

Evangeline as Identity Myth

Barbara Le Blanc

Volume 15, Number 2, 1993

Femmes et traditions
Women & Tradition

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1083203ar>
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1083203ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (print)
1708-0401 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Le Blanc, B. (1993). Evangeline as Identity Myth. *Ethnologies*, 15(2), 139–153.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1083203ar>

Article abstract

This article examines *Evangeline* as an identity myth, which during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, contributed in promoting a feeling of unity among members of the Acadian people. After a brief examination of the four stages of myth — spring, summer, autumn and winter — the reader is plunged into the four levels of myth — geographical, economical, sociological and cosmological. The study of the four levels shows how the use of reality in the myth's description acts as a bridgehead between present and past. Finally the exploration of the changes in vitality of the Evangeline myth begins with the primary phase or creation of the story. It then looks at the implicit phase or acceptance of the tale by a wide audience. Lastly, it considers the present rationalized questioning phase. Examination of these three phases of vitality allow the reader to comprehend how perceptions and the use of Evangeline have changed since her first creation up until the present day. The conclusion suggests that if myth is a way of finding meaningful existence, as well as emotion translated into image in order to promote a sense of group identity, then Evangeline appears to fulfill this function.

EVANGELINE AS IDENTITY MYTH

Barbara LE BLANC

Ethnologie des francophones en Amérique du Nord
Université Laval

Introduction*

The most well-known fictitious Acadian heroine, *Evangeline*, is an identity myth *par excellence*. In the later part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, she touched the hearts and emotions of an Acadian generation in search of their self-hood. She served as one part of a cultural glue in the midst of a Renaissance of the Acadian nation. Philosopher Cassirer has developed the thesis that “myths are emotional in origin and their function is essentially practical and social, namely, to promote a feeling of unity or harmony between the members of a society as well as a sense of harmony with the whole of nature or life.”¹ Acadian heroine *Evangeline* fulfilled a fundamental function as identity myth in touching the emotions of thousands to unite them.

The Evangeline Tale

The poem *Evangeline* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow published in 1847, tells the story of love thwarted in which a pair of lovers who have grown up together in the midst of peace and plenty, a terrestrial paradise, the Arcadia of the New World, are separated during the tragic historical event of the Deportation (1755-1763). Immediately after their wedding engagement has been made public, they are unwillingly parted and placed on separate sailing vessels bringing the Acadian human cargo to the thirteen British colonies situated along the Atlantic seaboard. *Evangeline* spends the rest of her life searching for her true love, Gabriel. They are reunited, only at the end of their lives, in Philadelphia, city of brotherly love. After many years of journeying, *Evangeline* has become a Sister of Mercy catering to the sick and aged. A smallpox epidemic ravages the city and one of the two, Gabriel, dying, expires his last breath of life in the arms of his beloved *Evangeline*. The other, heartbroken, soon follows her lover to the grave.

In the poem, *Evangeline* symbolized a loyal, demure, selfless, docile, faithful, patient, religious woman, the ideal of the Victorian woman. She elicited respect and admiration from Acadian and non-Acadian alike because of her

* I wish to thank Sally Ross, Laurier Turgeon and Jocelyne Mathieu for their helpful comments.
1. David Bidney, “Myth, Symbolism, and Truth”, *Myth: A Symposium*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok, Indiana University Press, 1955, p. 12.

courage, endurance and steadfast love for her fiancé Gabriel. Her courage in adverse situations combined with an eternal love and her unrelenting hope of finding her beloved endeared her to readers.

Evangeline became a household name in the last decades of the nineteenth and early years of the twentieth centuries in both Canada and the USA when it became required reading in schools. Unsuccessful attempts were made by chairman of the board of Governors at the University of Toronto to remove the poem *Evangeline* from Canadian schools because it created "a wrong impression of British justice, chivalry and administration".²

Evangeline as Myth

An examination of the tale reveals that it follows Northrup Frye's four stages of myth: "(1) Spring (dawn, birth). Creation, beginning, promise; (2) Summer (noon, marriage or triumph). Success in love, war, and life generally; (3) Fall (twilight, death). Tragic descent and defeat; and (4) Winter (night, dissolving into formlessness). Reign of the inchoate and malevolent."³

The first part of the mythic tale of *Evangeline* depicts a spring or dawn of life, the beginnings of a nation in Acadia, the youth of the heroine, the promise of marriage to her beloved Gabriel and thus a continuity through the fruitful love of the youth of the group, the hope of the future and continuity of community. Spring passes to the summer of success in love and the verge of the happy union between *Evangeline* and Gabriel. The summer is quickly overcome by the shadow of autumn in the form of the tragic Deportation order. An isolated *Evangeline* searches for her beloved. Her quest for love continues throughout the winter phase in the dark night of ceaseless wanderings in an inchoate world. The triumph of the worldly suffering comes in the death of the two lovers. The Christian audience would understand that in death there is triumph, resurrection and the realization of a new heavenly paradise where suffering no longer plagues humankind.

