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■ Introduction: François-Marie Luzel, Folklorist of Lower Brittany

In September 1895, the following obituary appeared in *Folklore*, the journal of the Folklore Society in Britain:

Breton folklore has sustained an irreparable loss in the death of M. Luzel, on the 26th February last, at the age of seventy-four. It is almost impossible to over-estimate his services in rescuing the folklore of his nation from the bands of romancers and poets. Far be it from us to undervalue poetry and romance. They are frequently among the highest and most valuable efforts of the human intellect; but when they are deliberately palmed off on an unsuspecting public as the genuine products of the popular imagination, of which in reality they are only the bedizened and distorted presentment, it is time for all who have any regard for truth and any feeling for traditional poetry and humour to protect and to show, if they can, a more excellent way. Leaving to others the work of criticism, M. Luzel set an example to collectors of folklore in Brittany; and it is to his example that we owe the admirable work of M. Sébillot, M. Le Braz, and others who are proud to reckon themselves his disciples. His splendid collections of tales and songs from *La Bretagne bretonnante* are prized by all students of the subject, and will long keep his memory green and fresh as the pioneer of the Science of Tradition in Brittany.

While it is in the very nature of obituaries to focus on the positive achievements of an individual, this is a generous testimonial for a folklorist who rarely left his native Brittany and who did not enjoy the privileged upbringing of most of his contemporary folklore

scholars. Most remarkable about the obituary is its specific reference to his battles with “the bands of romancers and poets,” as he bore the standard of a scientific approach to the study of the Breton folktale. The leading romancer and poet referred to here is Théodore Hersart de La Villemarqué, an aristocrat-born antiquarian who, according to Luzel’s biographer Françoise Morvan, had—like many aristocrats who had lost their privileges following the Revolution—reinvented himself as the proud defender of a traditionalist Celtic nation (1999, 15–26). La Villemarqué was everything that Luzel was not, and their long rivalry has come to symbolize much more than positional differences in relation to the collection of folklore, but also the polarities of Breton, and indeed French, nationalist politics. This dispute still rumbles on today between scholars and Breton cultural activists and can in part account for the fact that, despite the volume and importance of Luzel’s work, it has often remained out of print in France and has appeared in translation only in modest quantities before.¹ Nevertheless, just as the next generation of folklorists, such as Paul Sébillot (1843–1918), arguably the most important scholar of Breton folklore, and Anatole Le Braz (1859–1926), might have counted themselves among Luzel’s supporters, so Luzel’s work also ranks in significance alongside that of the generation that followed them: Arnold van Gennep (1873–1957)² and Paul Delarue (1889–1956).³

There is some confusion around the date on which François-Marie Luzel was born. Archival records give different dates and years, but it seems most likely that he was born on 21 June 1821. More certain is that the event took place in the family home, the manor of Keramborgne (Keramborn in Breton) in the commune of Plouaret.⁴ His family were Breton-speaking farmers with Republican leanings (the manor had come to the family as a result of Luzel’s grandfather’s being a “Capitaine de la Garde Nationale” during

the Revolution) and had some education. They were certainly not poor, but nonetheless their existence would have had a degree of precariousness about it. Moreover, it was a life that was inextricably tied to the land and the local community.

An early influence on the young Luzel was no doubt his attendance at the veillées held at the family home in Plouaret, the winter evening gatherings around the fireside with neighbors and visitors when time would be given over to storytelling and singing. In his later years, Luzel wrote about these events and the magical atmosphere that they evoked and he did so not without a little nostalgia.

Of most significance, though, is the influence exerted on the young Luzel by his uncle Julien-Marie Le Huërou, a teacher at the Collège royale de Rennes. In 1835, the young Luzel himself was sent off to the Collège for his secondary education and at first felt completely bewildered and constrained by his new life. However, his uncle was a keen scholar of Breton culture and encouraged Luzel in the same field, introducing him to many of his friends with similar interests. It was a turning point for Luzel and he immersed himself in his academic studies, discovering an aptitude for scholarly activity.

Le Huërou's approach to his research is interesting, because it very much mirrors the philosophical and political positions later adopted by Luzel in his own professional life. Le Huërou sought not to establish Breton as a language and culture with its own purity but to set it in the context of the greater family of European cultures and languages. He also rejected many of the Breton stereotypes, such as the cult of druidism, that were being promoted by many of the early Breton folklorists. Not surprisingly, when La Villemarqué published *Barzaz Breiz*, a collection of traditional Breton songs, in 1839, Le Huërou was highly critical.

Luzel's adult life seems to have been largely dominated by two features: first, a tension between his work as a folklorist and the

need to earn money, and second, a difficult relationship with the “establishment.” Luzel achieved no university-level qualifications and never held an academic post. He tried his hand at teaching many times but found himself dismissed from numerous positions. There may well be some truth in Morvan’s suggestion that he was the victim of an establishment that disapproved of his political and anticlerical opinions, but equally likely Luzel was a less than enthusiastic teacher, primarily focusing his energies on his collecting work.

Although today Luzel’s reputation as a folklorist is largely based upon his collections of folktales, his early folklore work had focused on the traditional songs and dramas of the region. It was not until 1870 that he published his first collection of tales, *Contes bretons*, which contained six tales, three of which were published bilingually. Coincidentally, but not insignificantly, 1870 was the year of the disastrous Franco-Prussian War, after which “the French folklore movement suddenly flowered, with the quickening of interest in philology, archaeology and ethnography. These were the years of the founding of journals and societies, of the cultivation of the cultural sciences, of the quest for the Celtic, Romanic, medieval, and peasant contributions to the French soul” (Dorson 1968, vii). Luzel was fortunate enough to be there right at the beginning of this golden age that lasted until the outbreak of the First World War.

