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THE EVANGELINE OAK: OF LOST LOVES AND FOUND OBJECTS

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Abstract: Down by the bayou in St Martinville, Louisiana, lies an oak tree which is supposed to mark the meeting place of Emmeline Labiche and Louis Arceneaux: the 'Evangeline' and 'Gabriel' whose legendary love, sundering and reunion is chronicled in Henry Longfellow's epic poem 'Evangeline'. In this paper, in response to the conceptualisation of the mediatisation of romantic love expounded by Storey and McDonald (2013), I use an associative structure to explore a range of 'found' cultural, literary, historical, group analytic and psychosocial associations to this legend and to give an account of my own personal response to it. I locate the idealised story of Evangeline and Gabriel and their unconsummated pairing at the heart of the Romantic movement and its links to both contemporary and late-modern colonial discourses and I place this in the context of a wider commentary on the alienation of emotional states of being in consumerist societies.

Feeling is deep and still; and the word that floats on the surface
Is as the tossing buoy, that betrays where the anchor is hidden.
Therefore trust to thy heart, and to what the world calls illusions.
Gabriel truly is near thee; for not far away to the southward,
On the banks of the Teche, are the towns of St Maur and St Martin.
There the long-wandering bride shall be given again to her bride-groom,
There the long-absent pastor regain his flock and his sheepfold.
Beautiful is the land, with its prairies and forests of fruit-trees;
Under the feet a garden of flowers, and the bluest of heavens
Bending above, and resting its dome on the walls of the forest.

They who dwell there have named it the Eden of Louisiana!

From *Evangeline: A Tale of Acadia* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow ([1847] 1995: 40-41)

[W]e are never so defenceless against suffering as when we love, never so forlornly unhappy as when we have lost our love object or its love.

From *Civilization and its Discontents* by Sigmund Freud ([1930] 1991: 270)

In South Louisiana, ten miles or so north of New Iberia up Highway 31, lies the town of St. Martinville. As you drive along South Main Street, off to your right, you will find the white-walled Church of St. Martin de Tours, whose website claims for itself the title of 'Mother Church of the Acadians' (Diocese of Lafayette, 2013). If you then walk past the church, down through the back streets towards the dark, sleepy, leaf-shrouded waters of Bayou Têche, you will come to the Evangeline Oak Park. A 'Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism' plaque bears the following inscription:

Evangeline Oak

Longfellow's poem "Evangeline" immortalized the tragedy of the Acadian exile from Nova Scotia in 1755. This oak marks the legendary meeting place of Emmeline Labiche and Louis Arcenaux, the counterparts of Evangeline and Gabriel.

The *Evangeline Oak* is one nodal point in a complex matrix of narratives and discourses, histories and legends, that spread out and down through time like its overhanging branches and tangled roots. To introduce and anticipate my theme, I should say straight away that this is in fact the fourth such tree to bear the name of 'the Evangeline Oak' (Dairon, 2011: 52). Things are not what they seem! It is, however, the only 'Evangeline Oak' that matters, for it is a 'found' object. I have my own story to tell, about how I found it and what I did with it; and other stories to relay, of what so many others before me have made of it.

Huey P. Long, populist politician and the 'Kingfish' of Randy Newman's *Good Old Boys* (1974), made a famous speech under the (an?) Evangeline Oak in 1927, as part of his successful campaign to become Governor of Louisiana:

It is here under this oak where Evangeline waited for her lover, Gabriel, who never came. This oak is an immortal spot, made so by Longfellow's poem, but Evangeline is not the only one who has waited here in disappointment ... Evangeline wept bitter tears in her disappointment, but it lasted only through one lifetime. Your tears in this country, around this oak, have lasted for generations. Give me the chance to dry the eyes of those who still weep here. (Long, 2013; see also Hebert-Leiter, 2009: 14)

In 1933 Paul Claudel, the French Ambassador to the United States, followed in Long's footsteps and also delivered a speech beneath the Oak (Dairon, 2011: 56). In a very different sort of speech given in 1942, in the French Quarter of New Orleans, to the Annual Dinner of the Medical Library Association, Rudolph Matas speaks of 'the Teche or Evangeline Country, perhaps the most typical, beautiful and romantic gem' of the landscape of Louisiana and of 'a pilgrimage to the woodland shrine of Evangeline, the unhappy maiden immortalized by Longfellow in his grand epic of the Acadian Exile' (Matas, 1942: 435-6). James Lee Burke's fictional Cajun detective, Dave Robicheaux, can be found following "the old backroad through St Martinville toward New Iberia. An electric floodlight shone on the white face of the eighteenth-century Catholic church where Evangeline and her lover were buried under a spreading oak." (Burke, 1987: 35) Finally, here is Longfellow's 'Evangeline' again, apostrophising her elusive Gabriel under an oak tree *somewhere* down near the bayou:

