

Undergraduate Research Symposium May 20, 2011 Mary Gates Hall

Online Proceedings

SESSION 1J

ple through time, from their homes in France to Acadia to Louisiana.

STORIES AND SIGNS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Session Moderator: James Clauss, Classics

Mary Gates Hall 258

1:00 PM to 2:30 PM

* Note: Titles in order of presentation.

**From France to Acadia to Louisiana: An Examination of
???Civilizing Discourse??? and Materialism in
Acadian-Cajun Folk Tales**

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Mentor: Kimberlee Gillis-Bridges, English

Folk and fairy tales are often far less whimsical than we would like to believe. They most often have purpose. They tell us how to best navigate the world of people. One shared idea among tales of most cultures is a historical notion that folklorist Jack Zipes terms, ‘civilizing discourse.’ This is the idea that women must be skilled enough to prepare their men for the challenges of a ‘civilized’ society. Of course, how one accomplishes this security is dependent on the society one must navigate. The path to economic security and success was inscribed in folkloric proportion in 17th century French and 19th century American psyches; conjoined with materialism. For the Acadian people though, the same path was traditionally marked by more egalitarian principles. Having spent years in diaspora after a striking, tragic instance of English ethnic cleansing that began in 1755, the Acadian people have managed to hold on to such principles and solidify their lost Acadian cultural identity. Some have returned to their original settlement in Canada. Many remain scattered, predominantly in Louisiana, and have come to be known as Cajuns. Though research into folk tales has yielded several means of categorizing the components and motifs of each tale, locating the origins of such components can be a difficult, if impossible process. Most tales are in constant flux, even if they are written down. The case of the Acadians however offers a unique opportunity to study the folk tales of a people whose strong oral storytelling culture has preserved their stories. Given the disparity between Acadian and French/American values we find that varied instances of ‘civilizing discourse’ in French, Acadian, and Cajun tales become cultural markers; where we may follow the journey of the Acadian peo-