It was in Quimper, where Luzel took a position as archivist for the Department of Finistère, that he met and befriended Anatole Le Braz, who became one of the most celebrated of the new generation of Breton translators and folklorists. Le Braz became not only Luzel’s disciple, despite his more avowedly nationalist tendencies, but also his literary executor.

A more important ally for Luzel, though, was the writer and philosopher Ernest Renan (1823–1892). Luzel and Renan met at

the end of 1857, while Renan was head librarian at the Bibliothèque nationale, and they remained friends until Renan's death thirty-five years later. Renan represented the scholarly establishment. Whereas Luzel was largely self-taught, Renan had a doctorate and led a respectable academic career. Whereas Luzel was anticlerical, Renan had trained to become a priest, although he never took his vows. What brought the two men together, apart from their native Brittany, was an interest in philology (particularly in the relationship of Breton to other languages) and a deep suspicion of the work of the earlier Breton folklorists such as La Villemarqué. In fact, it was with Renan's encouragement that Luzel took on La Villemarqué over the *Barzaz Breiz*. In return, Renan used his influence to help secure funding for Luzel to carry out his collecting expeditions. Luzel's relationship with the establishment had always been problematic, but Renan lent him some respectability and in 1890, two years before Renan's death, Luzel was made a Chevalier of the Légion d'honneur, an occasion made more poignant by the fact that the honor was bestowed by his old rival La Villemarqué. Five years later, both were dead, Luzel in February 1895 and La Villemarqué in December of that same year. Luzel's final collection of stories, *Contes et légendes des bretons armoricains*, a collection of five stories compiled and edited by Le Braz, was published posthumously in 1896.

Luzel the Folklorist

In his essay on Giuseppe Pitre (Zipes and Russo 2009a), Joseph Russo presents a picture of the nineteenth-century collector of Sicilian folktales as a man ahead of his time. His practice of collecting multiple variants of the same story, of recording often detailed notes about the way individual storytellers *performed* their stories, and of retaining within the texts the "inconsistencies and non sequiturs" (23)

that are a common feature of oral storytelling, arguably make Pitre and Luzel methodological bedfellows. However, to describe Luzel as a man a century ahead of his time may require some qualification. While his working practices, his approach to the study of the folktale, and much of his thinking around its significance were indeed very progressive when compared to those of many of his contemporaries, Luzel was also a man very much of his time. He may have had what now seem to us extraordinarily modern insights, but he did so from the point of view of a nineteenth-century scholar.

What makes Luzel stand out from many of his contemporaries is perhaps his willingness to collect and *publish* variants of the same tale. The modern folktale scholar would, of course, do exactly the same, attributing the differences between collected texts to the contextual conditions that governed the performance of the telling. As David Hopkin explains:

While their nineteenth-century predecessors (under the influence of nineteenth-century textual scholars) attempted to reconstruct ur-texts from the multiple variants at their disposal, twenty-first-century folklorists (like twenty-first-century textual scholars) study the variants themselves. The *mouvance* or *variance* between texts, to borrow terms used by medievalists, is meaningful when related to the specific social contexts in which they were performed. (2012, 26)

Among others, Richard Bauman's seminal text on performative approaches to storytelling analysis, *Verbal Art as Performance* (1984), proposes that a storyteller is engaged in a framed process of communication, that is, "performance," at the moment of telling and that the detail of the performed text (including the words spoken,

the manner of speaking—volume, cadence, rhythm, and so on—and any accompanying physical language, such as gesture or facial expression) is entirely determined by the context of that moment. Some elements of that context may be within the storyteller’s control; others may not. Thus, *what* is spoken and *how* is determined by *who* speaks it, *to whom*, and *when* and *where*, resulting in a potentially infinite number of story variants of equal value and currency. It is, as Peter Bogatyrev and Roman Jakobson posited as early as 1929, that “only the language of a specific person at a given time represents reality” (1982, 34).⁵ This notion of folklore as process, variance as the norm, and storytelling as performance has been well established in the field of folklore for the best part of fifty years or more and is the fundamental principle that separates most modern folklore scholarship from that which preceded it. In this way, the modern folklore scholar may be thought of as being just as interested in the *difference* between variants of a story as in their similarity, and able to derive meaning from differences and how they arose (see Hopkin 2010, 36). Indeed, variation, not similarity, it could be argued, is the key to unlocking meaning in any given text.⁶

Luzel was interested in variation for quite different reasons. For much of the second half of the nineteenth century, the folklore scholarly world was divided into two rival camps. On one side were the followers of solar or comparative mythology, as first expounded by the German-born Oxford professor Max Müller in 1856 (Dorson 1986, 165). This theory proposed that folktales had their ancient origin in solar mythology. Over the centuries, these myths were thought to have “degenerated” into folktales but the older symbolism was still evident within them. As such, all stories had fixed meanings and fixed symbolism, relating to ancient solar deities, and characters within stories could be classified by type. Furthermore,

the key to unlocking meaning lay in the study of language and by making philological connections. By 1873, the theory had already been robustly challenged by Andrew Lang and his followers in the “anthropological” camp, whose counterproposal took Darwin’s theory of evolution as its inspiration and created the notion of “cultural evolution.” Lang’s theory proposed that societies that were at similar stages of cultural evolution could produce similar cultural artifacts without ever having been in contact, thus allowing for variants of the same tale type to be created independently of each other. Aulikki Nahkola summarizes that “while Müller’s work represented a degenerative view of human culture, Lang built his theory on a model of evolutionary anthropology” (2001, 123).