Ah! How often thine eyes have looked on the woodlands around me!
Ah! How often beneath this oak, returning from labor,
Thou has lain down to rest, and to dream of me in thy slumbers!
When shall these eyes behold, these arms be folded around thee?"
(Longfellow, 1995: 47)

Storey and McDonald (2013) mobilise the concept of 'mediatisation' to research how in a postmodern world our narratives of love and desire cannot but be received and that we deploy media objects - 'found' objects, as I have suggested - to express our feelings in culturally specific ways. They argue that we do not have access to feelings of romantic love independent of or unmediated by the culture in which we live. In this paper, partly in response to their work, I locate the idealised story of Evangeline and Gabriel and their unconsummated pairing at the heart of the Romantic movement and its links to both contemporary and late-modern colonial discourses. My method will be to use an associative structure to explore a range of 'found' cultural, literary, historical, group analytic and psychosocial associations to this oak tree: this 'woodland shrine' which I made part of my own narrative of romantic love and to which, in November 2010, I made my own pilgrimage.

Evangeline was completed in February 1847 and published at the end of October that year. Longfellow was at that time Smith Professor of Modern Languages and Belles-Lettres at Harvard and a significant figure in literary and intellectual circles. Some folklore of a kind has developed around the moment that the idea for the poem first came to him. McFarland (2010) suggests that a clergyman named Horace Conolly had passed on to Longfellow a story that had been told to him by one of his parishioners. Griffiths (1982) has it that both Longfellow and Nathaniel Hawthorne were told the story at a dinner-party in the winter of 1840-41, while according to Hebert-Leiter (2009), Conolly told the story to Hawthorne in 1839 and to Longfellow not until May 1844. Whatever the historical truth of the matter, the story was in itself already part of an oral folk tradition concerning the Great Upheaval, *le Grand Dérangement*: the expulsion of the Acadian people from the Maritimes (Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island on the Canadian eastern seaboard, south of Labrador and Newfoundland) between 1755 and 1763. The English colonial authorities initiated this mass exile as a tactic in the context of the French and Indian Wars that were the North American battleground of the 'Seven Years War', between 1754 and 1763, involving the major European Powers.

Longfellow felt inspired by what he heard to write his own account of two lovers sundered by the Expulsion. Longfellow himself summarised the original folk tale thus: "a Story

based upon a legend of Acadie, and still current there; the legend of a girl who, in the dispersion of the Acadians was separated from her lover, and passed her life in waiting and seeking for him, and only finding him dying in a hospital when both were old" (cited in Griffiths, 1982: 28). He was not consciously mythologizing and what seems primarily to have attracted him to the story was its moral of individual virtue (Griffiths, 1982: 28-9). He was working with folklore (Hebert-Leiter, 2009) but poetry was his task. He was anxious not to embark upon the project in case Hawthorne, whose literary reputation was already great, wanted to make a novel out of the story. "If you really do not want this incident for a tale, let me have it for a poem", he wrote to Hawthorne (Longfellow, 1886: 70; cited in Hebert-Leiter, 2009: 16); in November 1847, with the poem already a success, he wrote again to thank Hawthorne "for being willing to forego the pleasure of writing a prose tale which many people would have taken for poetry, that I might write a poem which many people take for prose" (cited in McFarland, 2010: 38).

I started to develop my love of the blues, folk, country and rock musics of the American South when I was fifteen or sixteen years old and away from home at boarding school. It was then not very long before this sheltered, shy and self-centred Home Counties boy was dreaming that nothing could be more apposite than to be some re-presentation of the mid-'60s Dylan, walking down some avenue in Mobile with the Memphis Blues in my soul. When I first fell in love (in 1983, which was 'rather late for me'), *Blonde on Blonde* was the soundtrack of my yearning; *Blood on the Tracks* coloured the echoes and resonances of my melancholy and self-absorption, when my bashful advances went unrequited.

The soundtrack album to *The Last Waltz* (1978), the movie that Martin Scorsese made about the final concert of The Band, Dylan's longtime musical collaborators, was one particular source material with which to explore many of these musical genres. Buried on side six of the old triple-LP, as part of the coda to Dylan's explosive concert finale, is The Band's studio performance (with Emmylou Harris contributing a guest vocal) of a Robbie Robertson song called 'Evangeline' (1976), a love story in which the two protagonists are Evangeline 'from the Maritimes' and Bayou Sam, a gambling man from South Louisiana. Evangeline, in the chorus, curses the riverboat, the 'Mississippi Queen', which took her lover away from her. McFarland

(2010) notes Harris's comments, on her website, about her own later cover of the song, suggesting how the different myths around Evangeline have become intermingled. Most of the members of The Band were of Canadian origin and their album *Northern Lights, Southern Cross* (1975) features the song 'Acadian Driftwood', Robertson's own rendering of the story of the Great Upheaval.