Myths evolve at various levels: geographical, economical, sociological and cosmological.⁴ The geography described in the poem *Evangeline* really does exist. In all versions of the tale, the narrative event is situated in known and named places. Anthropologist Dan Jorgensen explains that "myth's inscription on the

2 . M.S. Spielman, "The Acadian Renaissance and the Development of Acadian-Canadian Relations 1864-1912, 'des frères trop longtemps séparées'", Ph. D. Thesis, Halifax, Dalhousie University, 1975, p. 13.

3 . Martin S. Day, *The Meanings of Myth*, New York, University Press of America, 1984, p. 60, and William G. Doty, *Mythography: The Study of Myths and Rituals*, Alabama, The University of Alabama Press, 1986, p. 180.

4 . Claude Lévis-Strauss, "The Story of Asdiwal", *The Structural Study of Myth and Totemism*, ed. Edmund Leach, London, Tavistock Publications, 1967, p. 7.

landscape contributes to ritual's power, but, beyond this, it gives myth a bridgehead in the everyday world that invites a mythical construction of contemporary events."⁵ The fictional Evangeline and her life were set in the real life places such as Grand-Pré, Nova Scotia and Saint Martinville, Louisiana within the context of a real historical event, the Deportation, making her tale more believable and creating a "bridgehead" for the modern reader to a far-removed and tragic past.

The creation of the historic sites where the fictitious heroine lived as a young woman and from where she was deported in Nova Scotia as well as the place where she searched in vain for her lover in Louisiana and other American states adds to the power of the creation of Acadian identity through Evangeline. Jorgensen explains that the myth is empowered "by linking it to a familiar place in order to compel events."⁶

As a result of this empowerment, the sites became almost sacred places of pilgrimage for Acadians the world over. Jorgensen explains that "sacred places are not only sites where things happened: they are also places where things continue to happen."⁷ In effect, if one looks at Grand-Pré National Historic Site, it continues to have a symbolic importance today. Cultural events, sponsored by Acadian organisations, at the site have encouraged Acadians to celebrate their history, culture and identity. The weaving of present with the past is an example of what Jorgenson describes as the cultural construction of the past which suggests that the "past is not simply there, but rather, that it is something that people build, and that it has an architecture."⁸ As a result "myth and sacred sites are powerful allies in their insistence that the past is never far away."⁹ Evangeline's statue, located at Grand-Pré National Historic Site, Nova Scotia and in Saint Martinville, Louisiana, is a constant and continual reminder of the Acadian past for both Acadians and non-Acadians.

The linkage between named locations such as Grand-Pré and the myth of Evangeline gives the latter an indispensable bridgehead in the everyday world, lending myth a kind of concreteness that vouches for its authenticity. The spatial references which we see in the use of the geographical sites such as Grand-Pré serve as a form of validation and thus empirical proof of the narrative claims of the poem.¹⁰ As a result of this validation many people became first aware of and subsequently sympathetic to the romanticized version of the Acadian story.

5 . Dan Jorgenson, "Placing the Past and Moving the Present: Myth and Contemporary History in Telefolmin", *Culture*, 2, 1990, p. 47.

6 . *Ibid.*, p.54.

7 . *Ibid.*, p. 47.

8 . *Ibid.*, p. 47.

9 . *Ibid.*, p. 48.

10 . *Ibid.*, p. 54.

Just as the geographical places named in the Evangeline tale were real, so the economic activities described are also real and reflect the lifestyle of Acadians in the eighteenth century. The “fruitful valley” and the “vast meadows” served as “pasture to flocks” in the “little village of Grand-Pré”. “Dikes, that the hands of the farmers had raised with labour incessant, Shut out the turbulent tides” paints for the reader the Acadian *Aboiteaux* or dykes which were unique to the Acadian people.¹¹ Although Evangeline and Gabriel are fictitious characters, the agricultural context is a relatively historically accurate portrait of the Acadian farming community of the eighteenth century.

The third aspect, the sociological aspects of the tale, also depicts an accurate picture of the Acadian reality in the eighteenth century. The narrative paints the social structure and order of the community. The family is the central focus of the collectivity with the Roman Catholic Church as its guiding institution. The village priest assures that certain rites and rituals are celebrated in order to maintain moral and social order. One example is the union of young couples which assures the continuity of the group. The importance of the marital rite of passage is evident when the poet describes the series of actions which Gabriel, the suiter must perform in order to marry Evangeline. The future groom and father-in-law must officially ask the future bride’s father for her hand in marriage and the local notary, René Le Blanc will pen to paper the legal document. “Rene Le Blanc will be here anon, with papers and inkhorn, Shall we not be glad, and rejoice in the joy of our children?” exclaims Benedict, Evangeline’s father after his joyful acceptance of Gabriel’s marriage proposal.¹² The community celebrates the marriage announcement and legal agreement: “Michael the fiddler was placed, with the gayest of hearts and of waistcoats...Gaily the old man sang to the vibrant sound of the fiddle.. Merrily, merrily whirled the wheels of the dizzying dances.”¹³ But in the tale, the Acadian social order is undermined by the arrival of the foreign troops and the subsequent order of Deportation.