In his introduction to *Contes populaires de Basse-Bretagne*, Luzel steers a diplomatic line between the two systems, proposing “mythological eclecticism” over an absolutist adherence to one or the other (1887, vii). For Luzel, the study of folktales had to be founded upon a robust scientific approach.⁷ Furthermore, by reducing the texts of the same story down to a set of key shared symbols, a single, authoritative meaning can be determined, allowing for the classification of the story. This might sound like a reductive approach to us these days, but to Luzel and his contemporaries, applying scientific principles to stories, in the way one might to botany, for example, afforded folktales a status they would not otherwise have. At the end of his introduction to the first volume of *Contes populaires*, Luzel makes an impassioned plea to the next generation of folklorists:

This is, in effect, the literature of the unschooled and the unfortunate, who know how to neither read nor write . . . and . . . we must . . . love it, respect it and hasten to collect it, at the very moment when it is in danger of disappearing forever. (xix–xx)

Luzel was on a mission to do for the Breton folktale what the Brothers Grimm had done for the German folktale (Luzel 1995a, 16) and his deep respect for the storytellers he collected from meant that he published each story as he heard it, in the exact words told to him. However, as Hopkin so rightly reminds us, “for no nineteenth-century folklorist did fidelity mean exactitude” (2012, 41). Luzel did not follow the strict principles of accurate transcription of the modern scholar nor could he, given that he did not have recourse to electronic recording equipment. Neither was he averse to a little editing and correcting here and there to make things more comprehensible to the reader, but his editorial hand was lighter than that of many of his contemporaries and he did not try to tidy up internal narrative contradictions, omissions, or non sequiturs. Luzel did not take multiple variants and reconcile them into a single definitive version of a particular story. For him, the authenticity of the tale lay in the fact that stories changed depending on the teller and the audience and that an eagerness to embellish a tale with episodes from other stories, in order to keep the interest of the listener, is a characteristic of the Breton storyteller (1887, ix).

Collecting multiple variants was also central to Luzel’s scientific approach—the analysis of a story to decode its true meaning lay not in the construction of a composite version but in the comparison of different variants of the same story, which would allow the scholar to identify common motifs and episodes. So, whereas the modern folklorist may derive meaning from the *difference* between variants, Luzel derived meaning from *similarity*. Furthermore, while Luzel’s attitudes were surprisingly modern in some respects, he did not look for meaning in the moment of performance, in the way we would today. Indeed, he would not have understood the meaning of “performance” in our sense. His understanding of folklore was chronological and archaeological. The folktale existed as an ancient

preindustrial relic and the folklorist's duty was to collect and preserve it before it died out—a race against time before it decayed altogether.

Yet even in this respect Luzel's attitude is more complex than might at first seem. For a start, his apparent affinity and empathy with his informants, particularly his two main storytellers, Barba Tassel of Plouaret, who at the age of seventy-two was still delivering on foot telegraphic dispatches and official communications from the local mayor (1887, x), and Marguérite Philippe of Pluzunet, meant that Luzel was fully aware how much the harsh social realities of nineteenth-century peasant life in Brittany were reflected in the tales. These were stories of social struggle and survival, where the poor pitted their wits against the wealthy and the powerful, and usually came out on top.⁸ They often reflected a thinly disguised hatred of the seigneurial system and displayed a natural sympathy, Luzel felt, with the poor and downtrodden, reflecting a world where the underdogs were the natural heroes, overcoming all kinds of trials and battles with the forces of evil and stupidity (1995a, 13). Ancient tales whose origins lay in the mists of time, these were stories that had been updated to reflect the daily struggles of the people who told them. Luzel was critical of earlier studies that simply reflected vague memories of traditions, written as if they were genuine but failing to capture the authentic popular voice (10).

Nineteenth-century folklorists also commonly believed that the further back a story or song could be traced, the more "authentic" it was. This drove Luzel's keen interest in the folktale as a form, which he believed to be much older (and therefore more authentically Celtic) than forms such as the folksong or poem. Folklorists often sought out storytellers in the farthest reaches of Europe, far from the centers of civilization, untouched by the industrial revolution, where agrarian communities and ways of life persisted. If folktales were vestiges of earlier civilizations, then it stood to reason that the

best and most authentic storytellers would be found in those parts of the world that remained untouched by the civilizing hand of Western thought, the Enlightenment, industrialization, and capitalism. This might seem questionable today, but it led folklore collectors in Britain, for example, to venture out to the west of Ireland and the Highlands of Scotland, leaving the cities of London and Manchester to the social observers and political philosophers. The more remote—the more “savage”—the better.

In his “Deuxième rapport” (1995a, 125–31), Luzel recounts his journey into the remote inland area of Cornouaille, around the mountains of Avez. In contrast to the areas nearer to the coast that had benefited from contact with other cultures through trade and the fishing industry, isolated communities existed here. Luzel may have set out on his mission with the hope and expectation of a fruitful journey, but he had a pretty miserable time of it. Not only did he have to tolerate the discomforts and indignities of traveling everywhere on foot, but he considered the material he collected inferior to what he had collected in the coastal towns and villages. It may not be surprising, on reflection, that Luzel had greater success in collecting stories from within his own and neighboring communities, where he was known, than in remote areas where the villages and their inhabitants were unfamiliar to him, and vice versa. Luzel, however, came to a different conclusion. Contrary to popular opinion at the time, he determined that, far from diluting the purity of traditions, contact with other cultures strengthened and enriched folk traditions with new ideas, thoughts, and stories.

The *Barzaz Breiz* Controversy

If Luzel’s career as a folklorist is remembered for one thing, it is for the controversy around La Villemarqué’s *Barzaz Breiz*, which was

the cause of a deep disagreement and an ideological split that rumbled on for many years. On the surface, Luzel and La Villemarqué make perfect rivals, one the precocious and affluent son of aristocratic stock, the other from a modest Republican background, impecunious for all his professional life. Their quarrel came to symbolize the animosity between two different positions within the complex and fraught world of Breton nationalist cultural politics and still divides the community, with *Barzaz Breiz* continuing to be celebrated by Breton cultural nationalists through the twentieth century (Gemie 2007, 47).

