Selections from the Public Documents of the Province of Nova Scotia* (Halifax: Charles Annand, 1869), https://archive.org/details/selectionsfromp00akingoog/page/n11/mode/2up; Parkman, *Montcalm and Wolfe*; Casgrain, *Un pèlerinage au pays d'Évangéline; Henri-Raymond Casgrain*, ed., *Collection de documents inédits sur le Canada et l'Amérique* (Québec: L.J. Demers & Frère, 1888), https://archive.org/details/collectiondedoc00fragoog/page/n21/mode/2up; Henri-Raymond Casgrain, "Eclaircissements sur la Question Acadienne," in *Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada for the year 1888* VI (Montreal: Dawson Brothers, 1888), 23-75, https://archive.org/details/proceedingstrans06royauoft/page/n75/mode/2up.

24 Gisa I. Hynes, "Some Aspects of the Demography of Port Royal, 1650-1755," *Acadiensis* 3, no. 1 (Autumn 1973): 7-8, 17; Louis J. Dugas, "L'alphabétisation des Acadiens, 1700-1850" (MA thesis, Université d'Ottawa, 1992), ii, 28-9, 67-8.

scholars face "piecing together fragments and confronting many gaps" in their attempts to write the history of a largely illiterate people subject to colonial rule.[25]

Coupled with these challenges of absence, suppression, or fragmentation in the archives, Longfellow's *Evangeline* emerged as a critical component to remembrances of the Acadian colonial past. In the poem, Longfellow critiques British colonial actions and promotes pride in American westward expansion. He recounts the story of a young, innocent Acadian woman, whose world is tragically altered by the actions of British soldiers. Separated from her betrothed Gabriel, Evangeline endures exile and continuing displacement as she searches for her husband across the American frontier. Evangeline eventually settles in Philadelphia, where one day she discovers Gabriel lying on his death-bed. The poem concludes with the long-lost lovers buried alongside each other, far from their homeland.[26] Interpretations of this narrative continue to evolve, with debates over whether Evangeline is a heroine or a victim.[27] Regardless, this poetic work rooted in Haliburton's depiction of Acadian dispersal and suffering received worldwide acclaim. For Acadians reckoning with poverty and marginalization as a result of their traumatic 18th-century experiences, this piece of literature proved formative in the collective remembrance of their history.

Publications in the Acadian press in the late 19th and early 20th centuries reveal how the *Evangeline* narrative became a knot that had a tight hold on Acadians as they confronted their colonial past. In August 1867 Pamphile Le May's translated version of the poem was featured as a serial print in the

25 Naomi E.S. Griffiths, *From Migrant to Acadian: A North American Border People, 1604-1755* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005); John Mack Faragher, *A Great and Noble Scheme: The Tragic Story of the Expulsion of the French Acadians from Their American Homeland* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005); Jean-François Mouhot, *Les réfugiés acadiens en France, 1758-1785: l'impossible réintégration?* (Québec: Septentrion, 2009); Hodson, *Acadian Diaspora;* Gregory M.W. Kennedy, *Something of a Peasant Paradise?: Comparing Rural Societies in Acadie and the Loudunais, 1604-1755* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014); Laurent Dubois, "Maroons in the Archives: The Uses of the Past in the French Caribbean," in *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar*, ed. Francis X. Blouin Jr. and William G. Rosenberg (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 293-4.

26 Longfellow, *Evangeline*, 39-54, 100-1; Thériault, *Évangéline*, 54-6.

27 Judith Elaine Cowan, "Outcast from Paradise: The Myth of Acadia and Evangeline in Canadian Literature in English and in French" (PhD diss., Université de Sherbrooke, 1983), 192, 196-7, 259; Rita Ross, "Evangeline: An Acadian Heroine in Elite, Popular and Folk Culture" (PhD diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1993), 118, 124.

nascent Acadian newspaper *Le Moniteur acadien*.[28] Editor Israël Landry introduced Le May's translation as being a "sad and moving story, where Evangeline seems to personify the hardships and the sufferings of the Acadian emigration."[29] Twenty years later, the newspaper *L'Évangéline* adopted the heroine's name and featured a stanza from the poem in its first and subsequent publications that told of Acadians being "scattered like dust and leaves" and thus "naught but tradition remains of the beautiful village of Grand-Pré."[30] In its early editions, *L'Évangéline* featured another translated version of the Longfellow tale (in more narrative than poetic form) and many letters and articles refer to the heroine.[31] References to the poem are found in speeches at the Conventions nationales acadiennes in the late 1800s and early 1900s, and are featured in Casgrain's *Pélérinage au pays d'Évangéline* (published in 1887, 1888, 1889, and 1890).[32] According to Pierre Rajotte, Casgrain's work, alongside those of Longfellow, Napoléon Bourassa, and Rameau de Saint-Père, "contributed to the development of an Acadian 'common narrative' centred on the Deportation, which would mark Acadian literature until the 1960s." Rajotte argues that Casgrain's incorporation of Longfellow resulted in a "crystallization of history and fiction" that contributed to the "establishment of a mythic vision of Acadie."[33] Garnering international attention and appearing in the first Acadian press, literature, and historical works, *Evangeline* proved crucial in Acadian society and culture during the Renaissance and its legacy carried into the 20th century.