There are many such renderings in contemporary popular music. Los Lobos have their own 'Evangeline' (1984) leaving home, aged seventeen, in search of the American dream. Annie Blanchard, a native of the Maritimes, born in New Brunswick, won the 2006 'Association Québécoise de l'Industrie du Disque, du Spectacle et de la Vidéo' (ADISQ) award with her version of Michel Conté's French-language 'Evangéline' (Blanchard, 2007). Dairon (2011) describes how the original version of this song, recorded in 1971, sustained its popularity into the 1990s despite cultural trends, in New Brunswick and elsewhere, tending to deconstruct the mythology that had been built up around the Longfellow version of the story. Conté's lyrics have the English soldiers ruthlessly separating the lovers and Evangeline searching for more than twenty years for her Gabriel. The song concludes that her name shall stand for all those, however unhappy, who believe in love and hold the hope. The South Louisianan singer Mary Gauthier also has a song 'Evangeline' (1999) which references Conté's version simply in having the chorus consist in the repetition of the heroine's name.

Cross-references to 'Cajun' (which is to say, 'Acadian') music and culture,^[1] by extension from the myth of Evangeline, are too numerous to be catalogued here in full. Paul Simon's *Graceland* (1986), a pivotal record in the rise of 'world music' as a marketable commodity, makes reference to Zydeco music and to the great accordion stylist, Clifton Chenier (1980). Compilations such as *J'ai Été au Bal* (1990) and *The Best of Cajun and Zydeco* (2010) collate the history of the music back into the 1920s and a number of Cajun-style recordings from the period between 1927 and 1932 are included in Harry Smith's monumental (also originally 'bootleg', and therefore quintessentially 'found') *Anthology of American Folk Music* (1952). Hank Williams' 'Jambalaya (On the Bayou)' (1952), Rodney Crowell's 'Leaving Louisiana in the Broad Daylight' (1978) and Lucinda Williams' 'Crescent City' (1988) are examples of songs that drew this listener into these cultural mythologies by combining driving Cajun-country fiddle with recycled associations to Zydeco song titles and fragments of Cajun French; the geography and gastronomy of South Louisiana (Mandeville, Lake Pontchartrain, filé gumbo and jambalaya);

pirogues and swamps and alligators and Cajun men on the warpath you'd best not stop to chat with. Walter Hill's 1981 movie *Southern Comfort* trades on more overtly negative stereotypes. Rusty and Doug's Cajun lovers, Diggy Liggy Li and Diggy Liggy Lo (1961), fall for each other at the *fais dodo*.

'Jolie Blonde' (or Jolé Blon) is widely thought of as the Cajun 'national anthem' (Cajun Radio, 2013; Paul Castle Music, 2013): "the heartbreaking lament that you hear once and never forget" (Burke, 2012: 28). Its faithless anti-heroine, whom I first discovered through the Oregon-based folk singer-songwriter Michael Hurley (1980), perhaps gets more airtime in popular culture even than her faithful, virginal counterpart, Evangeline:

Jolie blonde, regardez donc quoi t'as fait,
Tu m'as quitté pour t'en aller,
Pour t'en aller avec un autre, oui, que moi,
Quel espoir et quel avenir, mais, moi, je vais avoir?
(Cajun Radio, 2013)

Longfellow's *Evangeline* was an instant popular triumph. Within a fortnight it was into its third 1000-copy print run. On 8 April, 1848 Longfellow noted in his diary "the sixth thousand of *Evangeline*, making one thousand a month since its publication"; by 1857 he calculated that the poem had sold 35,850 copies (McFarland, 2010). In its first one hundred years in print, the poem ran to 270 or more editions and 130 translations (Griffiths, 1982). With his choice of names for his two main characters, *Evangeline Bellefontaine* and *Gabriel LaJeunesse*, Longfellow piled on layer upon layer of positive and emotive imagery and iconography. Here are to be found Eve; an Angel; Gabriel; Beauty; Fountain and Youth; and the name *Evangeline* itself derives from the Latin word *evangelium*, via the French word *évangile*, meaning 'gospel'. Undoubtedly the 'good news' of the storyline spread rapidly and quickly in the great wave of immigration and the related industrial expansion of that epoch. The American population swelled from 17 million in 1840 to 31 million in 1860. The young nation was spreading west, on its rapidly expanding railway network, invading, purchasing and annexing to itself new vastnesses of territory and resources.

Print was at the same time developing into the first mass medium: the rapid rise, established by the end of the previous century, both of the romantic novel and of the ethos of romantic love as an acceptable means for the division or accumulation of property by marriage (Stone, 1977; Campbell, 2005), was the wave which printing as a major industry so successfully surfed for so long.

