

June 2007

## Caribbean Storytales: a Methodology for Resistance

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### Recommended Citation

Vété-Congolo, Hanétha (2007) "Caribbean Storytales: a Methodology for Resistance," *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal*: Vol. 5 : Iss. 1 , Article 7.

Available at: <http://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/anthurium/vol5/iss1/7>

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Caribbean storytales not only have meaning, theory and a methodology, but in addition they articulate aspects of the spirit and the cultural unity of the archipelago. One needs to understand the content and the philosophy of these tales in order to appreciate the spirit of the Caribbean. In “Littérature orale et contes,” Martinican ethnologist Ina Césaire stresses that Caribbean storytales are true “révélateur” of that spirit (480). These tales are fundamentally interoral—hence the term “interorality”—since they were developed exclusively from transposition. The slaves transposed into their new world the appropriate aspects of their original culture that could best allow them to survive in their new Caribbean environment. Thanks to the transformations the tales underwent essentially at the symbolic level, the tales became Caribbean or rather, they defined little by little the content of what is Caribbean. I argue that the slaves absorbed their new environment in a syncretic manner. They adapted to it and provided it many new aspects and norms. Interorality was achieved consciously so that some distinctive traits of the African culture that the slaves knew were doomed to disappear would be retained. In this regard, Reverend Labat asserted that the slaves knew they were bound to remain in this new world and could not return to the African continent; they are “*éloignés de leur pays, sans espérance d’y jamais retourner*” (“away from their country, with no hope of ever returning there”; 228). By transposing their tales, the slaves transcribed their new identity in order to position it vis-a-vis their old world—Africa—as well as their new world—the Caribbean. Thus the slaves shaped Africa’s existence in the Caribbean, and by choosing to indicate their identity in relation to Africa, the slaves claimed their right to opacity as Édouard Glissant argues in *Traité du Tout Monde*.

Many characteristics of Caribbean culture were developed and articulated in the tales. Ina Césaire affirms that the role of Caribbean folktale is to represent the culture (480). The Caribbean folktale is both a receptacle for a distinctive culture and a “*lieu commun*” as Édouard Glissant conceives the phrase. This means that it is a convergence point where elements from different origins meet. In addition to their own culture, the slaves borrowed features from the masters’ culture that could not have failed to influence them. Reverend Du Tertre pointed out that on occasion the children of slaves and masters were brought up “together.” Some masters even preferred the slaves’ children to be with their own children rather than with their parents who were thought to be subversive. According to Du Tertre: “*on élève les petits Nègres de pair à compagnon avec les enfans du logis; & plusieurs habitans aiment mieux qu’ils soient avec leurs enfans, qu’avec leurs Pères & leurs Meres*” (“the negro children are brought up with the masters’ children, and many planters would rather see them with their own children than with their fathers and mothers”; 476). Thus, I argue that the tale indicates a new Caribbean identity as well as what is distinctly African and European.

The identity the slaves passed on to their children is intercultural and expressed in terms of African customs, the memory of which quickly faded, European culture, and the Caribbean environment in which the slaves were forced to exist. In *Ainsi parla l’oncle*, Jean Price-Mars observed that “*il est possible de découvrir dans les éléments constitutifs de nos contes des*

*survivances lointaines de la terre d’Afrique autant que de créations spontanées et d’adaptations de légendes gasconnes, celtiques ou autres*” (“one can find in our tales remote elements from Africa as well as spontaneous creations and adaptations of Gascon, Celtic and other legends”; 54). This relationship that the tales establish between European and African cultures places the slaves in the center of a wide portal opening to the world. Claiming one’s opacity is not the same as withdrawal into one’s self as Édouard Glissant affirmed: “*Je réclame pour tous le droit à l’opacité, qui n’est pas le renfermement*” (“I claim for everyone the right to opacity. Opacity is no withdrawal”; 29).

Because of all this, the Caribbean folktale is also a manifestation of the unpredictable, the “Chaos-Monde” that Edouard Glissant described in *Traité du Tout Monde* (22):

*J’appelle Chaos-Monde le choc culturel actuel de tant de cultures qui s’embrasent, se repoussent, disparaissent, subsistent pourtant, s’endorment ou se transforment, lentement ou à vitesse foudroyante; ces éclats, ces éclatements dont nous n’avons pas commencé de saisir le principe ni l’économie et dont nous ne pouvons pas prévoir l’emportement.* (29)

(I use the expression Chaos-Monde to refer to the current cultural clash of so many cultures that take in or reject one another, that vanish and yet, survive, remain the same or become transformed either slowly or with lightning rapidity; the burst of brilliance, the splitting apart—the principles of which we have not even begun to grasp and the operation of which we cannot predict.)