The exile and turmoil are the subject of the second part of the poem. The heroine is thrown into an “exile without end and without example in story... Before her extended, Dreary and vast and silent, desert of life.”¹⁴ Throughout a part of her journey she is accompanied by the spiritual and moral guide Father Felician, the village parish priest.

Year after year, the seasons pass. Evangeline grows old. Gabriel’s image remains in her mind’s eye. “Patience and abnegation of self, and devotion to others, This was the lesson a life of trial and sorrow had taught her.”¹⁵ The story

11 . Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie*, Halifax, Nimbus, 1962 (1847), p. 3-4.

12 . *Ibid.*, p. 17.

13 . *Ibid.*, p. 25.

14 . *Ibid.*, p. 41-42.

15 . *Ibid.*, p. 75.

ends with the reunion of Evangeline and Gabriel at death's door, finally freed from their wanderings and misfortunes. Throughout the tale, the sociological level overlaps with the cosmological level.

Cosmology places us in the branch of metaphysics dealing with a systemic and structural order of the universe. According to Edmund Leach: "At the heart of the matter is our recognition that man is mortal and that illness threatens death. The central doctrine of all religion is the denial that death implies the automatic annihilation of the individual self."¹⁶ In *Myth, Symbolism, and Truth*, David Bidney states that "mythical thought is especially concerned to deny and negate the fact of death and to affirm the unbroken unity and continuity of life"¹⁷ The heroine's quest brings her into a life's journey through the Christian rites of passage, through the trials and tribulations of human existence, culminating in death with the passage to another world that presupposes a Christian afterworld of eternal love, justice and tolerance. Christian belief holds that there is life after death, an eternal life with God. In this way the tale of Evangeline reinforces these beliefs and it promotes what Bidney considers a pragmatic function in myth of "belief in the solidarity of life and society and overcoming the fear of death."¹⁸

The mediating bridge between the material, earthly world and the "other" world is symbolised by the representatives of the divine force on earth, the holy men such as the priest and by the holy places such as the church. The respect offered to the priest in the Evangeline tale sets the tone for the importance placed upon religious authority in Acadian society: "Solemnly down the street came the parish priest, and the children Paused in their play to kiss the hand he extended to bless them. Reverend walked he among them; and up rose matrons and maidens, Hailing his slow approach with words of affectionate welcome."¹⁹ The ringing of the Angelus reminds us that "these simple Acadian farmers — Dwelt in the love of God and man."²⁰ Besides representing religious authority in the village the priest was also the pedagogue: "Father Felician, Priest and pedagogue, had taught them their letters."²¹

When Evangeline is introduced she is described as purified by the ritual of the mass. "Fairer was she when, on Sunday morn, while the bell from its turret Sprinkled with holy sounds the air, as the priest with his hyssop Sprinkles the congregation, and scatters blessings upon them."²² Other aspects of the important rituals of Catholicism are described: "Down the long street she passed, with her

16 . Edmund Leach, *Culture and Communication: The Logic of which Symbols are Concerned, An Introduction to the Use of Structuralist Analysis in Social Anthropology*, coll. Themes of the Social Sciences, Cambridge, Cambridge, University Press, 1976, p. 71.

17 . David Bidney, *op. cit.*, 1955, p. 13.

18 . *Ibid.*, p. 15.

19 . Longfellow, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

20 . *Ibid.*, p. 5.

21 . *Ibid.*, p. 9.

22 . *Ibid.*, p. 6.

chaplet of beads and her missal” and “— a more ethereal beauty — Shone on her face and encircled her form, when, after confession, Homeward serenely she walked with God’s benediction upon her.”²³ The four levels of myth are intermingled in the tale and are used according to the needs of the moment.

Changes in the Vitality of Evangeline as Myth

In the book *Mythography: The Study of Myths and Rituals*, William Doty states that we can distinguish three phases in the relative vitality of a myth, moving from the original, most powerful and dynamic context to the most rationalized form. The first phase, the *Primary Myth* “addresses itself directly to the need of the culture to have answers concerning questions and problems of human existence.”²⁴ Although the literary tale was not written by an Acadian, the source of the tale came from their common historical heritage, the deportation experience.