Anglophones in Nova Scotia started to embrace Longfellow's *Evangeline* story as well, as they began using it in marketable ways to economically

28 Pamphile Le May, "Évangéline," *Le Moniteur acadien*, 22 August 1867.

29 Israël Landry, *Le Moniteur acadien*, 22 August 1867.

30 See, for example, *L'Évangéline*, 23 November 1887.

31 "Évangéline: première partie," *L'Évangéline*, 23 November 1887 (Digby); "Évangéline: seconde partie," *L'Évangéline*, 14 December 1887; Commis-Voyageur, "Saulnierville, Baie Ste. Marie, N.-É.," *L'Évangéline*, 30 November 1887; Alpha, "Return From Exile," *L'Évangéline*, 30 November 1887; Francisca, "À l'Évangéline," *L'Évangéline*, 30 November 1887.

32 "Première convention nationale des Acadiens. Discours de l'Hon. S.F. Poirier, M.P..," *Le Moniteur acadien*, 1 September 1881, https://voi.lib.unb.ca/en/node/1679; "Discours de M. L'abbé Ph. L. Belliveau, Curé de Sussex," *Le Moniteur acadien*, 18 September 1890, https://voi.lib.unb.ca/en/node/347; Denis Bourque and Chantal Richard, *Les Conventions nationales acadiennes, 1900-1908* (Québec: Septentrion, 2018), 61, 110; Casgrain, *Un pèlerinage au pays d'Évangéline*, 121, 129, 141, 148, 242, 377, 382, 392, 445; Pierre Rajotte, "*Un pèlerinage au pays d'Évangéline* : l'encroisement de l'histoire et de la fiction," Présence francophone, no. 49 (1996): 72.

33 Rajotte, "*Un pèlerinage au pays d'Évangéline*," 72, 81.

benefit the province.[34] While Acadians were noticeably silent in early attempts to designate Grand-Pré as Evangeline's homeland, the 1920 erection of an Evangeline statue and its dedication in the absence of Acadian representatives seemed to prompt Acadians to more actively try to "claim the Grand-Pré site as their own."[35] During subsequent decades they held major gatherings in Grand-Pré, including a Convention nationale in 1930 and a bicentenary of the Deportation in 1955.[36] In acknowledging the popularity of *Evangeline* among both Anglophones and Acadians in the early 20th century, historian Ronald Rudin observes that "as Grand-Pré emerged as the principal site of memory connected with the deportation, the idea that the Acadians had willingly accepted their fate (and that no one was really responsible for it) became a central element in the story that was told."[37] Concerning memory, this parallels a contention by Joseph Yvon Thériault that the Evangeline story – as fictive as it may be – has been critical in creating collective memory for Acadians centred around their Deportation. Thériault argues that Acadian narratives stemming from the writings of Rameau de Saint-Père and continuing through to Léger's *Elle et lui* and Antonine Maillet's *Pélagie-la-Charrette* fail in silencing Longfellow, as they can only manage to "invert" this fictional narrative in their attempts at "recreating" an Acadie that had been forever "lost" in Longfellow's poem.[38]

Rudin and Thériault underscore the tightness of the knot wound by Longfellow's poem in the production of Acadian memory and identity through the 20th century, yet Léger's works *Elle et lui* and *Une fleur d'Acadie* should not be too quickly discounted as they reveal inaugural attempts to re-write the mythical history hinged on the imagination of "a stranger."[39] Léger's stories in many ways counter what Rudin describes as "the idea that Acadians had willingly accepted their fate" with the Deportation by recounting how some individuals chose to resist or to escape. Furthermore, Léger's works reveal that by the mid-20th century there was indeed an awareness of who was

34 Barbara LeBlanc, *Postcards from Acadie: Grand-Pré, Evangeline & the Acadian Identity* (Kentville, NS: Gaspereau Press, 2003), 61, 86–94.

35 Ronald Rudin, *Remembering and Forgetting in Acadie: A Historian's Journey through Public Memory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 186–7 (quotation on 187).

36 LeBlanc, *Postcards from Acadie*, 127–9, 133–40; Rudin, *Remembering and Forgetting in Acadie*, 187–95.

37 Rudin, *Remembering and Forgetting in Acadie*, 186.

38 Thériault, *Évangéline*, 186, 238–9.

39 Thériault, *Évangéline*, 186.

"responsible for it" and a growing boldness among Acadians in pointing to those responsible.[40] Léger raises the question of "What is the crime of these poor people?" and he incorporates primary sources including government documents, military reports, and colonial correspondence to identify the faults of Governor Charles Lawrence and his officers Murray, Winslow, and Monckton.[41] Léger's stories do not solely aim to "recreate" a lost, fictional Acadie, as he also claims truths of the Acadian past through depicting traditions and "inverting" the colonial archives. Léger pulls documents out of their colonial context and situates them in stories of Acadian experiences, thus providing the first published contributions (both literary and historical) intended to reveal significant aspects of Acadian history absent from works by outsiders.

