

**Lucille GUILBERT et al., *Pauvre ou vagabond: le quêteux et la société québécoise* (Québec, Rapports et mémoires de recherche du CELAT, 1987, vi. + 142 pp. ISBN 2-920576-18-6)**

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Cette étude, qui apporte une contribution significative à l'histoire maritime du Québec, est pionnière, car aucune synthèse n'a été entreprise sur le sujet jusqu'à maintenant. Au total, il s'agit d'un ouvrage important dont l'un des mérites est de bien cerner toute la question du pilotage au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle et de rassembler une documentation d'un grand intérêt qui ouvre la voie à d'autres problématiques de recherche. Une meilleure connaissance par le public des activités maritimes est susceptible de constituer un élément déclencheur conduisant à un mouvement de recherche qui, espérons le, se fera par le biais de plusieurs disciplines. L'ouvrage est fort accessible et sérieux, et les amateurs d'histoire maritime éprouveront beaucoup de plaisir à le lire.

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Lucille GUILBERT *et al.*, *Pauvre ou vagabond: le quêteux et la société québécoise* (Québec, Rapports et mémoires de recherche du CÉLAT, 1987, vi. + 142 pp. ISBN 2-920576-18-6)

This work is a welcome addition to the increasing body of study which attempts to analyze traditional folkloric texts as instantiated discourse within which are couched the values, attitudes, beliefs, and indeed the entire ethos of the social group. As such, it offers not only invaluable insight into the historical and contemporary roles of the *quêteux*—or beggar—in Québec society, but attempts to devise a model for the separation of narrative as text and narrative as discourse. In her introduction to the work, Guilbert provides an outline of the various “types” of *quêteux* she will be examining. She takes care to point out, however, that these are not merely “analytic types” devised and adopted to fit her data, but represent real distinctions recognized in traditional Québec society. These distinctions are based on the perception of the *quêteux* as someone “qui n'est pas comme tout le monde”; that is, an individual who is seen as operating outside the norms governing the behaviour and defining the responsibilities recognized by the group. As such, the *quêteux* is a marginal character

whose presence is potentially disruptive to the stability of the group as a whole.

Guilbert identifies three “*profils de quêteux [qui] sont présentés par les récits de tradition orale: le pauvre, le vagabond, et le pèlerin*”. [23] Each of these types possesses distinct characteristics, and group attitudes towards them are reflected in the discourse treating each one. “*Le bon pauvre*”, or good pauper, is treated as a “known other” whose only transgression is her or his legitimate poverty owing to circumstances outside the individual’s control. Discourse dealing with the pauper tends to highlight the Christian value of hospitality and charity, an attitude originating in the early Catholic association of the beggar with Christ. This perspective was further emphasized in nineteenth-century Quebec by religious institutions which legitimized the pauper’s situation and issued *certificats de pauvreté* to paupers to support and give proof of their status. The pauper thus becomes demarginalized, in the sense that the tradition of holy charity is reified with each act, and a slot is created identifying the pauper’s role and relationship to the social group.

The discourse concerning the pauper does not stop here, however. While stories demonstrating the positive consequences of the host’s freely offered charity and hospitality are numerous, a second characteristic is attributed to the pauper: the supernatural power to exact vengeance for humiliating and insulting treatment. Thus, one encounters such stories as that of the woman who mockingly turns away a deformed pauper and subsequently bares a child with the same infirmity. According to Guilbert, the function of such discourse is clear: “when collective sanctions are no longer enough to prevent the mocking of the feeble and the deformed, another necessary and inevitable sanction must be administered from elsewhere. One thus attributes the *quêteux* with the power to avenge themselves by casting spells on their tormentor”. [30; translation mine]. Moreover, the spell cast is one designed to teach a lesson by paralleling the type of insult or disrespect shown towards the pauper.

Despite the emphasis on charity and respect for the pauper, the value system of traditional Québec society does discriminate the legitimate pauper from the *mauvais pauvre*. Nineteenth century *curés* constantly reminded the parishioners to beware of bringing disrepute upon the community by offering alms to able-bodied paupers who, while able to support themselves, individually and deliberately choose not to do so out of laziness or fondness for alcohol. In such cases, charity is to be refused, and should the pauper reply by casting a spell, this may be broken by the *curé*. In stories of such encounters, the

opposition between the priest's holy powers and the pauper's unholy magic, combined with the priest's inevitable victory, serves to reaffirm the stability of the community's social and religious orientations. And while Guilbert does not say so explicitly, one might add that such discourse constructs a frame within which the seemingly contradictory values of offering and withholding Christian charity are reconciled.

As Guilbert writes: "Le marginal est objet d'un discours social. . . A travers les récits oraux qu'il véhicule, un groupe social questionne ainsi ses propres règles de fonctionnement, confirme ses normes en se servant de celui qui vit en contradiction avec elle." [4] Indeed, the discourse on the *quêteux* is more a manifestation of the group's investigation of its own norms, values and motivations than it is a comment on the *quêteux* per se. In this way, the presence of the *quêteux* is a dual one: a physical presence which allows the community to exercise and reaffirm its value system which is further reinforced by the *quêteux* symbolic presence in the realm of traditional narrative discourse. In this way, discourse on the *quêteux* redefines and recreates a positive image of a marginal (and hence potentially threatening) character, and this allows the *quêteux* reintegration into society. However, this reintegration is accomplished on the group's terms through its discourse; the group never truly comes to know the nature of the daily life of the *quêteux* as a real individual as opposed to a textual stereotype.