The Acadian elite of the last decades of the nineteenth century utilized Evangeline to rally the dispersed Acadian community. Her impact cannot be overlooked as one examines her in terms of the second phase of vitality or *Implicit Myth*. In the second phase, the *Implicit Myth*, Doty states that the story becomes widespread, accepted and more widely shared. As the basic elements of the Evangeline story became widely known, the tale awakened an interest and had an impact upon many segments of the North American population including poetry lovers, scholars and tourists whether Acadian or non-Acadian.

Pamphile Le May’s French-Canadian translation of the poem was published in Quebec in 1865. The first Acadian newspaper, *Le Moniteur Acadien*, established in 1867, offered its readers a copy of the poem. “Its editorials used the poem as a source of illustrations for messages concerning Acadian unity.”²⁵ Upon the establishment of a second Acadian newspaper, the name chosen for the written messenger that would enter Acadian homes was *L’Évangéline*, and the poem appeared in series form in its pages.

The newspaper *L’Évangéline* founded by Valentin Landry in Digby, Nova Scotia in 1887 was published for almost 100 years. At the 1890 Acadian Convention held at Church-Point in Nova Scotia, Landry explained why he had chosen the literary character’s name for his newspaper:

Il fallait un messenger qui put se rendre souvent au sein des familles acadiennes de la Nouvelle-Écosse, leur parler avec l’idiome de nos pères, et je crus que nul ne serait mieux reçu que la poétique et historique Évangéline.

23 . *Ibid.*, p. 6.

24 . William G. Doty, *op. cit.* 1986, p. 50.

25 . *Ibid.*, p. 36.

C'est elle qui vous entretiendrait sur le sujet si important que l'éducation. C'est elle qui parlerait avec connaissance de cause des notions si utiles de l'hygiène, qui vous fournirait les renseignements voulus pour faire de vous des agriculteurs pratiques. Elle irait chaque semaine sous vos toits pour vous raconter les nouvelles courantes dans la langue qui semblait interdite dans la presse de notre province depuis que notre province et l'Acadie existent.

Ce plan me paraissait beau; le projet, malgré toutes les difficultés qui s'y rattachaient nécessairement, me parut noble, patriotique, digne d'efforts et de sacrifices.²⁶

The publication of the entire poem in its French translation in a series form in the two local French language newspapers indicate the importance placed upon the poem by the Acadian elite of the Maritimes. Excerpts from the poem were also included in the school textbook *Troisième livre de lecture* used in Acadian schools in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. A. T. Bourque, inspired by the poem, wrote a song *Evangeline* which has been sung by many generations of Acadians. The Acadians who went on to higher education often learned the poem by heart. Pascal Poirier, appointed to the senate in 1885, affirmed that he recited and memorized the poem while walking on the campus of College Saint-Joseph.²⁷

It has always surprised people that there are no Acadian tales, legends, laments which talk about the Deportation or the years of exile. "Those themes were first dealt with by foreign writers who created the literary myth of Acadia, paradise lost, of a martyred people who are resigned and faithful."²⁸ The name *Evangeline* had not even existed in the Acadian community before the creation of the poem. Already in 1854 a boat was christened with the name *Evangeline* in the community of Pubnico.²⁹ By 1864 Acadian parents in Nova Scotia were using the name *Evangeline* for daughters.

Acadian summer festivals of the twentieth century in Nova Scotia include a contest where an *Evangeline* and a *Gabriel* are chosen to represent the community in public relations activities. Besides the official winners, costumed *Evangelines* and *Gabriels* dot the summer festivities. Although not necessarily accurate reproductions of eighteenth century apparel, the wearers symbolically attempt to link up with their past and show respect for their ancestors by choosing to wear the costumes. This phenomenon also occurred in Louisiana.

The appearance of *Evangeline* provided a mechanism for linking the Canadian Acadians with their American cousins in Louisiana. In 1930 Louisiana

26 . Alphonse Deveau, *La ville française, tome III: Les personnes éminentes*, Yarmouth, Les éditions Lescarbot, 1988, p. 107-108.

27 . Ernest Martin, *L'Évangéline de Longfellow et la suite merveilleuse d'un poème*, Paris, Hachette, 1936, p. 222.

28 . Marguerite Maillet, *Histoire de la littérature acadienne: de rêve en rêve*, Moncton, Les éditions d'Acadie, 1983, p. 518.

29 . Yarmouth Family Herald, Dec, 6, 1927 cited in Public Archives of Nova Scotia Scrapbook MG9V43, 360.