The relationships between Brittany and the rest of France, and its associated politics, are both complex and ever-changing.⁹ While contemporary Breton nationalism is more closely associated with the politics of the progressive Left—according to Gemie, “Bretons are more likely to adopt pro-European union attitudes than other French people, and significantly less likely to vote for the far-right *Front National*” (9)—the predominant leaning has previously been toward conservatism, and the nationalist movement is still partially tainted by its attitude toward the Vichy Government during the years of occupation.¹⁰ In the nineteenth century, the relationship was equally complex and, at times, contradictory.

The renaissance of interest in Celticism at the beginning of the nineteenth century was in response to both the rise of romanticism and the postrevolutionary nation-building agenda in what was a country widely fragmented by language and cultural traditions.¹¹ The “othering” of Brittany as a place of refuge and remoteness, representing the relics of France’s Celtic past, sought to legitimize it as a distinctive part of the wider nation, but as an alternative to the centralizing, post-Enlightenment, and anticlerical tendencies of the Revolution and “an instrument for the conservative right to use against the revolutionary legacy” (Gemie 2007, 43).

Théodore Hersart de La Villemarqué was born in 1815 into a pro-Royalist family with aristocratic connections and, although he became disillusioned with the restored monarchy, his instincts remained deeply conservative and pro-church, in contrast to Luzel's strong anticlerical roots. La Villemarqué was certainly no separatist, though. His belief was that Breton culture reflected the true character of the French nation and he proposed a "reorientation of French culture . . . with Brittany to be the focus for the new order" (Gemie 2007, 48), drawing inspiration from Breton culture for a simpler, more spiritual way of life. *Barzaz Breiz* was intended as a tool in this campaign, linking Celticism to Christianity, that expressed "codes of morality and spirituality which would inspire the French people to return to a Celtic and religious mode of being" (Gemie 2007, 48) and it secured La Villemarqué's reputation as one of the most important antiquarian scholars of his generation.

Luzel first raised his suspicions around the authenticity of the songs contained within the volume in 1868, but it was four years later, in 1872, that the row burst into the open, after Luzel spoke at the Congress of the Breton Association in Saint-Brieuc, condemning *Barzaz Breiz* as a fake and accusing La Villemarqué of manufacturing the songs contained within the book. Luzel's suspicions were at least in part owing to La Villemarqué's use of unified Breton, a form of the language that was free of the influence of other languages, whereas the Breton used by Luzel's singers and storytellers inevitably bore the hallmarks of other linguistic influences, especially French. Others, including Renan, shared his concerns and Luzel came under pressure to publish his own collection of Breton songs, *Gwerziou*, that when placed alongside *Barzaz Breiz* would expose the earlier work as fraudulent. The plan was to publish *Gwerziou* in two volumes, the first covering epic verse, the second containing sentimental and romantic poetry, thus mimicking the

structure of *Barzaz Breiz*. The first volume, published in 1868, sold only twenty subscriptions (Morvan 1999, 179) and the second volume did not appear until 1874.

Recent works by scholars such as Donatien Laurent (1989), Nelly Blanchard (2006), and Ellen Badone (2017) suggest that while the songs in *Barzaz Breiz* were very heavily edited, even rewritten into composite versions, by La Villemarqué, he was nonetheless familiar with the range of Breton dialects and worked with texts that he had genuinely collected. On this basis, it is difficult to condemn La Villemarqué. The Brothers Grimm, who inspired the work of early folklorists from the first half of the nineteenth century, were themselves heavy editors of the stories they collected and created composite versions from multiple variants. In Luzel's opinion, the quarrel was a disagreement between two methods, with the exponents of the new scientific method eager to discredit those who hung onto old practices. We should be careful not to denounce La Villemarqué from the position of the twenty-first-century folklorist, who would operate with quite different principles.

Luzel and Breton Culture

Sharif Gemie (2007) asserts that prior to the Romantic period the distinctiveness of Brittany, including its language, was thought of as being no more or less significant than any other region of France, but the idea of Breton nationalism emerged from the rise of Celticism in the early 1800s. By the time Luzel had grown up, a movement to preserve, protect, and promote Breton culture was already established, even though it was still in its relative infancy. In other words, Luzel was entering a world where a sense of distinct Breton identity was gathering pace and yet there were still opportunities for people like him to make a definite contribution to the

formation of that identity and how it might relate to the wider French and other regional identities.

There can be no doubt that Luzel was fully committed to this project for all of his life. In addition to his folklore work, he published poems and other literary works in Breton under various pseudonyms, and lobbied for schools to teach the Breton language, as the principal defining characteristic of the region.

The central problem for Bretonists was that there was very little written historic record, so folklore (and particularly the folktale) was seen as serving an important function in providing an alternative historical record of the Breton people. In fact, the situation was not unlike that faced by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm when they began collecting folktales in Germany. In his book *Nations, Identity, Power: The New Politics of Europe*, George Schöpflin recognizes “the potential importance of memory to forms of nationhood” (2000, 74) and a written historical record and a literature are critical elements in the memory-making process. When the short-lived Académie Celtique was founded in 1804 (see Senn 1981), it naturally turned to folklore as a way of finding a route back to the region’s Celtic heritage in the face of a distinct lack of written artifacts (Gemie 2007, 42). Emile Souvestre was in a nostalgic mood when he wrote in 1849:

it is above all in the countryside that we have tried to rediscover the popular tradition. There, among isolated families with fixed lives, away from the great events which disrupt their conduct, without books, the traditions of storytelling has (sic) been preserved. (quoted in Gemie 2007, 42)

It is not surprising, then, that when Luzel published *Contes bretons* in 1870, his first volume of folktales, he felt that this was the most important phase of his work.