Disrupting the archives and loosening the knot

In his novel *Elle et lui*, Léger weaves selected portions of archival material into the fictional story of Jean, a French migrant-turned-Acadian. Through this text Léger functions as a predecessor to recent historians by emphasizing how and why the Acadians were regarded as "useful subjects" by the British Empire.[42] When the Acadian region came under Britain through the War of Spanish Succession, Jean and his fellow Acadians received Queen Anne's 1713 promise that those "willing to continue our subjects" could "retain and enjoy their said lands and tenements, without any molestation."[43] Some Acadians still wanted to move elsewhere, but Léger recounts that in reality the Annapolis government did not want the Acadians to leave. Officials in Annapolis believed their migration would be "a major loss for the province" due to the garrison's dependency on Acadian wheat. Seeing them as "useful subjects," Governor Francis Nicholson detained them so they would "be profitable to their masters."[44]

Léger tells how during the subsequent decade the British wanted Acadians to cultivate and clear new lands, and to participate as part of the British

40 Rudin, *Remembering and Forgetting in Acadie*, 186.

41 Léger, *Elle et lui*, 117, 119; Haché, "Elle et lui : Tragique idylle du peuple acadien," chap. E.

42 For "useful subjects," see Akins, *Selections from the Public Documents*, 279–80. For "useful," see Akins, *Selections from the Public Documents*, 176, 197, 283, 584. "Subjects" is found throughout the archival documents when referring to Acadians.

43 Léger, *Elle et lui*, 28; Akins, *Selections from the Public Documents*, 264 (quotation in footnote).

44 Léger, *Elle et lui*, 28–9.

military. In 1727 Acadians declared their loyalty to the British Crown through Officer Robert Wroth, but only with certain "concessions"[45] that would allow them freedom to leave the area should they so choose, to practice their religion, and to remain neutral in imperial conflicts by not taking up arms for the British. When Lawrence Armstrong and Richard Philipps tried to overturn these "concessions,"[46] Jean met with his neighbors and advised them that due to Philipps's refusal to allow them to take their belongings with them and with having no purchasers for their land, they should stay settled where they were. He counselled his neighbors to act as "useful citizens" so they would be "left in peace" in their communities.[47] Philipps sent a letter acquiescing to Acadian concession requests, yet as imperial tensions escalated over the next 20 years and the War of Austrian Succession unfolded, Jean and his compatriots heard rumors reportedly coming from Massachusetts Governor William Shirley that their land may be taken by the British.[48] They went to Annapolis to speak to Governor Paul Mascarene, who reassured them that they would be left on their land given that they were deemed very "useful for the colony."[49]

This descriptor "useful" is found in letters by British officials in the colonial archives – letters that describe Acadians who they hoped to make loyal "subjects" – but its expression as "utile" in the French language alludes to a deeper meaning. The near homophone "outil," or "tool," has been used to describe the objectification of the enslaved, and Léger draws attention to Acadian dehumanization as they are deemed "useful" by the British to fulfill the empire's economic and political desires.[50] A graphic image of dehumanization occurs in each of Léger's books as he describes how during their Deportation Acadians were thrown around like "human cargo."[51] In *Elle*

45 Akins, *Selections from the Public Documents*, 78.

46 Léger, *Elle et lui*, 64; Akins, *Selections from the Public Documents*, 158, 79–80, 83–4.

47 Léger, *Elle et lui*, 65–6.

48 I have not found Philipps's letter that is quoted by Léger, but it is referenced in a letter by French missionaries that Casgrain found in Paris; see Léger, 66 as well as Casgrain, "Eclaircissements sur la Question Acadienne," 42.

49 Léger, *Elle et lui*, 78.

50 For the language of "tool" regarding imperial laborers, see, for example, Nicole Vanony-Frisch, "Les esclaves de la Guadeloupe à la fin de l'Ancien Régime d'après les sources notariales (1770–1789)," *Bulletin de la société d'histoire de la Guadeloupe*, no. 63–64 (1er trimestre–2e trimestre 1985): 6.

51 Léger, *Elle et lui*, 127; Léger, *Une fleur d'Acadie*, 60. See also Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, tran. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 41. First published in 1950, Césaire lists colonial atrocities and argues "They prove that colonization, I repeat, dehumanizes even the most civilized man; that colonial activity, colonial enterprise, colonial conquest, which is based upon contempt for the native and

et lui, Jean and his daughters Madeleine and Blanche endure living in poverty in Boston, and Léger describes how they laboured "against their will" and were seen as "beasts of burden found wandering."[52] This imagery of "cargo" and "beasts of burden" fits with statements by Governor Charles Lawrence, who hoped that exiled Acadians "may be of some use" for labour in the colonies and prove "profitable" since they are "healthy" and "strong."[53]