Senator Dudley Le Blanc brought a delegation of Miss Evangeline's from Louisiana to Grand-Pré in Nova Scotia. In 1931, Canadian Evangelines returned the visit to Louisiana. They were accompanied by two Gabriels. Similar visits followed in 1936, 1946 and 1963. The conscious use of the Evangeline myth by the Acadian elite in both Canada and the USA helped to develop an awareness at the grassroots level of the Acadian population. Rita Ross in her article "Evangeline in Louisiana: The Acadian-Cajun Connection" concludes that Evangeline provided a framework for the blossoming and growth of an Acadian-Cajun connection already based on a cultural and historical fact.³⁰

Another result of the arrival of the poem Evangeline on the literary scene was the writing of travel-cum-history books using some references to the Acadians or to Evangeline in their titles. The first to appear was *Acadia: or, a Month with the Bluenoses* by Frederick Cozzens in 1859. Ten years after Cozzens' book appeared, there are indications that tourism was flourishing in the Annapolis Valley. Two engines on the Annapolis-Grand-Pré line of the Dominion Atlantic Railroad, completed in 1869, were called *Evangeline* and *Gabriel*, while the evergreen arches erected for the opening ceremonies of the railway line read WELCOME TO THE LAND OF GABRIEL AND EVANGELINE. In 1871 group tourism began when four hundred people, the Coit party from Boston, travelled on a special train through the Annapolis Valley.³¹

Not all residents of the Annapolis Valley were sympathetic to the interest and sympathy felt by the Americans for the Acadians. The author of a Kentville tourist brochure makes a point of reminding Americans of their participation in the expulsion while he chastises them saying "we cannot overlook the fact that a vast amount of sympathy has been misplaced and wasted on the Acadians."³² Although the Annapolis Valley residents did not initiate the new tourism industry, explains Ingalls, businessmen and entrepreneurs provided transportation and accommodation for the visitors.

In this period of a new and developing tourism trade, Evangeline and the land she came from represented a romantic vision of pastoral beauty. She represented all that was simple and loyal. The land represented peace, calm, tranquility and simple beauty. The new tourist was in search of this peaceful paradise. Marketing techniques began using the name Evangeline because of these characteristics. The best pure bread was Evangeline bread. The faithful steadfast Maritime busline was Acadian Lines. Pure drinking water or soft drinks were called Evangeline.

30 . Rita Ross, "Evangeline in Louisiana: The Acadian-Cajun Connection", *Les Maritimes: Ethnologie régionale/The Maritimes: Regional Folklore*, Québec, Folklore Association of Canada/ Association canadienne d'ethnologie et de folklore, 1991, p. 23.

31 . Sharon Ingalls, "Mad About Acadians", *Beaver: Exploring Canada's History*, 69, 1989, p. 25.

32 . *Ibid.*, p. 25.

In 1907 John Frederick Herbin, descendant of an Acadian mother whose family name was Robichaud, bought a site in the hamlet of Grand-Pré with the intention of setting up a memorial park to his Acadian ancestors. He also wrote a book about the history of the Acadians. In 1917 the Dominion Atlantic Railway (DAR) bought a portion of the land from Herbin. It was the Railway Company which took the the Evangeline theme and marketed it to its fullest. Every passenger received a booklet entitled *Evangeline Land in Nova Scotia* which gave a romantic description of the journey by train through the Annapolis Valley. The opening text in their brochure read “the Land of Evangeline, a veritable summer paradise, rich in legend and in history.”³³

Louisiana was also affected by the Evangeline story. Two other written versions of the Evangeline tale were created in Louisiana, one by Sidonie de la Houssaye and another by Felix Voohries. Madame de la Houssaye wrote a novel in 1888, entitled *Pouponne et Balthazar*, in which she takes the Longfellow theme of lovers separated at the time of the Deportation in Acadia but gives the story a Louisiana local colour. Madame de la Houssaye recounts the story as if it was a personal family legend heard from her grand-mother. In her story the Acadian couple are reunited but in their new life in Louisiana they become acceptable citizens within the Creole population. Although the Creoles responded well to the novel, the Louisiana Cajun response to it was negative.³⁴

Felix Voohries wrote an English-language novelette, *Acadian Reminiscences: The True Story of Evangeline*. According to Voohries, he had heard the story from his grand-mother. In Voohries' tale the heroine is Emmeline Labiche and her fiancé is Louis Arceneaux. They too, like Evangeline and Gabriel, lived in Grand-Pré and like their counterparts were separated from one another at the time of the Deportation. When the two lovers are reunited in Louisiana, Emmeline meets Louis under an oak tree in present day Saint Martinville. Her initial joy turns to grief when she realizes that Louis has not been as steadfast as she and that he has another love. She goes mad and dies. Voohries hoped to “awaken cultural pride among his fellow Acadians”.³⁵ (Brasseaux, 1992: 19) Until Carl Brasseaux's study of the Voohries tale it was commonly believed that this version was the true story of Evangeline. Throughout the 20th century Louisiana academics such as George E. Bible, Thomas J. Arceneaux and Henry Lewis Griffin believed that Voohries story was based on historical figures.³⁶

33 . Dominion Atlantic Railway Brochure, *The Land of Evangeline: The Historical Paradise of Canada*. Halifax, Dominion Atlantic Railway.