The Veillée as Storytelling Event

The scene takes place in an old Breton manor house, in the middle of the woods, half-way along the road between the town of Plounévez-Moëdec and the town of Plouaret, the manor of Keramborgne, where I spent my childhood. It is the twenty-fourth day of December, Christmas Eve. The weather is cold and snow covers the ground. The Christmas *veillée* begins. With the evening meal finished, after the life of the day's saint has been read in Breton and the communal prayers recited, the whole household—masters, servants, children and day laborers—come together in a circle around the Yule log, an enormous oak trunk that burns in the vast kitchen fireplace. A wandering bard and beggarman, old Iouenn Garandel, has arrived at nightfall looking for hospitality, his bag thoroughly decorated with newly printed balladsheets and poems on loose-leaf paper . . . and he has been received with joy and happiness, especially by the children, and he has been shown to the storyteller's stool, at the corner of the hearth, with a full bowl of golden cider on hand. He begins by recounting the latest news from the parishes that he's passed through since his last visit: deaths, births, engagements, accidents, and adventures of all sorts. Then he sings the old ballad of *Lezobré* and the whole audience hangs on to the old man's every word, whose memory is inexhaustible when it comes to talking about the old days. (Luzel 1995b, 169–70)

As Françoise Morvan says, the cultural event of the *veillée* “occupies a very particular place in the work of Luzel” (Luzel 1995b, 7), as the “*mise-en-scène*” of storytelling. It was, for Luzel, at the very heart

of the storytelling experience, because, as Morvan explains, “it reminds us that the tale is also the location of the tale, that it is nothing without the authenticity of the moment in which it is written down” (16). This awareness of the importance of the storytelling *event* as the context that gave meaning to the stories made Luzel stand out from many of his contemporaries. The scientific approach, championed by Luzel and others, demanded an emotional detachment from the stories being collected, so that “on the page they appear depersonalized, disconnected to experienced reality” (Hopkin 2012, 29), yet Luzel found himself completely drawn into and enchanted by the event of the *veillée*. This scientific approach did not sit easily with Luzel’s interest in the performance event, as it is “suspect as regards the scientific objectivity required” (Morvan in Luzel 1995b, 14). This is a tension that remains at the heart of Luzel’s work (Morvan in Luzel 1995a, 175).

Luzel and his sister Perrine provided us with numerous accounts of *veillées* and while the one quoted above, first published in the *Revue de Bretagne et d’Anjou* in January 1888, specifically recounts the events of a Christmas *veillée*, the descriptions of other *veillées* reveal some common features.

First, however, it is important to try to understand the *veillée*, given that so many of the stories Luzel published, including those in *Contes bretons* (1995a) and *Contes du boulanger* (1995c), were collected at such events. He attached great importance to the *veillée* as a cultural occurrence. The verb *veiller*, from which *veillée* is derived, means “to stay awake or keep vigil” and also relates to the practice of sitting up with a patient or a corpse. *Veillée*, then, might, on the one hand, be translated as a “wake,” in the Irish sense of the word, whereby company gathers to drink, eat, tell stories, and generally celebrate the life of the deceased. The *veillée* was not an event reserved for such occasions, however, but a more common occurrence,

predominantly during the winter months, when family, friends, servants, and visitors would gather in a house, around the fireplace, to share and discuss news, stories, and songs. As Pierre-Jakez Hélias says, “The month of November was the month for tales” (1978, 57). Darnton identifies the *veillée* as “an important French institution” (1984, 17), indicating that the first account of such an event was written in the mid-sixteenth century by the Breton writer Noel du Fail (1520?–1591). The *veillées* that Luzel describes took place mainly either at the family manor house at Keramborgne or at Coat-Tugdual, the manor house in which his sister Catherine lived at Plouguernevel. These affairs were largely attended by members of Luzel’s family, the workers at the manor (servants or agricultural day-laborers), as well as visiting friends and traveling beggars seeking shelter. And, of course, all their children. Everybody was involved, it seems, regardless of age, gender, or social position:

The only time of the year when stories are habitually told is the winter, during the long evenings. Every fireplace, whether it is a manor house, a rich farm, or a humble cottage, has its singers and storytellers; everybody is there together. (Luzel 1995a, 112–13)

At one *veillée* held at Coat-Tugdual (Luzel 1995b, 85–127), the priest from Ploëzal was also in attendance and even contributed two ghost stories himself to the proceedings. The *veillée*, it seems, was largely a place where social divisions were left behind and a sense of community was built.

Particular excitement was reserved for those times when a traveling tailor or a wandering beggar would be attending. These people were regular visitors to the larger houses, where the hospitality would

be plentiful. They were renowned for their storytelling abilities and were always made welcome, not only for their skills as storytellers and singers, but also because they brought the news from neighboring, and not-so neighboring, parishes.¹² Luzel describes them as the community's "living newspapers" (1995b, 25). These included Iann Gourlaouën, Robart Menguy, Iouenn Gorvel, Iann Kergolor, and, most frequently, Garandel,¹³ the blind beggarman, whom Luzel called "a true Homer in clogs" (2002, 130).¹⁴ Others, such as Pierre-Jakez Hélias's grandfather, a clogmaker, known locally as "Jean the Wonder-Man" (1978, 68), were valued in their community for their skills in storytelling: "Indeed, his reputation for knowing so many tales was such that at the end of harvest-time, he was sought out . . . in order that he might transform a gathering of peasants in a farmhouse" (73–74). Hopkin reminds us that in such communities "narrative talent (was seen) as a form of cultural capital" (2012, 64).