With this theme of imperial power over its "useful subjects" or "tools,"[54] Léger anticipates recent studies of Acadian and French colonial history. Jean-François Mouhot's *Les Réfugiés acadiens en France*, for example, examines how the French government leaders did not want to assimilate Acadians within France, but instead wanted to use these "submissive, patriotic French speakers" for its "civilizing mission" in the French colonies.[55] A few years later, in his *Acadian Diaspora*, Christopher Hodson examines the imperial designs around pre-dispersal Acadians, where "the logic of imperialism pigeonholded them as laborers suited for agriculture and nothing more."[56] Most recently, in *Something of a Peasant Paradise* Gregory Kennedy echoes Hodson and Mouhot, writing that "in this atmosphere of imperial war . . . the Acadians were less integrated into a French Atlantic world and more imposed upon as pawns and potential resources" – in other words, objects to be used for the benefit of the empire in the midst of their colonial rivalry over Atlantic trade.[57]

These academic works support the characterization in Léger's text of the British Empire seeing Acadians as "useful" tools for its economic ambitions; but these historians also argue that this viewpoint of the empire does not negate Acadian agency.[58] Similarly, Léger brings a sense of humanity to Jean and his family that cannot be adequately found in colonial archives, as he tells of their ability to make choices and to take action as individuals or on behalf

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justified by that contempt, inevitably tends to change him who undertakes it; that the colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as an animal, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform himself into an animal."

52 Léger, *Elle et lui*, 134.

53 "Charles Lawrence to Arthur Dobbs," 11 August 1755, 15-16, Placide Gaudet's Acadian Genealogy and Notes, Appendix B, https://archive.org/details/reportconcerning22publ/page/n269/mode/2up/.

54 Vanony-Frisch, "Les esclaves de la Guadeloupe," 6.

55 Mouhot, *Réfugiés acadiens en France*, 295.

56 Hodson, *Acadian Diaspora*, 20.

57 Kennedy, *Something of a Peasant Paradise?*, 7, 14, 211.

58 Kennedy, *Something of a Peasant Paradise?*, 209; Hodson, A*cadian Diaspora*, 14, 156, 160, 211.

of their family or community. As imperial tensions over Acadian boundaries rose, Governors Lawrence and Shirley became more suspicious of Acadian neutrality. They ordered Acadians to submit their guns and canoes to British authorities and Jean responds by leading Acadian delegates in signing petitions to the governor.[59] In the first petition, the Acadians express their commitment to Britain provided the empire continues to allow them "the same liberties" previously promised. The men who deliver this petition to Halifax get detained, and then Jean himself brings a second petition to remind the British council of their previous agreements and of the loyalties of the Acadians to the empire.[60] The council chooses to imprison Jean with his compatriots on Île Georges. Léger weaves these documented petitions into the story, framing them within the context of Jean and his neighbors' interpretations, sentiments, and requests rather than leaving them framed by other colonial documents exchanged between officials. By situating them in a way that reveals Jean's interpretation of former proclamations, Léger justifies the Acadians' innocence and highlights how previous agreements with the British shaped the Acadian presumption that they would remain protected. At the same time, British officials justified their fears of Acadian disloyalty through those very same documents. By recounting this story, Léger's work highlights Acadian abilities to negotiate with colonial governments while also accentuating ambiguities in interpreting archival records. Léger shows how these colonial documents can be deployed to articulate different meanings as they are set within a different contextual frame – and thus help better illuminate the lives of those who left minimal or fragmentary written sources.

As a powerful symbol of Acadian agency, Léger depicts how Jean chooses to trick British officers by feigning weakness so that he can escape and return to Grand-Pré. Jean's resistant act enables him to flee to his community, where he learns that the Acadian men are to gather in their church the next day to be given "instructions" of the king from John Winslow.[61] As Longfellow

59 Léger, *Elle et lui*, 91–5.

60 Léger, *Elle et lui*, 91–3 (quotation on 92); Acadiens aux Mines, "Requetes des Acadiens à Lawrence," 10 June 1755, 60–61, Placide Gaudet's Acadian Genealogy and Notes, Appendix C, https://archive.org/details/reportconcerning22publ/page/n359/mode/2up; Des habitants des Mines, et la Rivière-aux-Canards et des lieux qui en dépendent, "De la part des habitants des Mines à Lawrence," n.d., 62, Placide Gaudet's Acadian Genealogy and Notes, Appendix C, https://archive.org/details/reportconcerning22publ/page/n363/mode/2up.

61 Léger, *Elle et lui*, 105, 108–9; John Winslow, "Extracts from John Winslow's Journal," 5 September 1755, 19, 20, Placide Gaudet's Acadian Genealogy and Notes, Appendix A, https://archive.org/details/reportconcerning22publ/page/n279/mode/2up/.

describes, after entrapping the men in the church Winslow reads a document issued by Lawrence requiring that Acadians be put on ships while soldiers take possession of their land and livestock.[62] In Léger's text, Jean fails to convince Winslow not to follow Lawrence's orders and, as a form of resistance, Jean then turns to prayer. He observes that "after all, it is better to forgive than to need forgiveness, and the defeated are sometimes greater than the victor."[63] Like Jean's escape, this brings an inversion of power as Acadians may appear as victims on the surface but, in the context of moral sentiment and soul, they exercise power over the British colonial officers. By granting Acadians agency, be it to escape or to forgive or to fight (as seen in *Une fleur d'Acadie*), Léger disrupts the objectification of those deemed "useful subjects" in the colonial archives.