34 . C. Brasseaux, *In Search of Evangeline: Birth and Evolution of the Evangeline Myth*, Louisiana, Blue Heron Press, 1988, p. 14-16.

35 . Brasseaux, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

36 . *Ibid.*, p. 29-30.

As a result of the original Evangeline tale and its subsequent Emilie Labiche version, the tourism market grew in this southern state of the USA. Visitors were attracted to Louisiana especially because of local version of the tale written by Felix Voohries. In 1925 a Longfellow-Evangeline National Memorial Association was formed and received a charter. Its purpose was to establish a national park in Saint Martinville. Besides affecting tourism, the tale inspired film-makers, amateur and professional playwrights as well as musical composers. Even a Classics Comic Book version was written for younger audiences.³⁷ Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Evangeline was widely accepted, adopted and transposed into other expressions whether cultural or touristic in nature.

Although Evangeline became a central motif in the Acadian Renaissance in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century, certain Acadians today believe that she symbolizes a silent and resigned Acadie and wish to offer more positive role models. Thus the myth is moving into

37. Filmmakers: The Canadian Bioscope Company was formed in Halifax in November 1912 and this company produced the first Canadian film, *Evangeline*. The movie had its first public showing at the Empire Theatre on Jacob Street, Halifax on February 2, 1914. There was standing room only. It was also shown in other communities such as Amherst, Truro, Windsor, New Glasgow, Sydney, Moncton, Fredericton, Montreal, Regina and New York. The publicity used to entice the public to view the film reflect the importance which was placed on the pastoral tranquility of the land of Evangeline. The following is an example of the publicity inviting audiences to come and see the film: HAVE YOU SEEN EVANGELINE? All scenes photographed in the land of Evangeline including Annapolis Valley, Port Royal, and Grand-Pré. A Pure, Sweet, Sympathetic Pastora; of French Acadian Life in ACADIA, HOME OF THE HAPPY. (Nova Scotia Archives) Annapolis Valley got free publicity because many of the scenes were filmed in communities in the valley: Port Royal, Annapolis Royal, and Grand-Pré. Although many researchers have tried to find a copy of the first Canadian film none has been located. There are several still shots of the scenes which give an idea of the scope of the production. In 1922 a Hollywood version of Evangeline was produced by William Fox featuring the actress Miriam Cooper. In 1929 there was a second Hollywood production starring Delores Del Rio. The Mexican actress who played Evangeline pledged money for a statue to mark the supposed burial site of Evangeline in Saint Martinsville and agreed to be cast in her likeness. The official unveiling coincided with the arrival of 138 Canadian Acadians on April 19, 1931. The statue sits majestically and calmly next to the parish church in Saint Martinsville. 20th century Acadian film-maker Ginette Pellerin is presently doing research for a film about Evangeline and her impact. Playwrights and Musical Composers: Trois Gabriel pour une Evangeline, a comic theatre piece created by Cheticamp Acadian Ernest Boudreau, written in the 1980s entertained residents and tourists alike. James Clark of Jamestown, New York wrote a musical play. Nova Scotian Sten Erik has recently completed a musical play and a children's story based on the Longfellow poem. Musician and teacher Ross Thompson of Wolfville, Nova Scotia is presently working on a musical production. Acadia University located in Wolfville, N.S. produced an opera in the 1950s. The late Doctor Graham George, former professor of Queen's University, Kingsston, Ontario, produced an opera of Evangeline in 1948. Phil Price of Hantsport, N.S has recently written a musical play. In the 1950s the poem Evangeline was transformed into a comic book version for the Classics Illustrated Series. The list could go on but these examples serve to show how Evangeline lived a period of wide acceptance, adoption and transformation.

the third phase of vitality, the *Rationalized Myth*, where the “concern at this point is to preserve the originating myth by rationalizing it, by interpretations that show that the original terms of the myth can be rewritten in such ways that they no longer conflict with more recent knowledge and understanding”.³⁸

Several contemporary Acadian writers have rejected the Evangeline myth and have replaced her with other symbols. What Longfellow considered to be an illustration of faithfulness and the constancy of woman no longer interest all of the Acadians. New ideologies are trying to fill in the silence and substitute Longfellow’s Evangeline. Perhaps this reaction and changing attitude among certain members of the Acadian elite may be caused by self-reflection and a strengthened sense of Acadian identity. “Myth tends to recede before the advance of realism and self-conscious reflection.”³⁹ As a result of reflection, some Acadians seek to nourish a developing sense of Acadian identity with indigenous characters as opposed to foreign creations. Two such examples have been created by Acadian writer Antonine Maillet.