This suggests that the Caribbean tale is also a meeting place. It is a “*lieu commun*” where several cultural and time zones converge. Although aware of their status, the slaves were uncertain about their future in the Caribbean. This is why the interoralization techniques employed by them relied on their symbolic imaginary to invent a future, to state it and to establish a relationship between this future and the past. In fact, they set in place the Poetics of Relation that Édouard Glissant described in *Traité du Tout Monde* (22):

*Et j’appelle Poétique de la relation ce possible de l’imaginaire qui nous porte à concevoir la globalité insaisissable d’un tel Chaos-Monde, en même temps qu’il nous permet d’en relever quelque détail, et en particulier de chanter notre lieu, insondable et irréversible. L’imaginaire n’est pas le songe, ni l’évidé de l’illusion.* (22)

(And I call Poetics of Relation, the capacity of our imaginary to allow us to conceive the ungraspable global nature of such a *Chaos-Monde* at the same time that it allows us to pinpoint some details and in particular, to celebrate our impenetrable and irreversible place in it. The imaginary is not a dream nor is it an empty illusion.)

The literary culture of Africa that reached the Caribbean was ancestral and not as much influenced by European culture as it is today. The African oral tradition had developed several age-old poetic forms that interpreted the African spirit. I argue that tales and proverbs were systematically chosen in the different linguistic areas of the Caribbean to the detriment, for example, of lyrical poetry and song that would not have been viable in the colonial slave *conte*. Thus, Moreau de Saint-Méry observed that the slaves in Saint Domingue had a propensity for proverbs with a moral ending. He wrote that, “*Les nègres aiment les proverbes et les sentences. Ils en ont même de très moraux*” (“The negroes like proverbs and maxims. They have some very moral ones”; (56).

This highlights the fact that the slaves decided to retain the African characteristics of astuteness and prudence in the Caribbean and selected tales according to their usefulness and necessity. They were also influenced by the land, viability and adaptability. In the long run, the storyteller no longer told the tales from the viewpoint of Africa. Both the storyteller and the tale spoke from the viewpoint of the Caribbean to which they became committed. By interoralization, the slaves resisted the total decline of their Africanness and succeeded in maintaining parts of their African identity and past. Édouard Glissant suggests this in his “*Îles et archipels*”: “*Même déportés sans aucun recours, sans langages, ni dieux, ni outils, les Africains ont maintenu une présence de l’ancien pays, qui entrera dans la composition de valeurs nouvelles*” (“Even as deportees with no resort, no languages, no gods, no tools, the Africans maintained a presence of the former land that they would use to form new values”; 11). At the same time that they were putting up this spiritual and symbolic resistance, the slaves also needed to physically oppose the inhuman conditions under which they existed on the plantations. Storytelling, with its symbolic wording, played a double role of *marronnage* and would be the cover under which there was resistance to these conditions. According to Reverend Du Tertre, *marronnage* was the first mechanism used by the slaves to strive for freedom. He explained how efficacious and formidable *marronnage* was:

*Ces fugitifs sont tout à fait à craindre, car quand ils ont gousté cette façon de vie, coquine & miserable, l’on a toutes les peines du monde à les reduire; ils débauchent les autres, & l’on s’est vu réduit à cette extrémité à la Martinique, qu’on n’osait dire un mot de travers à un Nègre, ny luy faire la moindre correction qu’il ne s’enfuit dans les bois: les Nègresses mesmes les imitoient, & s’y en alloient avec de petits enfans de sept ou huit iours. (500)*

(These fugitives are frightening because once they have tasted this unshackled and despicable way of life it’s extremely difficult to deter them from it. They inveigle their fellow slaves to run away too and in Martinique it is a fact that one is afraid to say a wrong word to a slave or even to threaten him lest he flee into the woods. Even slave women imitate them and run away with seven or eight year old children.)