In the few years before the publication of *Evangeline*, the journalist John L. O'Sullivan had developed the concept of 'manifest destiny'. He argued in support of the annexation of Texas, in pursuit of "the fulfillment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions" (O'Sullivan, 1845). Longfellow's epic reworked oral folk tradition into a foundation myth for this expanding nation: "a new National Gospel of the American Nation" (Dairon, 2011: 40). It contains a potent mixture of themes, served up throughout with lashings of religious imagery: *les Anglais*, as is only right and proper, are the original sociopathic bullies of the story, but the simple, peaceful and pious Acadians stoically endure the hardship of exile and dispersal (and if they get too uppity, their priest, Father Felician, is on hand to rebuke them and bid them turn the other cheek to the colonial intruders (Dairon, 2011: 49)). But where there is threat, also is opportunity and Fate (or Destiny) draws them to the 'Eden' of South Louisiana, where hard work and resolve, as in the particular case of Basil the Blacksmith (Gabriel's father), may yet make good capitalists of us all. And a pious, virginal girl, who is steadfast and faithful and who will not deviate from her chosen path, will prevail in the end, even if only to hold her lover in her arms as he breathes his last in an almshouse in Philadelphia: the very birthplace of the nation.

Evangeline then is a lyrical and sentimental masterpiece of its kind and very much of its time: a folk tale rendered in 1399 lines of dactylic hexameter (a taste of which elaborate style opens this paper) with a memorable High Romantic storyline. The poem offered a foundation myth for a new nation brimming with an optimism as yet unclouded by civil war (although the issue of slavery in the South was an escalating political problem: O'Sullivan wrote as he did partly because President Tyler's administration hesitated to annex Texas and thereby bring another

slavery State into the Union). Many generations of American school children had to memorise the opening stanza that begins with:

This is the forest primeval. The murmuring pines and the hemlocks...
(Longfellow, 1995: 11).

However, it is important to remember that it was not until the Jefferson administration's Louisiana Purchase of 1803 that the Acadian homeland-in-exile became part of United States territory. When *Evangeline* and her company float down the Bayou Têche together, whilst, unbeknownst to them, Gabriel is rowing up the other side of the river to resume his own travels, they are, in strict historical terms, in French territory that is about to come under the authority of a Spanish Governor, Antonio de Ulloa, under the terms of the Treaty of Paris that ended the Seven Years War. The nearby town is 'New Iberia' and it is 'Spanish moss' that festoons the trees along the bayou. On the other hand, as Hebert-Leiter (2009) emphasises, the poem is written in *English* (the language of the emergent United States, but also of the cruel usurpers of the original Eden in the Maritimes). The French-speaking, Catholic Acadians, in this and many other ways besides, are constructed in the poem as what Žižek (2010) calls the 'decaffeinated' other:² they are, in Longfellow's account, ripe and ready to be assimilated into the welcoming arms of their new homeland.

The poem certainly served an important, albeit unintended socio-political purpose, in allowing at least one version of the history of the Great Upheaval to remain in the public consciousness. However, *Evangeline* was never intended by Longfellow to be accurate, either historically or geographically. He is known to have done some research into the French and Indian Wars (see Griffiths, 1982), but he is not understood to have visited either the Maritimes or the swamplands and bayous of South Louisiana. Neither, for that matter, should he be criticised for telling his story the way he wanted to tell it. History nonetheless would have it that significant numbers of the Acadians were actively involved in the war against the English, being particularly strongly allied for many years with the native Micmaq, part of the Wabanaki Confederacy that held the military balance of power in the contested territories. The villagers of 'Evangeline's' home village of Grand-Pré were therefore not necessarily the peaceful, pastoral innocents that Longfellow would have us imagine.

This does not of course excuse or minimise the ruthlessness and imperialistic drive of English foreign policy at the time; nor the actions of the English Governor, Charles Lawrence, who required all Acadians to swear allegiance to the Crown and then sought to expel them all, whether or not some of their communities had remained neutral (the English Commander in the poem is an historical figure whose real name was Colonel Winslow and the letter to the community of Grand-Pré is an archived document (Dairon, 2011)). Longfellow does gloss over New Englander involvement in the expulsion (the Maritimes at that time included parts of what now is the State of Maine, where the English had allies who helped them plan the dispersal). Brasseaux, the pre-eminent contemporary historian of Acadian culture, has tracked in detail the movements of the Acadian exiles from the Great Upheaval (see, for example, Brasseaux, 1985). There was a warm *local* welcome for the 200-odd Acadian exiles, who were already weary and destitute with travel and woe by the time that they started to arrive, in the first two small influxes of April 1764 and February 1765, at the door of what Brasseaux points out was the equally destitute French administration in New Orleans. But the welcome in New England was not so friendly (see Hebert-Leiter, 2009) and if the Acadians did then flourish in their new homeland, it was not only despite the ravages of yellow fever and malaria but also despite the colonial ethos behind the emergent nation's gatekeeping.