In Part II of her study, Guilbert moves on to discuss the "Quêteux perçu comme vagabond", the *quêteux* as "unknown other", an outsider and a stranger who moves from community to community begging alms and charity. Unlike the good pauper, the vagabond is a truly threatening figure who resists integration into the social structure. He (for it is invariably a male figure), is regarded with a mixture of fear, rejection, and distrust, and is often perceived as a bringer of death and disease. The unknown vagabond is often credited with possessing the *evil eye* and the power to disrupt the community. Guilbert discusses how this fear might be the result of "displacement", whereby inexplicable misfortunes are attributed to an outsider, who thus serves as a concrete focus for the group's anxiety and aggression. These negative traits are highlighted in the discourse on the vagabond.

Guilbert also outlines a number of the "functional" explanations for this representation of the vagabond in Québécois narrative discourse. The vagabond is an unknown factor whose presence is often used as an explanation for otherwise inexplicable natural or social phenomena. In the course of "narrativization", the vagabond is portrayed as representative of "les forces sauvages, non domestiquées

par le contrôle permanent d'un groupe. Parce qu'il est nomade, étranger, et solitaire, le quêteux menace la tranquillité du groupe et son économie précaire." The vagabond is doubly a menace to group solidarity in that the spells that he might cast isolates the victims from the rest of the group "en les marginalisant temporairement ou définitivement". [89] Such discourse often emphasizes the vagabond's particular danger to women and children; indeed, these outsiders are often portrayed as "le diable déguisé en quêteux". [91]

Guilbert's analysis of the social dimension of narrative discourse is interesting and informative. Less so is her discussion of the discourse structure in terms of Proppian structuralism and Greimas' theory of structural semantics, which tends to undermine the conclusions reached in the earlier analysis. However, this evaluation may be due to personal bias; certainly, those who continue to adhere to this analytic tradition will not be displeased with Guilbert's constructions and associations. To be sure, her conclusion that "le conte merveilleux... semble le seul lieu où l'errance individuelle soit tolérée et valorisée comme quête personnelle et quête de soit" [102] is a perceptive and astute attempt to establish links of intertextuality for her corpus.

In the conclusion, we are reminded once again that the discourse forming the basis of the study is the product of the cohesive social group, and that the definition of the *quêteux* contained in this discourse is more a reflection of the group's perceptions and concerns than it is an accurate representation for the *quêteux* per se. That is, the discourse implies an individual speaker and an audience bound in a communicative relationship at some moment in time. As such the experience or event will be *narrativized* in different ways according to the intended message of the narrator. As Guilbert points out, an oral account will be transformed for reasons other than simple forgetfulness or a desire to introduce originality. Tradition bearers, as social actors, participate in the transmission of values and behavioral norms, which they then incorporate with changing values and perspectives. And both of these are reflected in their social discourse.

To conclude, Guilbert's work is a good example of how folkloristics and discourse analysis may profitably be incorporated in a single interdisciplinary study. I'd have liked to see more reference to the discourse strategies employed in different types of texts (eg. direct and indirect speech; anaphora and cataphora; and some of Labov's narrative discourse components). My most serious criticism is with regards to the author's use of Greimas' theory of structural semantics in a discussion devoted to social discourse and narrative communica-

tion. For while such semantic analysis carries its own perspective on discourse, it tends to emphasize the textual encoding of signification, as opposed to the socially-oriented creation of meaning during communicative events. That is, it tends to be more devoted to discourse as text ("textanalyze") than to the study of discourse as communication in context. Those not familiar with Greimas' thus will find Guilbert's use of the terms "competence" and "performance" in her discussion of narrative structure [29; 91-92] somewhat confusing, for she uses the former to designate characteristics of the narrative actor's will, power, and skill to execute specific aims, and the latter as the actual execution of those aims. This is unfortunate since these terms carry very different meanings in the domain of discourse as communicative interaction from those they carry in the field of discourse as narrative text. Moreover, the lack of any explanation of this part of the analysis and the limited examples of such application of structural semantics to the corpus leaves the reader (at least this reader) unconvinced as to its findings.

Less serious but equally bothersome is the absence of a copy of the "questionnaire soigneusement élaboré" [40] which the author states was used to collect data for a case study on the Bellechasse region of Québec. The findings are summarized in essay form, but it would have been instructive for the reader to compare the stated findings with the types of questions asked in order to evaluate the field methodology employed by the researchers. Fortunately, the author does provide a good sampling of ethnotexts to which the reader may refer. Finally, given the overall quality of the study, it is unfortunate that a combination of typographical errors and poor printing and reproduction detracted from the work as a whole.

Overall, *Pauvre ou vagabond* is an interesting treatment of the social relationship between cohesive group and marginal individuals, and of how this relationship becomes activated in social discourse. And despite the criticisms noted, it is a study which makes one look forward to the author's future explorations in this field.

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