According to Édouard Glissant, *marronnage* is not only physical it is also aesthetic as illustrated by interorality: “*Le marronnage est une opposition sociale, politique et culturelle ... il a fini par engendrer des réflexes culturels et intellectuels féconds*” (“Marronnage is a social, political and cultural opposition ... It ended up engendering fruitful cultural and intellectual reflexes”; 11-12). Caribbean interorality and folktales represent this aesthetic *marronnage*, which is even more fearsome since it is concealed and seemingly innocuous. Because of its symbolic nature the wording of the tale can be highly subversive. This subversive nature is also indicated through theatricality. In the storytale, words alone do not suffice to communicate in a proper and effective manner. It must be conveyed by every fiber of one’s being. What Roland Barthes says about Japan can be applied to the Caribbean: “*l’empire des signifiants est si vaste, il excède à tel point la parole .... là-bas le corps existe, se déploie, agit, se donne .... Ce n’est pas la voix qui communique, c’est tout le corps*” (“the power of signifiers is so vast, it is so much more than words ... over there, the body exists, expands, acts, gives ... itself to the speech. It’s not the voice that communicates, it’s the entire body”; (18).

### **A Methodology of Resistance**

In order to thwart his master’s system that demeaned him, the slave had to organize his resistance. Reverend Du Tertre records that the slaves often took the time to organize their flight from the plantation. According to him they “*ne se rendent jamais Marons, qu’ils n’ayent mis ordre à leurs affaires, c’est pourquoy ils se munissent de ferremens, comme serpes, haches & couteaux*” (“never become maroons without putting their affairs in order. That is why they take along with them iron fitments such as billhook, axes and knives ...”; 499). The slaves first decided on a plan and in fact were very meticulous. They considered their culture, identity and new environment, and then they looked at the world around them and judged it. They did some self-analysis, and relied on themselves and the force of their spirit. They then made an appropriate and judicious selection of their possessions. In order to do this they had to consider their former and their present environment and then possibly looked at these in relation to their future environment, yet to be constructed. This led to reflection and then to awareness and reaction. Finally, they needed to elaborate the methodology of the means for their resistance, which was trickery. Edward Long points out the ingenuity of the slaves in the colony of Jamaica (405):

their principal address is shewn in finding out their master’s temper, and playing upon it so artfully as to bend it with most convenience to their own purposes. They are not less studious in fifting their master’s representative, the overseer; if he is not too cunning for them, which they soon discover after one or two experiments, they will easily find means to over-reach him on every occasion, and make his indolence, his weakness, or sottishness, a sure prognostic of some comfortable term of idleness to them: but if they find him too intelligent, wary,

and active, they leave no expedient untried, by thwarting his plans, misunderstanding his orders, and reiterating complaints against him, to serret him out of his post: if this will not succeed they perplex and worry him, especially if he is of an impatient, fretful turn, till he grows heartily sick of his charge, and voluntarily resigns it. An overseer therefore, like a premier minister, must always expect to meet with a faction, ready to oppose his administration, right or wrong; unless he will give the reins out of his hands, and suffer the mobility to have things their own way; which if he complies with, they will extol him to his face, condemn him in their heart, and very soon bring his government into disgrace. (3.3.405)

Storytelling demonstrates the method and furnishes the pedagogy for resistance. The characters that are best suited for that mission, who also present a true representation of the daily trials of life, are Compère Lapin and Anancy. They possess the qualities described by Edward Long, which are manipulation and adaptation. In “Littérature et contes,” Ina Césaire writes about Lapin that: “*Lapin, pervers, ambigu et révélateur des contradictions de classe, deviendra le véritable héros d’une psychologie où la ruse a connu plus de réussite flagrante que le courage ou la révolte*” (“As perverse, ambiguous and revealer of social class contradictions as he is, Lapin became the hero of a psychology where cunning is more successful than courage or revolt”; 483). Both characters have an exegetic value and function, as illustrated in the Creole tale *Compè Lapen ka mandé Bondié ti bren lès pri*. Organization of the narrative is directly linked to the organization of the reasoning. Unsurprisingly, this tale has many versions in the anglophone and francophone Caribbean, where it is frequently and extensively made use of in a systematic way. Indeed, apart from its symbolic meanings, the tale tells why rabbits have such a short tail.<sup>1</sup>

As suggested, the tale does not only have symbolic and conceptual meanings but it also has practical value, that is, the lesson to be learned from the tale. They illustrate by examples given throughout the story the methods and ways of becoming a successful maroon. The slaves are already the men-of-action who accompany the storyteller whom Roger Abrahams describes in his study of the role of verbal performer in Caribbean societies in the 1960s and 1970s. He is, according to Abrahams, “the physically adept one who brings focus to the proceedings by his leadership and performance abilities” (xvi). This methodology is meaningful only if everyone is aware of the circumstances that the tale reflects and the experience being described. The storyteller and the listener must have the same understanding of the tale. According to Robert Pelton, what is important is the way those who tell trickster tales understand them (10). From this point of view, the tale has some of the characteristics of an initiation. It reinterprets the experience since its basis is in society, but under the humanizing and social initiative of the slaves telling it society is reorganized. In this way, interorality is exploited in the tales by the slaves.