In the play *Evangeline deusse*, Antonine Maillet proposes an Evangeline who speaks the language of her people. Evangeline in the Maillet play, is a 20th century Acadian woman who shares her exile in a Montreal park with two male ex-patriots, a Jew and a Breton. The *Sagouine* or Washerwoman, a character also created by Antonine Maillet offers another woman figure which may replace Evangeline. She is 72 years old and speaks the Acadian dialect of Bouctouche, New Brunswick. In the summer of 1992 a theme park called *Pays de la Sagouine* was created in New Brunswick to honour this down to earth Acadian woman. Far from the silent Evangeline, la Sagouine comments “in her own Acadian language and with scathing humour, on the many injustices and troubles suffered by her people.”⁴⁰

The song *Evangeline, Acadian Queen*, by Angèle Arsenault, well-known Acadian singer and songwriter from Prince Edward Island, provides proof of the degree to which Evangeline has infiltrated our mental and physical landscapes.⁴¹ The song, in an humourous manner, is a litany of Evangeline images which confront us as we drive through some Acadian regions.

Gerald A. Larue in his book *Ancient Myth and Modern Man* states that all myths can be considered identity myths because “they relate to human efforts at self-understanding.”⁴² He explains that myths enable “the community to live amid the cosmic and sociological tensions and pressures”. He believes that myths

38 . Doty, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

39 . Bidney, *op. cit.*, 1955, p. 21.

40 . Jacques M. Chevalier, *Semiotics, Romanticism and the Scriptures*, New York, Mouton de Gruyter, 1990, p. 30.

41 . Angeline Arsenault, “Evangeline, Acadian Queen”, *Libre*, 1977, SPPS 19903.

42 . Gerald Larue, *Ancient Myth and Modern Man*, Englecliffs, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1975, p. 183.

enable the “individual to understand his place in the world, to grasp the dimensions of being human, to comprehend limits and purpose and perhaps to give meaning to human existence.”⁴³

Concluding Remarks

The statue of Evangeline stands solitary in Grand-Pré National Historic Site, a site which commemorates a French speaking group in the midst of an ocean of English speaking settlers who were granted land as a result of the Acadian Deportation. The statue of Evangeline stands as a haunting silent witness to the tragic event of 1755. Perhaps the silent statue of Evangeline in the midst of the lush green weeping willow trees and blossoming flowers of the park speaks more loudly than most might imagine. The gentle, patient, pure, selfless, steadfast heroine immortalized in stone at the park conveys a strong meaning for the interpretant who enters into an interaction with the object and decodes her meaning.

It is in part thanks to the universal meaning embodied in the Evangeline tale and the various material manifestations of the heroine that the Acadian tragedy of the Deportation remains to remind of the intolerance which can lead to hate and racism. It further makes the reader aware of the feelings of rejection which can exist in society regardless of the military, political or economical reasons that contribute to the occurrence of such actions. The Deportation was an example of denial of a whole group of people because they were unwilling to sign an oath of allegiance. Most individuals can relate to the feeling of rejection and thus sympathize in some degree with the Acadians. The rejection experienced by the Acadians might also help understand their willingness to adopt a character created by a descendant of the group which had rejected them. Perhaps it was an easier way of being accepted by their perceived oppressors and as a result gave them the ability to accept themselves as heroes and survivors rather than as victims or guilty participants.

The pure and steadfast love exhibited by the heroine Evangeline serves as an eternal truth that many social groups can identify with and when they do, a sense of hope shines upon the darkness of intolerance and rejection. Evangeline has become a mythical and metaphorical message bearer carrying the torch of lasting love and eternal hope, not only for many Acadians who are the direct descendants of the Deportation experience but to others at grips with finding solutions to meaningful existence, a major function of myth.

Will Evangeline remain to haunt? Will she be displaced by a more “authentic” Evangeline? Will she only remain in brand-names for breads, soft drinks or ladies underwear in years to come as described in the Arsenault song?

43. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

Will she retain her mythical proportions? Whatever does become of her, since her creation in 1847, she has affected the psyche of thousands. If "myth is emotion turned into image"⁴⁴ perhaps Evangeline became the image for thousands of the emotion she represented, a roller-coaster ride through the happiness and sadness of existence, bringing meaning to the journey of life.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ancelet, Barry Jean, "Elements of Folklore, History and Literature in Longfellow's Evangeline", *Revue de Louisiane/Louisiana Review*, 11, Lafayette, 1982, p. 118-125.
- Arvin, Newton, *Longfellow: His Life and Work*, Westport, Conn., Greenwood Press, 1977.
- Beane, Wendall, and William G. Doty, ed., *Myths, Rites, Symbols: A Mircea Eliade Reader*, New York, Harper Colophon Books, vol. 1, 1975.
- Bidney, David, "Myth, Symbolism, and Truth", in Thomas A. Sebeok, *Myth: A Symposium*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1965.
- Brasseaux, Carl, *In Search of Evangeline: Birth and Evolution of the Evangeline Myth*, Thibodaux, Louisiana, Blue Heron Press, 1988.
- Callois, Roger, *Le myth et l'homme*, Paris, Gallimard, 1981 (coll. «Idées»).
- Chevalier, Jacques M., *Semiotics, Romanticism and the Scriptures*, New York, Mouton de Gruyter, 1990.
- Cormier, Cécilia, "Le père A. T. Bourque et la chanson patriotique acadienne", *L'Évangéline*, Moncton, 1976, p. 12.
- Day, Martin S., *The Meanings of Myth*, Lanham, Md., University Press of America, 1984.
- Deveaux, Alphonse, *La ville française*, tome III: *Les personnes éminentes*, Yarmouth, Les éditions Lescarbot, 1988.
- Dominion Atlantic Railway Brochure, *The Land of Evangeline: The Historical Paradise of Canada*, Halifax, Dominion Atlantic Railway, 1935.
- Doty, William G., *Mythology: The Study of Myths and Rituals*, Alabama, The University of Alabama Press, 1986.
- Eliade, Mircea, *Aspects du myth*, Paris, Gallimard, 1963.
- _____, trans. by Willard R. Trask, *Myth and Reality*, New York, Harper and Row, 1963.
- Elliot, Shirley B., "A Tale of Love in Acadie, The origin of Longfellow's 'Evangeline'", *Atlantic Advocate*, vol. 48, n° 8, April, 1958, p. 48-49.
- Griffiths, Naomi, "Longfellow's Evangeline: The Birth and Acceptance of a Legend", in *Acadiensis*, New Brunswick, University of New Brunswick Press, Spring, 1982, p. 28-41.

44. Bidney, *op. cit.*, 1955, p. 14.

- Hawthorne, Manning, & Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *The Origin and Development of Longfellow's Evangeline*, Portland, Maine, The Anthoensen Press, 1947.
- Ingalls, Sharon, "Mad About Acadians", *Beaver: Exploring Canada's History*, 69, 1989, p. 21-27.
- Jorgenson, Dan, "Placing the Past and Moving the Present: Myth and Contemporary History in Telefolmin", in *Culture*, 2, 1990.
- Larue, Gerald, *Ancient Myth and Modern Man*, Englecliffs, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1975.
- Leach, Edmund, *Culture and Communication: The Logic of which Symbols are Concerned, An Introduction to the Use of Structuralist Analysis in Social Anthropology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976 (coll. «Themes of the Social Sciences»).
- _____, ed., *The Structural Study of Myth and Totemism*, London, Tavistock Publications, 1967.
- Leeming, David Adams, *The World of Myth*, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude, "The Story of Asdiwal", in Leach, Edmund. ed., *The Structural Study of Myth and Totemism*, London, Tavistock Publications, 1967, p. 1-47.
- Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth, *Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie*, Halifax, Nimbus, 1962 (1847).
- Maillet, Antonine, *La sagouine*, Montréal, Leméac, 1974.
- _____, Antonine, *Évangéline Deuse*, Montréal, Leméac, 1975.
- Maillet, Marguerite, *Histoire de la littérature acadienne: de rêve en rêve*, Moncton, Les éditions d'Acadie, 1983.
- Martin, Ernest, *L'Évangéline de Longfellow et la suite merveilleuse d'un poème*, Paris, Hachette, 1936.
- Milwraith, J. N., *A Book About Longfellow*, London, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1900.
- Olson, Alan M., ed., *Myth, Symbol, and Reality*, Notre Dame and London, University of Notre Dame Press, 1986.
- Ross, Rita, "Evangeline in Louisiana: The Acadian-Cajun Connection", in *Canadian Folklore canadien*, 13:2, 1991, p. 11-23.
- Sebeok, Thomas A., ed., *Myth: A Symposium*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1955.
- Spielman, M. S., "The Acadian Renaissance and the Development of Canadian Relations 1864-1912", unpublished Ph. D. Thesis, Halifax, Dalhousie University, 1975.
- Strenski, Ivan, *Four Theories of Myth in Twentieth Century History: Cassirer, Eliade, Lévi-Strauss and Malinowski*, Iowa, University of Iowa Press, 1987.

-
- Voohries, Felix, *Acadian Reminiscences: The True Story of Evangeline*, Lafayette, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1907.
- Williams, Cecil B., *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, New Haven, Conn., College & University Press, 1964.
- Wynn, Graeme, "'Images of the Acadian Valley': The Photographs of Amos Lawson Hardy", in *Acadiensis*, New Brunswick, University New Brunswick Press, 1985, p. 59-83.
- Yarmouth Family Herald*, December 6, 1927, cited in Public Archives of Nova Scotia Scrapbook MG9V43, 360.