By contrast, the *veillée* attended by Perrine in 1890 in Morlaix would have attracted neither these traveling virtuosos at one end of the social scale, nor the landowners or clergy at the other end, so had a narrower social range in its audience. The focus is once again on conviviality, social cohesion, and community-building:

During the winter of 1888–9, there met in the town of Morlaix a group of popular singers and storytellers, made up of Breton laborers and artisans. The singing and storytelling were only in Breton. They gathered every evening during the long winter evenings in a bakehouse and, as the oven was stoked for baking the bread, a double benefit could be enjoyed of passing an evening among friends in a well-heated space and listening to beautiful Breton songs and all kinds of marvelous stories . . . (Luzel 1995c, 7)

At these particular events, each person paid an entrance fee of one sou for cider that would “liven up the singers and the storytellers and . . . help keep the interest of the audience” (7). In describing the *veillées* that he himself attended, as a child and as an adult, Luzel does not mention money changing hands, but there is plenty of cider and he does tell of an almost ritualistic event with distinct phases.

The evening would begin with the laying and lighting of the fire, followed by the arrival of the guests and the setting-up of spinning wheels at the back of the room—where the women would continue to work throughout the entertainment—and the seats for others (a large bench or two, sometimes a more comfortable chair for the head of the household, and the storyteller’s stool, next to which rested a full bowl of cider). Once everyone was gathered, there would be communal prayers and a reading from the life of the saint whose feast day it happened to be. Next came conversations about the day’s work and the swapping of local news. If a traveling storyteller was present, there would also be news from elsewhere. During this time, the women at their spinning wheels might have been quietly singing to themselves as they spun, perhaps occasionally being asked to sing louder for the benefit of the whole room. Then, with the children becoming restless, the storytelling would begin.

Besides the longer folktales that clearly played a significant role at these gatherings, along with singing and more general conversation and discussion, ghost stories took up a substantial part of the evening. Very often these were short and told as true, either in the first person or as having happened to a relative, an acquaintance, or a “friend of a friend.” Luzel considered these stories to be of only minor significance, in comparison to the longer tales, but he did acknowledge their crucial role in creating an atmosphere of mystery, excitement, and anticipation, which was a central feature of

the veillée. The audience, it seemed, enjoyed the thrill of a scary story just as much as we do today.

The number of stories told on any given evening depended on several factors, including when the veillée started and finished, the amount of news and gossip to be shared, and the length of the stories themselves, as well as how much discussion each telling generated. In the five veillées described by Luzel in *Veillées bretonnes* (2002), the evenings consisted of between two and ten stories along with one or two songs. The evenings concluded at around ten o'clock, often with a song or two to counteract the tales of the supernatural that had gone before and to send the company on their way with smiles on their faces.

Darnton proposes that reading formed an integral and regular part of the veillée:

Perrault's version of the tales reentered the stream of popular culture through the *Bibliothèque bleue*, the primitive paperbacks that were read aloud at *veillées* in villages where someone was capable of reading. These little blue books featured Sleeping Beauty and Little Red Riding Hood as well as Gargantua, Fortunatus, Robert le Diable, Jean de Calais, les Quatre Fils Aymon, Maugis l'Enchanteur, and many other characters from the oral tradition that Perrault never picked up. (1984, 63)

Although Luzel makes no reference to such activity at a veillée, Darnton's mention of Perrault is significant. France, of course, enjoyed a particularly rich fairy-tale tradition, begun by Charles Perrault (1628–1703), Mme d'Aulnoy (1650/1–1705), Marie-Jeanne L'Héritier (1664–1734), and others in the seventeenth-century salons,¹⁵ and it would be a mistake to assume that the influence of

oral culture on literary forms was all one-way traffic. Almost certainly the widespread availability and circulation of literary fairy tales in chapbook form meant that they found their way into popular culture, either through the kinds of readings Darnton describes or by the storytellers' hearing these stories and then reinterpreting and remaking them as oral stories that were *told* at the *veillées*. Indeed, Catherine Velay-Vallantin argues for a far more complex set of relationships between oral and written versions of stories and even questions the convenient distinction between the two in a society where oral and printed variants would circulate freely in different forms, constantly being reworked by the communities that told them. As she says: "there is not a tale that escapes the multiplicity and diversity of treatments" (1992, 39). Furthermore, she suggests that the *Bibliothèque bleue* did not merely reprint the tales of Perrault, but often reworked them, sometimes restoring elements from the earlier oral tales that had been expunged by Perrault for the courtly audiences (46–49).

The relationship between oral and printed forms, however, goes beyond the French literary tales of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Writing in September 1872, Luzel himself declared, "I have recently read *The Facetious Nights of Straparola* and I was astonished to find just how the stories in this very interesting collection, which are truly popular and ancient, are all to be found in our Breton cottages, and often barely modified" (1995a, 153–54).¹⁶ There is no evidence to suggest that Luzel's storytellers made distinctions between different genres and forms and several of the stories collected by Luzel are redolent of literary fairy tales, such as Perrault's "Le Petit Poucet" and "Goulaffre the Giant." As Darnton rightly asserts, "Cultural currents intermingled, moving up as well as down, while passing through different media and connecting groups as far apart as peasants and salon sophisticates" (1984, 63).¹⁷

What Luzel captures most admirably in his descriptions are the conversations that took place in between the more structured moments of storytelling. Here are discussions evaluating the merits and veracity of each story and about the nature of supernatural belief. On occasion, a narrative summary or fragment is offered in response to a story. Most importantly, though, it is through these internarrative conversations that the next storyteller and story are negotiated and determined, sometimes by somebody volunteering (or being volunteered) to tell a story that the previous story has reminded them of, sometimes by a request for a particular storyteller to tell a contrasting narrative (either to lighten or darken the mood), or at other times simply because one person's voice has not been heard for a while (that is, it is simply their turn to contribute).