## **The African Model**

In the Ashanti community, the tale, *Hare and the Great Spirit of the Bush* tells why Anancy is the sole owner of all folktales. There are three narrative levels in this tale. First, Hare asks the Spirit for more intelligence since he claims not to have enough. His intention is to be the cleverest of all the animals in the bush. The fact of asking the spirit is as important as the intention to have superiority. Both have an ascending structure. However, to have more intelligence is not gratuitous and Hare needs to be put to the test. Second, the Spirit proposes to Hare that he obtain his desired intelligence by merit and asks him to bring back small birds in a flask, some doe milk in a calabash and a snake as long as the stick he gives Hare. Third, Hare goes on to the forest and applies only one tactic to obtain these things. He will have to succeed on this mission in order to transform the negative situation—not enough intelligence—into a positive one.

The structure of Hare's tactic—the performance of the actions—is linear but the result is ascending since Hare succeeds. Firstly, Hare challenges the small birds to enter the flask by telling them that they do not have the ability to do so. To take up the challenge they enter the flask. Hare then mocks the doe by telling her that she cannot produce milk. He goes on doing the same thing with the snake claiming that he can't be as long as the stick. By underestimating their abilities, he makes them take action to prove them selves. Hare meets all the targets and he obtains the bargaining chips he desires. Finally, the Spirit refuses to endow him with more intelligence since obviously he demonstrates that he is clever enough. Indeed, because of his ruse, the test is easily passed. The moral of the tale therefore is descendent, since neither has his desire for more intelligence been fulfilled nor his lack thereof remedied. Indeed, the story begins on a high level through the desire for superiority expressed to the superior being. This has great symbolism. The story, however, terminates on a low level with the absolute refusal to grant this superiority. Thus, there is an important opposition between the beginning and the end of this tale as well as between the success of the tactic and the failure to satisfy the desire.

The descent, which is also somewhat surprising, is shown at the level of this contradiction since, as agreed, the contract has been performed. The mission has been accomplished but the wish has not been granted. The Spirit has not kept his promise hence a strong impression of immorality and of paradox. According to moral precepts, of which the Spirit is thought to be the guardian, a promise must be kept. The Spirit is the character that breaks this precept and this could mean that if the reason for it is fair, moral codes may be broken. This tale teaches us though that the Almighty cannot be deceived. Furthermore, each person has a role and a set of skills. This hierarchy cannot be transgressed. Finally, avarice, arrogance and covetousness are to be rejected for the sake of social cohesion.

The structure of this story, just as the tactic—but not the result, however—is almost linear and does not have any particular crescendo. The actions are not very exiting since the tactic that Hare decides to employ is monotonous, as it is repetitive. The end can be anticipated

even though it is surprising. Hare's complaint to the Supreme Being is ascendant. This is, however, completely reversed in the end.

### **The Franco-creolophone Transposition in the Caribbean**

In the Franco-creolophone Caribbean, this tale is entitled, *Compère Lapin ka mandé Bondié ti bren lès-pri*. It also has three narrative segments and pits God against Compère Lapin. The latter asks God for intelligence since, according to him, he is totally deprived of it. God agrees to give him some should he bring back in eight days one tooth of Compère Zamba, some hair from brown pigs, the milk from a wild cow, Compère Tigre's excrements and one grass snake with her seven little grass snakes in a Spanish container. Caribbean people are often accused of being fatalistic and defeatist and here, Lapin suggests that these two negative attitudes should be proscribed. Compère Lapin adopts a different tactic for each of the missions and after two days only he succeeds in bringing all of these errands back to God. This is precisely why God refuses to comply with his wish.