Léger causes further archival disruption by bracketing the colonial archival sources at the centre of his book with detailed descriptions of Acadian cultural heritage traditions. In Antonine Maillet's *Rabelais et les traditions populaires en Acadie* (1971), she contends that the elite of the Renaissance gave too little attention to the oral traditions of the Acadian working class and, in many ways, Léger's descriptions of Acadian cultural practices reflect the elitist and Catholic partialities Maillet criticizes.[64] Due to the authority of the Catholic church, tensions over French education, and the battle against illiteracy during the early 20th century, Léger describes traditions rooted in the Catholic faith and he repeatedly stresses the value of education and literacy. At the same time, Léger's mention of folklore and his emphasis on storytelling reflect the fundamentality of oral tradition in Acadian culture and history.

Through studies of Acadian folklore, scholars have uncovered clues to stories' ties across the Atlantic as well as to their preservation during the Diaspora. When Touraine native Nicolas Denys first traveled through the Acadian region in the mid-17th century, he observed how the Mi'kmaq told their children stories that they had "heard from their grandfather"; this practice paralleled European oral traditions, as in the case of France, where people "would tell children of the times of the fairies, of the Asses' skin, and the like."[65] Evidence of Acadian ties to French oral tradition is found via Denys's

62 Léger, *Elle et lui*, 108–9; Winslow, "Extracts from John Winslow's Journal."

63 Léger, *Elle et lui*, 111.

64 Antonine Maillet, *Rabelais et les traditions populaires en Acadie* (Québec: Université Laval, 1971), 13–15.

65 Nicolas Denys, *La Déscription géographique et historique des costes de l'Amérique septentrionale avec l'histoire naturelle du païs / The Description and Natural History of the*

mention of this "Asses' skin" story that falls under Conte-Type 510B in Paul Delarue's categorizations of folklore, as aspects of this story are woven into various documented Acadian "Cinderella" tales.[66] In her dissertation, Antonine Maillet argues that Acadian folklore is rooted in Rabelaisian stories that evolved in 16th-century France, and she asserts that these traditions continued through the Deportation as Acadian exiles carried their "oral literature" with them.[67] Léger's narratives, where he mentions folklore and emphasizes the significance of storytellers in his community, are precursors to Maillet's contention concerning this endurance of oral tradition.

Léger recounts how each Christmas season after midnight mass Jean's family returned home from church to share a meal and to tell "of traditions, secular legends, the stories of the were-wolves, of spirits."[68] Oral tradition in Acadian culture is further accentuated when Jean's family gathers around the hearth to hear grandfather Joseph recite the story of "our land."[69] In conveying an ominous sense of what is to unfold with the British, Joseph winds together stories of his family's past with lessons for their future. Joseph emphasizes the importance of orality, stating that the history he will recount is not "written like the one your father often reads to you in his big books." He describes how their Acadian ancestors lived "chapters" that deserve remembrance and he encourages them to continue recounting these stories, concluding that his own grandfather "said that telling about the past is to make it come alive again."[70] In *Une fleur d'Acadie*, Léger explains in the Foreword that Hélène's story is rooted in "a tradition preserved from generation to generation in the Cormier family" and he claims that her history would have been "lost like many others, if our mothers had not told it to us from age to age until our time."[71] Attune to issues of accuracy, Léger observes that through his research of the national archives he found that in Acadian storytelling "tradition had borrowed little

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Coasts of North America, trans. William Ganong (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1908), 418.

66 Ernest F. Haden, "La petite Cendrillouse, version acadienne de Cendrillon : étude linguistique," *Les Archives de folklore*, no. 3 (1948): 21–34; "Souillon," July 1948, MG 1, vol. 2809, #8, Nova Scotia Archives (NSA); Gerald Thomas, "La vieille sorciaise et la pelote de laine: une interprétation des contes types Aa-Th 480 (Les fées) + AA-Th 510 (Cendrillon)," in *Les Franco-Terreneuviens de la péninsule de Port-au-Port: évolution d'une identité franco-canadienne*, ed. André Magord (Moncton: Centre d'études acadiennes, 2002), 86–94.

67 Maillet, "Rabelais et les traditions populaires en Acadie," 9–10, 13–14.

68 Léger, *Elle et lui*, 33.

69 Léger, *Elle et lui*, 88.

70 Léger, *Elle et lui*, 88.

71 Léger, *Une fleur d'Acadie*, 5, 19; Cowan, "Outcast from Paradise," 192.

from legend" – implying that what was handed down orally was legitimized through select archives.[72] Léger thus lent credibility to those who told Acadian history in ways that subsequent generations could remember it. As a member of the educated elite in the early 20th century, Léger's inclusion of oral tradition reflects its prominence across all tiers of Acadian society and its deep roots in their colonial past.