After music had first drawn me to travel to New Orleans and the American Deep South, on New Year's Day of 1991, it was in some large part the 'Dave Robicheaux' series of novels by James Lee Burke (and a movie version of the second of these, *Heaven's Prisoners* (1996)) that drew me back again. Burke offers a powerful and lyrical, contemporary depiction of Cajun culture using the genre of the 'hard-boiled' detective novel: as discussed in depth by Hebert-Leiter (2009; see also Merrill, 2011). Merrill notes, for example, that Burke quotes from or otherwise evokes the song *Jolie Blonde*, in its many different incarnations, in nine of the Robicheaux novels (the series is ongoing). Robicheaux is torn between his nostalgia for a golden age of Cajun culture, located for him in 1950s America, and his own longing to feel assimilated into mainstream America and to leave behind the poverty and illiteracy of his parents. This tension is neatly captured in a passage in *Creole Belle* (Burke, 2012: 278), in which Robicheaux reminisces about pitching

American Legion baseball in the 'Evangeline League' of the 1950s. In an earlier volume Robicheaux speaks of "a place that was ours and had belonged to our people and a way of life since the Acadians came to Louisiana in 1755" (Burke, 1987: 57; as already observed, the Acadians did not in fact start to arrive in numbers until 1764, so that, in the myth as it plays out in Robicheaux's mind, nearly a decade of exile has been compressed in time). As Hebert-Leiter emphasises, this longing of Robicheaux's is symbolised by his renunciation of the French Cajun language of his forefathers. Much as he loves and admires the old man Batiste who was his father's friend and who works for him and shares some of his adventures, Dave can't help wishing that Batiste would not teach Cajun French to his adoptive daughter Alafair: he wants Alafair, who is San Salvadorean by birth, to be more 'American' than he ever was.

Burke locates most of the action of his stories in the area around New Iberia and the Bayou Têche and he actively winds into his characters' experiences the legend of Evangeline. It is in identification with the Robicheaux character that, somewhere in my mind, I determined that I had to make my own way to St. Martinville. Here is Robicheaux remembering his first kiss with an old girlfriend, Bootsie, who has just come back into his life and will become his second wife:

It was at twilight under the Evangeline Oaks on Bayou Têche in St. Martinville, and the sky was lavender and pink and streaked with fire along the horizon, and she looked up into my face like an opening flower ... and the fireflies spun webs of red light in the black-green tangle of oak limbs overhead and the sky from horizon to horizon was filled with the roar of cicadas. (Burke, 1992: 23)

In his earlier *Heaven's Prisoners*, he takes his lover Annie to a *fais dodo* in St. Martinville where

an Acadian string band and a rock 'n' roll group took turns playing on a wooden platform set back against Bayou Têche. The tops of the trees were green against the lavender and pink light in the sky, and the evening breeze blew through the oaks in the churchyard where Evangeline and her lover were buried. (Burke, 1987: 148-9)

Note once more that Robicheaux has his own version of the Evangeline legend in his mind: this time it is Evangeline and Gabriel who are buried in the churchyard. What matters is that it is a landscape – with a soundtrack – for lovers.

Hebert-Leiter (2009) also discusses two other contemporary novelists who mine rich seams of Cajun history and culture, offering complex and nuanced accounts of the liminality of the Acadians in exile and of socio-economic and interracial tensions between Cajun, Creole, Black, White and Native American peoples in the deep South. Ernest J. Gaines' gripping *A Gathering of Old Men* (2000) depicts a Cajun family with a history of riding lynch mobs against black farm workers. In Tim Gautreaux's *Next Step in the Dance* (1998), his lovers Paul and Colette are sundered by Colette's self-imposed exile to Los Angeles in search of a new materialistic America. There is a wonderful scene in an ersatz Cajun restaurant in which Paul's culture is literally served back up to him, unrecognisably commodified (see Hebert-Leiter, 2009: 129-32). The waiter reassures Paul that "it takes time to develop a true Cajun palate". Paul retorts: "it sure don't take much time to ruin one" (Gautreaux, 1998: 81). When the couple return to their home town of Tiger Island, they are reflecting on their ancestry with the priest and Paul's grandfather Abadie, who recollects his own grandfather August, son of Viléor, son of Zefirin; the old man continues: "Before Zefirin was Arsène, and before that was François, who was thrown out of Nova Scotia by those damn English. The what – the Spanish gave him some land that one time covered half of downtown" (1998: 196-7).

In *The Clearing* (2003) Gautreaux shows us Minos Thibodeaux and his father Merville, the Marshal of Tiger Island. Merville remembers his childhood on Bayou Lafourche and then "a taste formed on the back of his tongue, and there it was, cream cheese made by his mother, big sausages, smoked pork, and something else – a sound, the waspy drone of fiddles and dancing on Saturdays, dancing in the yard when it was dry enough, all the neighbours come out for a *bal de maison*" (2003: 75). Merville approaches the corrupt sheriff at Tiger Island, Octave LaBat, asking for a conversation in private. When LaBat is disinclined to move from his chair, Minos says "*Alors, allons parler français*", claiming complicity in their shared cultural heritage. LaBat takes offence: he styles himself a modern American (an echo, here, of Robicheaux's impatience with Batiste). "I got no use for that kind of talk anymore. Tell me in English." (2003: 289) While Burke's Robicheaux mourns and rages against the destruction of the South Louisianan 'Eden' by Big Oil and corrupt local politicians (and the death of his father Big Al in an accident on an oil

rig), Gautreaux' Minos Thibodeaux is a steam engineer who trains up to work with diesel so he can keep abreast of technological advances as the virgin cypress forests of the South Louisianan 'Eden' are decimated for processed timber and profit margins.