This Caribbean tale is longer and more complex than its African source. This length translates the complexity of the slavery system in which the slaves have to face many challenges. While the African Spirit asks Hare for three items, God asks Lapin for six. This reflects the system and the traps inherent therein. In addition, the Christian God prevalent in the colonies replaces the animist culture of Africa that the Spirit embodies. Nonetheless, the African psychology is retained through the free and familiar relationship the characters have with the Supreme Being. In both tales, they communicate with him directly and these Supreme Beings seem very accessible and there is no need for intercessor saints contrary to some Christian dogma. Compère Lapin addresses God directly and thus his brazen lie is seen even clearer. Whereas, Hare states bluntly his desire to obtain more intelligence, Lapin claims that he has none whatsoever. Lies were commonplace in this Caribbean context and God himself does not seem offended by Compère Lapin's sly attitude. He goes so far as to lie to God, the almighty Being, who sees and knows everything, and rewards those who are audacious, determined and courageous. It is undeniable that God represents the master whose power is absolute. Since this God, that is, this master, does not give away anything, as the tale illustrates the slaves should take whatever they needed by being audacious, wily, determined and courageous. They should dare to circumvent the system by using appropriate tricks. Consequently, this tale teaches the master's psychology and the means to bypass it. Audacity and courage must always accompany ruse. Just like the African hare, the Caribbean rabbit uses guile to achieve his goals. However, he adapts his strategy according to his needs and according to the circumstances of his experience. Thus, with vivid drama and gesticulation, he applies six different tricks, the lesson being that, in the slavery system, one can only survive thanks to the versatility of one's tactical imagination. On the one hand, the African meanings—that is the moral—are adapted. On the second, the characters are transformed into concepts that are explained in the tale itself. Repeating the same



tactic each time is dangerous and useless in the deleterious context of the plantation. Compère Lapin learns that regardless of his lack of knowledge, he should not hesitate to challenge God, whose power should not frighten or discourage him. The fatalism and defeatism often adopted by Caribbean people must be avoided. He uses his excrement as a substitute for Tiger's and presents them to God. The latter forgives him quite easily for this guile, which in itself is a victory and demonstrates the true genius of the African tale. While in the African tale lies and sins are denounced, in this tale they are encouraged since lying and using cunning can be salutary for the slaves. Reverend Labat highlights the fact that the Dominican slaves understood the value of guile:

*Dans le commencement qu'on travaillait à leur conversion, les missionnaires y ont souvent été trompés. Les voyant bien instruits et assidus à la prière et aux catéchismes, ils croyaient les pouvoir baptiser avec sûreté, et pour...leur inspirer des sentiments plus relevés de notre religion, on les conduisait aux îles françaises ...; et dans ces occasions on leur faisait des présents et on les régalaient bien. Cela les contentait beaucoup, mais au bout de quelques jours ils demandaient d'être encore baptisés afin de recevoir de nouveaux présents; ils se mettaient aussi peu en peine de leur baptême que s'ils ne l'eussent jamais reçu, étant toujours prêts à le recevoir,... sans que toutes les instructions des missionnaires aient pu leur inculquer rien de fixe et de stable en matière de religion. (400)*

(At the beginning, the missionaries who tried to convert them were fooled. Since they saw that they prayed with assiduity and knew their catechism well they thought they could easily baptize them ... in order to inspire in them noble sentiments about our religion even more they were taken to the French islands ... and for that event they were given gifts and food. They loved it but after a few days they asked to be baptized again in order to receive more presents; they did not really take their baptism seriously and always expect to receive it again, ... and this religious education could not even inculcate in them any fixed and stable notion of our religion.)

Notwithstanding, this tale teaches the Christian precept inculcated into the slaves by the ecclesiastical authorities according to which God is good. Thus the tale exhorts its listeners to make use of any tool necessary, appropriate and useful to the projected aim, as illustrated in the citation above. Even though the tale aims at indoctrination and showing ways to survive and rebel against the system, the fact remains that these tactics are not totally fruitful and that the edge has been taken off Compère Lapin's victory, which is only a relative victory. Therefore, the tale has a binary ideology. This may well be a reflection of Caribbean societies where nothing is absolute but everything is mitigated, relative and ambivalent.

On the hand the tale promotes idealism as Lapin's request shows. On the other hand, it underscores realism since the request is not honored. In the final analysis, God is the winner.