Another aspect of cultural heritage that cannot be fully revealed in colonial archives, but that gets underscored in Léger's text, is the Acadian belief in God's power over nature and thus nature's power over humanity. On the night that the British ships arrived to deport Acadians in Grand-Pré, Jean and his family get separated onto two vessels. As the ships begin leaving the port, Léger's story reaches its climax with a storm that brought a "black fog that enveloped" the ships and a "furious sea."[73] In describing the conditions, Léger quotes a letter by a British captain who recounted how after leaving Mines "our boat was assaulted by one of the most violent storms I ever saw."[74] Léger underscores how the power of the storm brought fear to both the British and the Acadians. In the midst of the storm, with the "bloody" and "boiling" ocean, the lightning "flung around" by the sky, and the rain and hail that fell "with extreme violence," several British boats sank.[75] On the ship *Elizabeth*, Jean's ill granddaughter perished and, in her anguish, the baby's mother Rose chose to jump overboard. The archives often present an unwavering portrait of Britain's imperial dominance, but this story magnifies how the empire could prove subject to nature and to Acadian agency. The story of Rose's suicide may appear to represent her victimization at the hands of the empire, but Léger notes that she "became an easy prey for the storm" and she chose to commit her "spirit to [God's] hands."[76] Léger certainly intended for Rose's story to depict the suffering of Acadian society, yet historians' interpretations of suicide as a form of resistance among enslaved Africans can open doors for a new

72 Léger, *Une fleur d'Acadie*, 5.

73 Léger, *Elle et lui*, 126.

74 Léger, *Elle et lui*, 127; Abrm (Abraham) Adams, "Capt. Abraham Adams to Col. Winslow," 8 December 1755, 36, Placide Gaudet's Acadian Genealogy and Notes, Appendix B, https://archive.org/details/reportconcerning22publ/page/n311/mode/2up/. In the original English, Adams writes, "As to our Fleet which Sailed from Menis we had one of the Severest Storms I ever knew."

75 Léger, *Elle et lui*, 127 and Adams, "Capt. Abraham Adams to Col. Winslow"; Adams wrote "I am afraid Several of the Fleet was lost in ye Gale."

76 Léger, *Elle et lui*, 127.

analysis.[77] The story of the violent storm, with its culmination of Rose's suicide, symbolize the weaknesses of an empire that cannot control the storms nor its "useful subjects." In this context Rose's death proves the apogee of Léger's text, where beyond choosing how to negotiate, to escape, to forgive, or to create history, an Acadian woman decides to entrust her life to a God more powerful than an empire.

The power of choice attributed to Rose in this part of the story stands in contrast to the notable absence of Acadian women in the colonial archives. Apart from being listed in parish records, leaving occasional marks on a government document, or being mentioned in some judicial reports, there is minimal record of the voices of Acadian women themselves.[78] Yet, as is reflected in Léger's book titles and his note on how Hélène's story was passed through generations of "mothers," his fiction attests to Acadian women being an integral cord that Acadian culture and community are wound around. The centrality of women among Acadian society seems highly plausible given their large families that depended heavily on women's labour for their daily sustenance. In addition to raising children, women planted and harvested crops, worked to maintain the dykes, preserved foods for the winters, and made textiles; there is also a documented instance of women serving as community representatives when men were absent.[79] During and following the Diaspora, necessity warranted women acting as providers and more through the family separations and struggles for survival.[80]

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77 See, for example, Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 120; Londa Schiebinger, *Plants & Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2004), 131, 146; Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); and Terri L. Snyder, *The Power to Die: Slavery and Suicide in British North America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

78 Recent scholars turning their focus to Acadian women's history acknowledge the archival challenges they face; see Adeline Vasquez-Parra, "Les réfugiées acadiennes dans l'Atlantique français: des voix effacées," *Études canadiennes/Canadian Studies*, no. 88 (2020): 10, 16 as well as Isabelle LeBlanc, "Où sont les femmes dans la mémoire collective acadienne?," 16 June 2020, https://www.acfas.ca/publications/magazine/2020/06/sont-femmes-memoire-collective-acadienne. Concerning women's illiteracy in Port Royal and Grand-Pré based on his study of marital records, see Dugas, "L'alphabétisation des Acadiens," 67–9.

79 Griffiths, *From Migrant to Acadian*, 69–70, 263. Griffiths tells how some women "signed for their husbands" at a meeting in Minas in 1714.

80 Abbé Le Guerne, "Copie d'une lettre écrite par Monsieur l'Abbé le Guerne Missionaire des sauvages à l'Acadie, à Monsieur Prévost, Ordonnateur à l'Isle Royale," 10 March 1756, 349, 352, Placide Gaudet's Acadian Genealogy and Notes, Appendix N, https://archive.org/details/reportconcerning22publ/page/n931/mode/2up/; Faragher, *Great and Noble Scheme*, 339, 345–46, 349, 354–5, 356, 359; Hodson, *Acadian Diaspora*, 69; Vasquez-Parra, "Réfugiées acadiennes dans l'Atlantique français," 5–6.