In its story of tragic love and its evocation of an idyllic, pastoral, prelapsarian Acadia, Longfellow's *Evangeline* echoes important themes in the philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose ideas formed the foundations of the Romantic movement that has dominated modern Western thought since the last quarter of the eighteenth century (see, for example, Russell, 2004: 615-36). The Romantics valued a certain type of heightened emotional '*sensibilité*' above all other goods (for the origins of Romanticism in the cult of sensibility, see Campbell, 2005: 138-79). It was as if they understood what Freud ([1930] 1991) would later say about the suffering of lost love but felt that the suffering was insufficiently intense. They were all 'half in love with easeful Death' (Keats, [1819] 1986). Their first great hero, as Alvarez (1974) notes, was the English poet Thomas Chatterton, Byron's precursor, who wrote a great outpouring of romantic verse, wasted away in a garret and then died of swallowing arsenic before his eighteenth birthday. As Alvarez wryly comments, after Chatterton and the craze generated by Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* ([1774] 1989): "the poet ... became a doomed figure; his public expected it of him" (Alvarez, 1974: 228). Longfellow's hero and heroine are reunited, but only at the door of death: in this way he covers both ends of the Romantic market. The surge of nationalism as an ideology, in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars, also hitches a ride on the Romantic wagon and we have already noted *Evangeline*'s historical context in the expansion of the United States westwards across the North American continent.

Rancière (2008), writing about France in the time of Louis Napoleon's 'Third Empire', when Longfellow's *Evangeline* was still a bestseller across the Atlantic, shows the link between the moral panic about 'excitement' and the fear of 'democracy'. He suggests that the old order of monarchy, religion and aristocracy had been torn apart by the triple whammy of the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution and the arrival of mass media (2008: 235): the same combination of ideology, technology and communication systems, in fact, which was driving American expansion. The poor of Romantic literature were peaceful, rural and tragic in a

'decaffeinated' kind of way: by the mid-nineteenth century, the emergent problem was then that they might read these constructed accounts of themselves and start to form their own views of what might be the true nature of their desires. The mediatisation of desire under capitalism was the means by which this threat was to be neutralised and incorporated into the dominant discourse.

The psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion wrote about the 'basic assumption' group mentality of 'pairing' ([1961] 1994). In his theory, a pairing group mentality is one in which the potential for learning from experience is set aside in favour of a passive and ultimately destructive waiting around, in the hope that something might come of a getting together of two of its members. Bion suggested that the unconscious fantasy within this 'pairing group mentality' is that this idealised union might produce a 'baby' that would 'save' the group, a Messiah that would spare them the need to pursue their own struggles for growth. This hope must never be fulfilled: any actual product of the pair must be killed off, since it is the 'travelling in hope' that the group is dedicated to, not the 'arriving'. In direct illustration of this dynamic, the memorial plaque outside the reconstructed site of the Memphis motel where Martin Luther King was assassinated bears the following inscription:

They said one to the other,
Behold, here cometh the dreamer ...
Let us slay him ...
And we shall see what will become of his dreams.
(Genesis 37: 19-20)

I suggest that the Romantic idea of love can usefully be understood as a form of basic assumption pairing. Desire and the impulse to couple are natural drives; but everything about the commodification, the Hollywoodisation of desire, suggests that the dominant underlying idea is that *desire must never be satisfied* (for then it ceases to be open to commercial and ideological exploitation). Media depictions of romantic and sexual love are now graphic in a way unimaginable to, say 1930s film audiences; nonetheless, in the dominant discourse, it makes good commercial sense for one foot, so to speak, always to stay decorously and tantalisingly on the floor. You might think you've reached consummation-by-identification as the limbs of the

leading actors lustfully or languorously entwine, but then you find that this was just a ridge, not the summit, and that you still have to shell out good money for the sequel or the branded T-shirt or the special edition 'Director's Cut' DVD.

Evangeline is pledged to Gabriel but then the English summarily deport them to different destinations; she again misses her man as their boats cross in opposite directions on the Bayou; she finds him again, only to have him breathe his last in her arms. She and Gabriel are 'ships in the night' and this perhaps is the perverse centre of the poem's Romantic appeal. A visit to the Père Lachaise cemetery in the 20th arrondissement of Paris offers vivid parallel support for this hypothesis. Once you have nodded in the direction of the squandered talent of the Romantic rock anti-hero Jim Morrison and paid your respects to Oscar Wilde or Edith Piaf or Marcel Proust or Sarah Bernhardt, you can pick your way through the rows of gravestones down towards the southern border of the cemetery to the purported last resting place of Peter Abélard and Héloïse d'Argenteuil, true-life mediaeval lovers whose illicit romance was brutally interrupted and betrayed and who were reunited only in death (Abélard, *ca* 1132). Their memorial is now a major modern tourist attraction: but in 1817, when their purported remains were laid in Père Lachaise with great fanfare and ceremony, it was burial plots in the newly instituted cemetery that were being marketed. Business had been rather slow before the sundered lovers' arrival.