Moreover, contrary to Hare, Lapin is beaten in under the plantation system. The Spirit is more magnanimous than God who slaps Lapin on the neck. This is a reflection of the physical and psychic violence that holds sway in the slave system. The tale proves that the master has the last word and is, if truth be told, not munificent. Despite all, resistance through persistence is encouraged. This lesson has two inferences that appear to be ambiguous thereby reflecting the ambivalence and complexity of the situation. Thus, the difficulty if not the impossibility for the slaves to set themselves free of this system that regulates them is emphasized. However, Lapin passed his tests for he succeeds in obtaining the elements that will allow his request to be answered. This is all the more amazing since he uses the most appropriate, method, guile. This said his tests are not elevating as those of a true hero should be.

On the discursive level, the system of resistance as well as the teaching thereof that it provides in the dynamics of the tale are limited although they both reflect very well the operating system of the plantation. While in most of the tales Lapin is successful, here he is powerless before God, his master. However, the merit of his attempt is to be seen firstly in the way it was conducted, and secondly in the active hope and perseverance it inspires. The lesson is that one should not capitulate even in the face of a more powerful enemy. For these reasons, we can view Compère Lapin as a hero and an anti-hero at the same time. This strong and double symbolism reinforces the lesson it conveys all the more that Robert Pelton states in *The Trickster in West Africa* that “the trickster is ... a symbolic pattern ...” (3). Lapin is the example, the living personification of the method to be used. In fact, he is a methodology. Like the African tale, the end illustrates that the Supreme Being is hard to mislead. Notwithstanding, the Christian God is exceptional; he is vengeful and violent. Apart from this difference, one of the major transpositions from the African ending is the use of Lapin’s punishment to explicate phenomena such as the reason why rabbits are slaughtered. In this light, the end has a practical meaning and we learn that rabbits are slaughtered because of this knock given by God. So, it is clear that this tale has great depth in since it contains two diverging connotations.

To the visible and explicit narration is appended an invisible and implicit tale of pure symbolism. Because of their original sin, rabbits suffer from decapitation. In this light, Lapin is truly an anti-hero. However, according to the invisible and implicit narration Compère Lapin becomes a hero since his message promotes resistance by the means he himself articulates. In this, it is clear that the tale makes no pretense at elitism. Through the oppositions and the contradictions, it is also emphasized that no truth is absolute. On the contrary, the tale suggests different possibilities and offers an interpretation of experience.

### **Structures and Meanings**

Lapin’s actions provide rhythm, movement, volume and structure to the story. The structure is irregular and a reflection of the preceding attributes. First of all, he moves from

bottom to top to meet with God. The structure of the narration is therefore ascending. This also symbolizes his desire for social promotion. Then Lapin moves back to earth in a descending motion. His tactics are numerous hence the rhythm and movement—this also registers the physical particularity of rabbits—and volume. The internal dynamic of the narration refers to the animal species of rabbits. There again the movement goes upward since Compère Lapin attacks the least dangerous of the animals first—Zamba—and ends with the fearsome snake. He then goes back up to God who hits him and sends him back down to earth. Not only does this gesture represent the descending structure of the narration but, in addition, it renders the master's psychological attitude toward the slaves whom he wants to maintain under his yoke. These two movements made by Compère Lapin indicate the opposition between his will and his master's. To Lapin's voluntary intention—he goes up to God on his own accord—is opposed his master's who sends him back down to earth; the physical actions transcribe the characters' psychological dispositions. Lapin's aspirations, which are always ascending since his goals are always high, are brought back to more realistic proportions. Thus, it is suggested that the rigor and rigidity of the hierarchy cannot be abolished. Lapin's strong competences cannot overpower God's own trick and therefore, the system will remain as is. Finally, the system becomes an enemy that is revealed to be stronger. The difference with the African tale is evident in the intensity of the end and in the degree of ascendancy and descendancy of the actions and their result. The action of going up to the sky and then down to earth is more intense in the Caribbean tale. Since it is in the New World that the slaves were more belittled, and it is in this same World that they felt the need for self-actualization most keenly. The symbolic importance of the final situation of the tale in relation to the beginning is expressed through the organization of multiple tactics.

The movement from bottom to top articulates the personal aspiration of Lapin. Therefore, Hare and Lapin have two narrative roles. Their goal is to make a wish come true with the help of the Almighty figure. But while Hare's discursive role is to honor morality and honesty that of Lapin is, in addition to that, to maintain the spirit of resistance. The African tale stipulates that the Almighty figure shall not be defied, whereas the Caribbean tale articulates that not only may this be done but that it is necessary to do so.