At the beginning of *Elle et lui*, Jean's father dies fighting for the French Empire in Acadie, leaving Jean and his mother to fend for themselves in France. Jean's mother raises him alone, teaches him to read, and sets the foundation he needed so that when she died he could move across the Atlantic. Once in Acadie he meets and marries Jeanne and they begin to have a family. With the tragedy of displacement, the women surrounding Jean become his life support system. In Boston, his daughters Madeleine and Blanche find their family a place to live and figure out ways to provide for their father's needs. In Maryland, Jean's wife and his daughter Geneviève survived on their own for a decade; and while Jean searches in vain, it is Jeanne who finds him and knocks at his door. After experiencing a momentary joy, Jean falls into a listless state due to his desperation over being unable to provide for his family. Jeanne responds that just as in the Biblical narrative of suffering Job, they each must endure their times of struggle knowing that their sufferings will not last forever. When their family heads north to Canada, Jeanne dies en route and her daughter Madeleine steps up to lead with a "strong and valiant nature." As Jean mourns his wife, Madeleine symbolically lifts her father's head up to comfort and encourage him, just as his mother in France did when he was a child. Their family arrives to resettle in Jemseg, north of their former homeland, where Madeleine grabs an axe and with "great blows" takes down the first trees in the "virgin forest" (that in actuality was not so virgin given the centuries-long presence of the Wəlastəkokewiyik and Mi'kmaq in what is now New Brunswick). It is through these women that Acadians prove resilient as they "create new homes and establish new families."[81]

In *Une fleur d'Acadie*, female protagonist Hélène is named after a member of Pierre Thibodeau's family. Léger notes, however, that while she is listed as a descendent of one of Pierre Thibodeau's sons in the archival records "the registers are lacking when it comes to definitely establishing her ancestry."[82] Choosing this heroine whose roots cannot be traced symbolizes women's absences in the archives, yet Léger proceeds to grant Acadian women power in making history as active participants in the past and as storytellers through to the present. During the Deportation Hélène rings the church bell to warn others of the British arrival, but not everyone in her community manages to

81 Léger, *Elle et lui*, 10, 12–17, 130–4, 158, 165, 169. Léger does acknowledge the presence of the Wəlastəkokewiyik and the Mi'kmaq in his account of Jean being summoned to accompany l'Abbé Bourg for a meeting with the Wəlastəkokewiyik in Meductic in 1778; see Léger, *Elle et lui*, 191–2.

82 Léger, *Une fleur d'Acadie*, 19.

escape. Hélène gets captured and separated from her fiancé. Left to fend for herself, she lives as a prisoner in Fort Cumberland until the officers decide to let her go so that they can follow her back to capture other escapees. In referring to Abbé LeGuerne's report of 60 women in the region who witnessed their husbands captured by the British, Léger makes Hélène representative of those women left to survive in Memramcook, Petitcodiac, and Chipoudy and to contribute to the restoration of their people.[83] Léger observes how a man like Paul Revere, who also warned his people of arriving British soldiers, is memorialized with monuments and glorified in poetry while a woman like Hélène goes unmentioned.[84] According to literary critic Marguerite Maillet, Madeleine and Hélène "are women who, according to the author, assured the survival of the race and made 'the Acadian great in adversity'."[85] Yet neither the archives nor Longfellow's poem adequately testify to women's necessary participation in the sustenance and endurance of the Acadian people, and Léger's text addresses these absences.

When Jean and Madeleine and other Acadian families who accompanied them on their return north arrive in Jemseg, their first action as a community is to divide up land "lots" to use for cultivation. Léger describes these lots as being located on the "ruins" of a French community in Jemseg, but does not acknowledge that these claims were made on traditional lands of the Wəlastəkokewiyik who also endured displacement during the Seven Years War as well as with the settlement of Acadians and later Loyalists.[86]

Léger provides greater context for the meaning of "land" than is found in archival records; but this subject requires a cautious approach since Léger himself proves a proponent of the elite Renaissance ideals that called for Acadian agricultural labour while exalting their declared "homeland" or "patrie." In a 1910 speech published in *Le Moniteur acadien*, Léger informed his audience that their ancestors "left traces of their labors on the soil of their homeland" that were not "erased." He eloquently describes how, as a consequence of the Deportation, their "agriculture was neglected, the soil

83 Abbé Le Guerne, "Copie d'une lettre écrite par monsieur l'Abbé Le Guerne," 349.

84 Léger, *Une fleur d'Acadie*, 33.

85 Maillet, *Histoire de la littérature acadienne*, 154.

86 Léger, *Elle et lui*, 168. On the homelands and dispossession of the Wəlastəkokewiyik, see Micah A. Pawling, "Wəlastəkwey (Maliseet) Homeland: Waterscapes and Continuity within the Lower St. John River Valley, 1784–1900," *Acadiensis* 46, no. 2 (Autumn 2017): 8, 10–11 and Andrea Bear Nicholas, "Settler Imperialism and the Dispossession of the Maliseet, 1758–1765," in *Shaping an Agenda for Atlantic Canada*, ed. John G. Reid and Donald J. Savoie (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2011), 24.

infertile, and the farmers were exploited"; but then he celebrates Acadian "progress" as they are "buying back their lost land and acquiring new lands."[87] Léger idealized the prospect of Acadian husbandry and he relates it to their lifestyle both prior to and after the Deportation.