It is clear from these discussions that most of the stories were already familiar to many in the room, but that did not seem to diminish their enjoyment of them at all, supporting Marina Warner's statement that the "stories' interest isn't exhausted by repetition, reformulation or retelling, but their pleasure gains from the endless permutations performed on the nucleus of the tale" (2014, 45). As the evening drew toward its end, there were often requests to keep the stories short, so that everyone could head off to bed, or to save the ghost stories for the next evening, lest the children be unable to sleep. As Bogatyrev and Jakobson posit, "the milieu trims the work to suit its needs" (1982, 36).¹⁸

What may appear to us to be everyday and familiar conversations are, in fact, critical in determining the shape and form of the performance event and, therefore, its meaning and the meaning of the stories themselves. Furthermore, the transitions between conversation and narrative performance are relatively seamless. There is no sudden major shift in register once a story begins or ends, no

grand introduction of the storyteller to the audience at its start and no applause offered at its conclusion, but the stories seem to flow out of the previous conversation so that the performance remains low in intensity¹⁹ and the language used in the storytelling remains “closely related to the language of everyday communication” (Hopkin 2012, 14). It is part of the performance of everyday discourse and in this way, it also becomes a space in which the clear distinctions between performer and audience identities can be challenged and become blurred.

It is Luzel’s recording of the whole *veillée* in this manner, therefore, that allows us to understand storytelling as a social and historical act, “as part of a conversation between members of one family, or one neighbourhood” (Hopkin 2012, 29). And, while this may not have been Luzel’s intention, it is only by considering the stories in this context that we are able to understand them not as relics or survivals of a past agrarian culture, nor as “a bourgeois version of the countryside and its residents” (Hopkin 2012, 16), but as contemporary statements that reflect the concerns, fears, hopes, and social realities of the communities that told them. In so doing, these stories enhance our understanding of those communities, as more a matter of historical record than fantastical whimsy.

Luzel as Collector, Translator, and Editor

According to Luzel’s biographer Françoise Morvan, it was almost by accident that Luzel began his work on collecting folktales (Luzel 1995a, 166). Prior to 1868, Luzel’s collecting had concentrated on theater texts, songs, and poetry, but the folktale was a new, unexplored area for research and he came to realize its significance to a broader understanding of Breton culture. He began collecting large amounts of material, especially around his home of Plouaret and

the neighboring villages. His first collection of tales, *Contes bretons*, published in 1870, contained just six stories and provides us with a fascinating insight into his working methods.

It was not unusual at the time for folklorists to rely heavily on trusted correspondents to provide material for their collections and it was not always possible to fully verify the stories that were submitted. Luzel, in contrast, collected all the stories himself, wherever possible. He did to some degree rely on his sisters (especially Perrine, who not only collected tales on his behalf but also brokered introductions with women storytellers, in particular) and friends, such as Jean-Marie Le Jean, although this was not publicly acknowledged for fear of casting doubt on the authenticity of Luzel's work, especially in the wake of the *Barzaz Breiz* controversy. It was only much later, after the remarkable collection of the stories of François Thépault at Morlaix, published as *Contes du boulanger* (Luzel 1995c), that Luzel fully acknowledged his sister's contribution to the greater project.

In the preface to *Contes bretons*, Luzel gives us a somewhat contradictory set of statements about his approach to the texts he was collecting. He describes how he would occasionally interrupt storytellers and ask them to repeat certain phrases to make sure he had written them down accurately (although it is not easy to understand how he did this within the context of a *veillée* without destroying the atmosphere of the occasion). At the same time, when discussing the issue of translation (1995a, 8–9), he introduces two schools of thought. The first allows a relatively free hand in the translation process, especially as the stories are not specifically Breton but variants of tales found in the wider European (and especially French) corpus. The second proposes a much more “rigorously faithful and literal” text (8). Luzel comes down clearly on the side of the former approach. Since these stories are from oral tradition,

he argues, the importance of the exact words spoken should not be exaggerated, as these are fluid and ever-changing. Instead, one should show “an absolute respect” (9) for the fable, that is, the structure and the content.

Luzel was intent on collecting and recording the oral traditions of Brittany in a way that reflected the reality of a region where many dialects of Breton were spoken and whose oral culture did not exist in a kind of splendid isolation. Nevertheless, we should be wary of attaching to Luzel the sensibilities of the modern folklorist regarding accuracy, verbatim transcription, and editorial intervention. Luzel was not about to abandon his editorial responsibilities.

As Luzel set out on his project of folktale-collecting, he seemed to be almost at a loss as to how to negotiate the thorny issue of transcription and translation. For the six stories contained with *Contes bretons*, therefore, he adopts three different approaches and asks his readers to provide him with feedback and suggestions. The first three stories (“Goulaffre the Giant,” “The Man with the Two Dogs,” and “The Godson of the Holy Virgin”) are presented in relatively free translations from Breton into French. The fourth and fifth (“Jesus Christ in Lower Brittany” and “The Fisherman’s Two Sons”) appear in Breton alongside a fairly close French translation. The final story (“The Miller and His Seigneur”) also appears bilingually, but this time the translation is a literal one.

The central problem that Luzel was dealing with was the very nature of the Breton language itself, which existed in multiple dialects (not all of which were comprehensible to each other) and also as a purely oral form (unlike the literary invention of unified Breton). As he transcribed the stories (and later prepared them for publication), Luzel was therefore having to invent a spelling and a grammar, while at the same time using a mixture of three different Breton dialects—which would retain the oral nature of the tales as told and be more

comprehensible for a broader Breton-speaking readership—without having to resort to the artifice that was unified Breton.