### **The Transposition in the Anglophone Caribbean**

In the following Dominican and Trinidadian versions, Lapin also has to accomplish tasks.<sup>2</sup> In Dominica where the tale is drastically shortened, God asks Lapin to bring back a caïman's tooth. Lapin pours okra juice on the ground where the caïman dances so that the caïman will fall after which he extracts with a nail driver one tooth from the caïman's mouth. On hearing of this trick, God refuses to grant Lapin more intelligence.

In Trinidad, Papa Bondieu, that is God, asks Lapin to get him a flask full of wasps. Lapin frustrates the wasps by telling them that they are not able to get into the flask. The wasps accept

the challenge and enter the flask. To get Tiger's tears Lapin tells Tiger that God himself ordered that he be tied to a tree. After having tied him to a tree, Lapin hits Tiger who cries. He then collects some tears. God asks Lapin to place himself under a box while he gives him more intelligence. Lapin fails to do this and to punish him God grabs him by his ears and throws him far away hence the length of rabbit's ears.

In the anglophone versions, Lapin's tactic is the same as that used in the francophone version. On one hand, okras are used and on the other, Lapin questions his prey's physical prowess in order to frustrate them and lead them to make mistakes. Their pride leads them to provide Lapin with what he wants. The difference is in the amount of items required by God. In Dominica, God only requests one item while in Trinidad he asks for two. In the Trinidadian tale, God is directly presented as a liar, but this does not in any way lessen the closeness of the three Caribbean tales. God claims he can provide Lapin with more intelligence provided the latter remains under a box whereas his real intention is to strike down Lapin with a thunderclap. Lapin's dishonesty and disobedience saves him. Wishing to see what was coming to him before the appointed time he moves from beneath the box. The ruse is valuable since it saves him. The master, whom God embodies, is a liar who cannot be caught or defeated except by another lie.

Reverend Labat gives us an astonishing example of the tricks used by masters to subdue their slaves. He explains that the Mine slaves who thought they could return to Africa after their death, decided to commit suicide. To avoid the loss of his goods, "*Un Anglais, habitant de l'île saint-Christophe, appelé le major Crips*" ("An English man living in the colony of Saint Christophe and named Major Crips"; 227) made his slaves believe that he would commit suicide together with them. In this way, he too could go to Africa and enslave them there even more terribly. He consequently prevented this collective suicide: "*Le major Crips revint chez lui avec ses nègres, fort content de la réussite de son stratagème. Les nègres lui tinrent parole et ne se pendirent plus*" ("Major Crips returned home with his negroes. He was very happy of his trick. The negroes honored their words and never hung themselves"; 228). Robert Pelton concluded that, "the most distinctive feature of the West African trickster" is "his association with divination" (273). He goes on stating that "Divination touches each of the "forms" that seem to give West African life a distinctive shape" (273). However, this is not felt in the Caribbean context where Compère Lapin evolves. In this light the transposition is aggressive.

This Anglophone tale complements the francophone version and adds another dimension to its concept and ideology. It shows that the weapons are harmonized and Lapin has definitely learned from his master. Edward Long summarizes the assimilation process between masters and slaves: "The general character of our Creole slaves may be summed up in the words of an old proverb, 'Like master, like man.'" (404). The assimilation is climaxed by the fact that the slaves are aware of the lies of their masters who claim that only work can bring dignity and food. Reverend Labat informs us that among the slaves there was a popular saying, "*voleur comme un blanc...*" ("to be a cheater like a white man..."; 409). The slaves made a point in highlighting the irony of the lie since their masters who did no work enjoyed richness and the respect of their

peers. So, in this Trinidadian tale, God's true nature is unveiled. He is a deceiver. Like the master in the colonies he symbolizes, God uses and promotes deception. Moreover, in the colonies, the slaves have understood very well that the master, to claim to be the guarantee of morality, teaches lying and trickery. Finally, in the francophone and Anglophone versions there is a unified ideology as the same causes have resulted in the same type of transposition and discourse.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Elsie Clews Parsons has collected about eighteen versions of this tale in the Caribbean in *Folklore of the Antilles, French and English* (vol. XXVI, part III, 1943, 15-20), in addition to the version published in volume XXVI part III in 1933 and the six others in volume XXVI part II published in 1936. In Africa, this tale is *Hare and the Great Spirit of the Bush* (Davesne et Gouin).

<sup>2</sup>See Elsie Clews Parson, *Folklore of the Antilles, French and English*, vol. XXVI, Part III, 1943, 15-16.

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