Léger's biases point to the difficulty of ascertaining the meaning of "homeland" for 18th-century Acadians, yet his novels prompt reflection on what land ownership might mean for a settler society (albeit a unique one[88]) that has a history of seeing claimed land violently taken by a colonial power – leaving them dispossessed and struggling through tremendous adversities as they try to survive and then re-establish themselves. Certainly not all Acadian exiles focused on returning to their former homeland. Yet many did, and it seems fair to contend that as a dispersed people who formerly succeeded in fishing and agriculture for their survival and trade they desired having a homeland where they could once again lay claim to their own "estates."[89] In describing Jean's family's return to the north, Léger tells how they hoped to find "a corner of land where they could freely rest their head."[90] Upon arriving in Canada, the families in Jemseg supplied Britain with military support and provisions during the American Revolution.[91] Despite this Acadian support for the empire, Léger describes another British betrayal when in 1783 Nova Scotian Lieutenant-Governor John Parr promised British Loyalist refugees the Acadians' land in Jemseg as a "gift."[92] According to Léger, when the new Lieutenant-Governor Thomas Carleton of the young province of New Brunswick passed a law requiring registered land titles, many Acadians did not possess titles for their property. The government reclaimed it and Acadians

87 Antoine-J. Léger, "Échos d'une grandiose démonstration nationale," *Le Moniteur acadien*, 1 September 1910, https://voi.lib.unb.ca/en/node/992.

88 For recent debates concerning Acadians and their labeling as settler colonists, see John Reid, "Quelques réflexions sur l'Acadie et l'historiographie du « settler colonialism »," *Repenser l'Acadie dans le monde* (blog), 8 April 2020, https://www.repenserlacadie.com/post/l-acadie-et-l-historiographie-du-settler-colonialism-john-reid as well as Travis Wysote and Erin Morton, "'The Depth of the Plough': White Settler Tautologies and Pioneer Lies," *Settler Colonial Studies* 9, no. 4 (2019): 489–93.

89 "Duc de Nivernais to Duc de Praslin," 17 February 1763, Jean-François Mouhot's Base documentaire sur les Acadiens réfugiés en France au XVIIIe siècle (1758–1785), https://www.septentrion.qc.ca/acadiens/documents/31; Brasseaux, "*Scattered to the Wind*", 12, 14, 24, 28; Haliburton, *Historical and Statistical Account of Nova Scotia*, 1:183–95 (quotation on 193).

90 Léger, *Elle et lui*, 161.

91 Bumsted, "Resettlement and Rebellion, 1763–1783," 172. According to Bumsted, there is record of Acadians in the St. John River Valley who "had assisted the British cause" even though most settlers living in the region "claimed to have taken no sides."

92 Léger, *Elle et lui*, 193.

once again endured displacement with the influx of Loyalist settlers.[93] Many relocated north to Madawaska or south to Memramcook, where they "chose land and started once again to clear it."[94] As is evidenced in the surfacing petitions and contracts with the British and French colonial governments, it seems logical that for many Acadians a desire for land possession carried through in their post-dispersal search for land to cultivate and to call their own. During the late 19th century, ties to the land became a theme of Acadian conventions and contributed to bringing a growing sense of unity among a scattered population. In Acadian discourse the language of "land" and "patrie" began to have multiple and often intertwined meanings, understood as being a source for sustenance, a place of belonging, and/or an imagined homeland. Léger's text reveals the value of looking at colonial land agreements and judicial cases through a lens that magnifies recurring contentions over Acadian land possession and expropriation.

Finding an undercurrent

Léger was a member of the Acadian elite whose writings certainly depicted a fantasized Acadian family that personified elitist ideals of religion, education, and agricultural labor. Léger's novels, however, also include sections that disrupt the authority of colonial archives in knowing a marginalized community's history and that challenge the idolization and subsequent commodification of the story of Evangeline. In what may be interpreted as a resistant act in writing the history of his own people, Léger attributes heroism to those who go unaccounted for in both archival records and in Longfellow's poem. In *Une fleur d'Acadie* he writes how Acadians who were "plundered, deported, and sick" all had to have a "heroic courage,"[95] and at the conclusion of *Elle et lui* Jean declares to his remaining family "The Acadian nation must come to life once again, in you and through you, obscure heroes."[96] Rather than heroicizing a romanticized figure invented by an American author and buried for eternity in Philadelphia, Léger advocates for Acadians to be remembered for their capacity to endure colonial struggles and to replant communities.

Through his research and his writing Léger weaves selected colonial archives into stories that bring to the surface how the empire expected

93 Léger, *Elle et lui*, 194; Condon, "Loyalist Arrival," 199.

94 Léger, *Elle et lui*, 193–99 (quotation on 199).

95 Léger, *Une fleur d'Acadie*, 47.

96 Léger, *Elle et lui*, 172.

Acadians to function as "tools," thus overlooking that this same population held agency as individuals, families, and communities. Léger's works further contest the assumed power of the British Empire by portraying its vulnerability to nature and to its "useful subjects," and his narratives emphasize the importance of women and the significance of land for a society rooted in a history of diaspora. By weaving archival sources through his narratives, Léger's novels foreshadow a literary movement that begins disrupting the Acadian history carried by powerful currents stemming from colonial archives and Longfellow's *Evangeline*.

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