Campbell (2005) charts the diverse nature of the historical, cultural and philosophical movements that fall under the broad head of Romanticism. His central thesis builds upon Weber's work on the Protestant ethic in capitalism (Weber, [1930] 2001) to locate the Romantic movements at the dynamic heart of the expansion in consumerism that, he argues, was the engine that drove the train of the Industrial Revolution. To express and to amplify this sociological argument in group analytic terms, our collective investment in the fantasied, but forever procrastinated, coupling of the idealised pair that Evangeline and Gabriel epitomise was the force that generated the collective frenzies of consumerism upon which Western Imperialist power was founded. The foundering, growth-hungry economies of the contemporary West still seek to fan the dying embers of that peculiarly late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century furnace in which the colossal cultural and commercial success of *Evangeline* was forged. Slavoj Žižek, who may or may not be familiar with Bion, perhaps reaches the heart of the matter when he writes sardonically, in a newspaper article for Valentine's Day, about the latest device marketed for sexual stimulation of the penis, the 'Stamina Training Unit' (Žižek, 2013). He imagines a

societal response to this consumerist excess in which an ideal couple – an artificial vagina and a vibrator – are plugged into each other and left to get electronically on with their pairing on the group's behalf, while the real life couple can sit back to negotiate an unmediated intimacy without feeling under any pressure from the 'duty to enjoy'.

For many decades after the publication of *Evangeline*, no one was particularly confused into thinking of its central romance as a true story; or of Evangeline Bellefontaine and Gabriel LaJeunesse as real people. It is only much later on, around the turn of the nineteenth century, that the poem, having fallen very much out of literary and political fashion in the mainstream, begins to be reclaimed as a national myth underpinning Acadian/Cajun identity (although the first translation into French is made as early as 1865: see Griffiths, 1982). Dairon (2011) tracks in detail the various phases of 'iconodulism' (Evangeline's elevation into a mystical American national symbol) and 'iconoclasm' (the emergence of an identification with a distinct ethnic grouping within the wider Nation) through which the story now takes on its current kaleidoscopic presentation of imagery; in which both previous trends are 'strongly intertwined' (Dairon, 2011: 37-8). A major Acadian newspaper first printed in 1887 was called *L'Évangéline* and the *accent aigu* in our heroine's name begins to signify the re-emergence of a distinctive French-language Acadian cultural narrative.

In the novel *Pouponne et Balthazar*, Sidonie De la Houssaye (1888) reports a family legend told her by her grandmother in which her Acadian lovers, Pouponne Theriot and Balthazar Landry, are reunited after the Great Upheaval but prefer to identify with 'superior' Creole culture (see Hebert-Leiter, 2009: 30; Lafayette Convention and Visitors Commission, 2013). By the end of the nineteenth century the idealised welcome the Acadians 'remember' has become a clear classification of ethnic inferiority: the exiles displaced by the English imperialists have been internally colonised by their American successors. A counter-mythology (what Brasseaux (1998) terms 'fakelore'; see Hebert-Leiter, 2009: 30-32) is urgently required in order to reclaim cultural pride for Cajun people: enter Felix Voorhies, a local District Judge who in 1907 published *Acadian Reminiscences: the True Story of Evangeline* ([1907] 2013). This is

where we finally meet our hitherto mysterious Emmeline and Louis, whose names appeared at the start of this paper, on the plaque by the Evangeline Oak.

Voorhies presents *his* two 'fakelore' lovers as the 'true' historical characters upon which Longfellow based his 'Evangeline': indeed, he 'reports' in his Introduction that the story was handed down to him by word of mouth from his grandmother, who had adopted Evangeline when she was orphaned (Voorhies, [1907] 2013: 9). In his account, Emmeline (who is nicknamed Evangeline by the grandmother) does meet Louis under the oak – but she finds that Louis has not waited for her, is already answered for, and she dies of a broken heart. Hebert-Leiter reports how one Leona Guirard, curator of the Evangeline State Park, would give tours of the Park with yet another version, in which the sound of the wind in the oak trees is the sound of Emmeline and Louis, reunited at last, whispering to each other (2009: 32-33). The pragmatic necessity for 'fakelore' and the Romantic yearning for 'true love' are here neatly combined.^[3]

Foucault ([1976] 1980) writes of 'the insurrection of subjugated knowledges' (81) and of how, if (for example) a marginalised minority ethnicity works to reclaim ownership of its own narrative, the mainstream discourse will find some way to decaffeinate or otherwise colonise any 'insurrectionist' threat that might be inherent. By this stage we can see how the story of the Upheaval, via the legend of Evangeline, has been mediatised in multiple ways, not just in books but in the more recent medium of film (see, for example, Carewe, 1929): not least, to sell a package to the emergent contemporary phenomenon of the cultural tourist. Any awkward underlying difficulty in the difference of Acadian culture can be glossed. "Poetry is not history", remarks a former pastor of the church at St. Martinville, but "(s)he could have existed" (Lafayette Convention and Visitors Commission, 2013). If people want to visit an oak tree, then let this one be The Oak.