Morvan explains the editorial process that Luzel eventually adopted (Luzel 1995a, 180–81). Working from his Breton text, as compiled from his fieldwork notes, Luzel would first create a literal French translation. He would then “rewrite” this French version with the purpose of improving its style, rendering a more readable text, clarifying and correcting where necessary, but avoiding unnecessary elaborations. Finally, he would return to the Breton text and, with reference to his French translation, modify the Breton text into something suitable for publication. So although Luzel’s editorial hand remained relatively light compared to many of his contemporaries, he did alter the texts through quite a complex process as he prepared them for publication.

Luzel was, after all, trying to balance several conflicting demands. He was engaged in a project that sought to expose Breton folktales to the scrutiny of modern scientific approaches. At the same time, he needed to sell books to a wider public and his editorial work was aimed at preparing texts that would make a good read.

While Luzel concentrated his collecting in Lower Brittany (the northwestern Breton-speaking part of the region), the prolific Paul Sébillot was similarly, and significantly, occupied in Upper Brittany.²⁰ Nevertheless, Luzel’s collecting was not evenly distributed across Lower Brittany and the vast majority took place in his home area of Trégor. This may, of course, have partly been pragmatism. Traveling in remote parts of Brittany was no easy task in the nineteenth century and Luzel’s own accounts of the discomforts he endured while conducting fieldwork across Léon and Cornouaille suggest that he was not the happiest of travelers. In a report dated 2 August 1870, he tells of how he arrived in the village of Kymerc’h at eleven o’clock in the evening, after a long day traveling alone and

on foot, and was unable to persuade anybody to provide him with lodgings:

I have for a long time been familiar with Cornouaille and I was under no illusion as to the wide range of challenges that awaited me: long walks beneath a burning sun, on uneven roads and across a treeless landscape; the dreary comforts of the hostelries of our small Breton towns, beds with heavy hemp blankets, where one is eaten alive by enraged and starving fleas. I was counting on all of this. But what I didn't expect, in spite of everything, was to have to sleep outdoors. Even so, that is what happened to me. (1995a, 125)

Luzel was well connected, as one might expect, in the villages around Plouaret, and was able to recruit storytellers and gain admittance to veillées without much difficulty. By contrast, he appears to have encountered much less cooperation during his travels throughout Léon and Cornouaille. Once outside his own community, Luzel found it much more difficult to relate to his storytellers. Morvan observes that "as soon as he left Trégor, he saw people and things as would a stranger, a romantic traveler, a tourist" (Luzel 1995a, 192). Furthermore, much to his surprise, although he was able to collect material from places as remote as Ushant, he found the storytelling traditions there much poorer than he had expected.²¹ In the summer of 1870, for example, he ventured into the *Monts d'Arrés*, a range of granite hills that traditionally separated Léon and Cornouaille:

I had always thought that Braspartz, situated in the middle of the mountains, not far from Mont Saint-Michel,²² the highest point in the *Arez* chain, would be an excellent base for a collector of old popular traditions. But how very wrong I was. (1995a, 126)

From his travels that summer, however, Luzel drew an important conclusion. The most vibrant traditions were to be found in the towns and villages closer to the coast, enriched by contact with other cultures through fishing and trading, and not in isolated communities that had no external influences to nourish them (1995a, 126). This was a radical idea that suggests Luzel was, in many ways, ahead of his time; it was further supported by his experiences in Léon that same autumn.

Luzel's Storytellers and Their Audiences

Luzel was blessed with having access to prolific storytellers within a few miles of his home. In total, Luzel collected from seventy different informants and most are recorded by name, profession, and the village or town they came from (see Luzel 1995a, 213–15). The storytellers' professions varied, but the men tended to be servants, laborers, and artisan craftsmen (including itinerants), rather than shopkeepers or small business owners, and the women mainly in service or beggars (a general term for anybody without regular work and living off the charity of others), although he also collected from housewives, farmers' wives, spinners, and a dressmaker. Many of the women were engaged in multiple activities. Catherine Doz from Plouaret, for example, was variously a beggarwoman and a builder's wife (Luzel 1995a, 213–14). Although forty-two of his storytellers were men, representing 60 percent of the total, most of the stories Luzel collected were, in fact, from women.²³ He relied particularly on two women for his material: Marguérîte Philippe (Marc'harid Fulup) from Pluzunet, who made her living from both spinning and as a "pilgrim-by-proxy,"—that is, traveling to holy shrines on behalf of other people to seek the intervention of a saint on her client's behalf—and Barba Tassel, a beggarwoman

from Plouaret, who was charged with delivering the mail to Plouaret.

Margu rite and Barba were the only two storytellers from whom Luzel collected stories throughout the whole period of his folktale research. Of the two, Barba appears to have originally been the more prolific storyteller. Margu rite, in contrast, was principally known for her singing. According to Luzel, she sang “constantly . . . as she turned her spinning wheel” and was “much sought after at the country farms to enliven the long hours of the winter evenings” (1995a, 89). However, it is Margu rite for whom Luzel reserves the highest praise; he claims she knows 60 stories in addition to her reputed repertoire of 150 songs.²⁴ What seems to have impressed him most was her “prodigious memory” (1995a, 89), which enabled her to recite her material to Luzel with a precision and confidence that must have made the job of collecting and transcribing that much easier. Contrary to the popular image of the aged storyteller, she was, in fact, a relatively young woman in her early thirties when Luzel began collecting stories from her (she was sixteen years his junior and lived until 1909, although a picture taken of her in 1906 shows a woman seemingly much older than her sixty-nine years).

Over the years, Luzel came to rely increasingly on these two women. As he himself became more selective about the stories he would collect, he seemed confident about the quality of material that he would get from them. It is not clear whether he resorted to directly paying them for reciting the stories to him. It is quite possible, although Charles Le Goffic’s reported conversation with Margu rite Philippe throws some light on the arrangements. Rather than paying her for each individual song, it seems that he gave her an annual “Christmas box” of ten francs and would feed her, give her the occasional coin, and put her up at his house, whenever she needed it.