On Hallowe'en weekend of October 2010 my love and I joined the parties up and down Frenchman's Street, at the edge of the *vieux carré* in New Orleans, and we danced to a jazz band at the Spotted Cat. The Sunday morning of Hallowe'en itself, we checked out of the St. Charles Hotel and drove out along Highway 90 towards Morgan City. We had fried frogs legs in a diner near Franklin and took the old Spanish Trail route from Jeanerette via New Iberia. In the early

afternoon sunshine we parked off the main road in St. Martinville. We paused at the grave of Emmeline beneath the statue of Evangeline (modelled by the actor Dolores del Rio when she was filming the 1929 film version of the story (Carewe, 1929)) and we paid our respects at the bust of Longfellow. On a little belvedere between the Evangeline Oak and the Bayou Têche I took my love by the hand and spoke words to make reparation for a wrong I had done her and to pledge to her that I would be constant for her and never again allow myself to fall into estrangement from her. We gazed at the waters of the Têche and we took photographs and then somewhere in the distance we thought we heard the sound of guitars. We walked through the Evangeline Oak Park and down Old Market Street and outside the Trinity Catholic Elementary School we found ourselves in dawning realisation and wonder in the midst of a *fais dodo*. We ate from plates of dirty rice and listened entranced to the bands - until it was time to get back on the road and to take Interstate Ten back through South Louisiana along the banks of Lake Pontchartrain, across into Mississippi, past Biloxi and Pascagoula and across the Alabama State line towards Mobile.

– For Angela –

Notes

1. A note here for the reader may be helpful, distinguishing some terms that often appear to overlap. Acadie (anglicised as Acadia) was a colonial subdivision of New France, covering the area of the Maritimes and what is now the eastern part of the province of Quebec and the northern part of the State of Maine. The Acadians in exile were the peoples displaced by the English during the Seven Years War who settled in Louisiana in the second half of the eighteenth century and the term 'Cajun' is a compression of 'Acadian' and refers generally to the culture and ethnicity of those French-speaking settlers and their contemporary descendants (but also to inhabitants of Louisiana who may identify with the culture without necessarily having or needing a family tree to claim membership). 'Cajun' cuisine and musical styles are two prominent and prominently commodified aspects of this shared minority culture within Louisiana. 'Zydeco' is a particular hybrid musical style blending traditional French-speaking Cajun folk music with more contemporary rhythm and blues styles.

Finally, 'Cajun' should be taken as a distinct term from 'Creole', which in this context refers to the descendants of French and Spanish settlers who were born in Louisiana rather than migrating there. The term has meant different things at different

- times within Louisiana, being sometimes connected to interracial marriage with peoples of Native American or African origin, and sometimes to the children of settlers of white origin only; at one time, denoting simply a slave. Creole culture retains the traditions of French-speaking and Catholic observances but Creole peoples are not necessarily connected to the descendants of the Acadian Great Upheaval. Hebert-Leiter (2009) emphasises what she calls the 'interstitial', liminal nature of Cajun group identity, *between* races, cultures and nations. She also writes illuminatingly (and with far greater authority than I could possibly claim) about the nuances and complexities of the changing definitions of the word 'Creole' and of another complex denotation 'Creole of Colour' (2009, especially pp. 3-10).
2. Žižek here is commenting on the expulsion of the Roma peoples from France in Autumn 2010 and is observing the sinister paradox that, once 'decaffeinated', the vulnerable minority can be expelled almost without anyone noticing - not for being different, for the difference has been decaffeinated, but 'simply' for appearing wilfully to refuse to 'be the same'. Žižek suggests that late modern liberal multiculturalism subliminally proclaims the virtue and value of embracing the Other, so long as that Other is essentially deprived of its 'other-ness' - by analogy with the idea that it might be permissible to drink coffee, so long as there is no caffeine in it. To borrow from and update the inscription on the Statue of Liberty, it is as if to say to the Acadians: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore ... but only if they leave their underlying difference at the door (and [to anticipate a point made later in this paper] we can commodify their superficial but admittedly colourful other-ness for the benefit of the tourist industry)". Žižek argues that the 'reasonable racism' of, for example, the present Coalition government in the UK, as it plays gesture politics on immigration to outflank the UK Independence Party, is primitive and barbaric racism nonetheless.
 3. I am grateful to Gabrielle Brown for noting this resonance and for her other very helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

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Consistent with the narratives set out in this chapter, references are divided into various different categories of media.

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