



GLOSSARY OF CAJUN FRENCH PHRASES

<i>Ainsi soit-il</i>	“So be it.” Used in French prayers in place of “amen” (which comes from a Hebrew word meaning more or less the same thing).
<i>Arpent</i>	A unit of land area used in southern Louisiana, equal to a little less than an acre. Often, arpents of land weren’t square, but were long and narrow, with a short frontage on the bayou.
<i>Ça, quand-même</i>	Literally, “that anyway.” An exclamation of amusement or surprise.
<i>Charivari</i>	A Louisiana French tradition, in which revelers follow a newlywed couple back to their house on the wedding night and raise a ruckus outside their bedroom window. It’s mostly meant in a good-spirited way, but if it causes some mild embarrassment to the couple—who, after all, were certainly participating in typical wedding-night activities while it was going on—that was fine.
<i>Cher or chère</i>	Dear, cute, sweetie.
<i>Connard</i>	An insult not used in polite company. The closest English equivalent is “asshole.”
<i>Couillon</i>	An insult for which the seriousness depends on who says it. From a friend and said with a smile, it can mean “Dumbbell” or “nitwit” and be meant as a tease. Said in anger, it’s pretty vulgar; the closest we have in English is “bastard.”
<i>Fais-do-do</i>	A community dance.
<i>Fée</i>	A fairy; also used for someone who is a little crazy.
<i>Feu follet</i>	Literally, “foolish fire.” A will-of-the-wisp that dwells in the swamps of southern Louisiana.
<i>Grippe</i>	The flu.
<i>Jésu me protège</i>	Jesus protect me.
<i>Jésu te bénit</i>	Jesus bless you.
<i>Le bon Dieu</i>	The good Lord.
<i>Loup-garou</i>	A legendary swamp-dwelling werewolf.
<i>Lutin</i>	A ghost, the spirit of an unbaptized child. They try to lure adults to follow them, leading them to become hopelessly lost.
<i>Mais</i>	Literally “but”—it’s the all-purpose Cajun word. It’s used like the English “well,” or “no, really?” or “come on!”



<i>Maudit</i>	As an adjective, it's equivalent to "damned" or "blasted" in English. As an exclamation, it's close to "well, I'll be damned."
<i>Merde</i>	Shit. Not said in polite company, just as in English.
<i>Pauvre bête</i>	Poor thing, poor fool.
<i>Père</i>	Father. As in English, it can mean your actual father or a title of respect for a Catholic priest.
<i>Pischouanque</i>	An insult, usually toward someone the speaker considers weak or puny. The closest we have in English is "pissant."
<i>R'gardez-donc</i>	Literally, "so look at that!" An exclamation of surprise.
<i>Sale</i>	Filthy.
<i>Sacré coeur de Jésus and Sacré Dieu</i>	Sacred heart of Jesus and holy God; both are also used as exclamations of dismay.
"T"	A common form of nickname in southern Louisiana is a "T" name, where "T" is short for <i>petit</i> (little). So T-Joe in the story is "Little Joe." It often completely took the place of the person's real name. I have a cousin named Nolan whom everyone calls T-Tache ("Little Spot") because he has freckles, and another whose name is Léonie (like J.P.'s sister) but has been known since childhood as "T-Sloan." I once asked her where the nickname came from, and what it meant. She laughed and said, "I've been called that since I was a child. I honestly have no idea who gave me that name or why."
<i>Tante</i>	Aunt.
<i>Tiens</i>	Literally, "hold." It's hard to translate, but the nearest words/phrases in English are "well," "hang on a moment," "okay," or "all right."
<i>Tombez des cordes</i>	Literally, "throwing down ropes." An expression describing a torrential downpour, a little like "raining cats and dogs."



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR *THE COMMUNION OF SHADOWS*

Part I: The Bells of Sainte-Marie

1. What difference does Basile see between the “rules of Père Jolibois” and “the rules of God?” He obviously disapproves of what Thérèse was doing, and yet he says “there was no real harm in her.” How does he square his own sense of morality with what he gets from his faith?
2. The first time Jean-Pierre speaks with Thérèse’s ghost, she tells him she seeks justice, but doesn’t say against whom. Whom did you think Thérèse was talking about? How did that change as you learned more about the circumstances of her death?
3. Do you think what happened was Michel’s fault? His actions were the ones who most directly resulted in Thérèse Clerot’s death, but where—if anywhere—does the blame actually lie?
4. After Michel’s death, why does Jean-Pierre stay in the Dominique household?
5. Why do you think Julienne willed everything to Jean-Pierre?

Part II: Mirror Image

1. Why do you think Tante Fée connects more strongly to T-Joe than to the other members of their family?
2. What do you think Tante Fée is trying to accomplish by haunting T-Joe and Valérie?
3. Tante Fée got her heart broken when she was young; how does this help explain why she’s determined to help T-Joe?
4. Why does T-Joe decide not to blackmail Tante Fée to leave them alone, using what he knows about her past?
5. How does he get the courage to face down Eugène?



Part III: Tombez des Cordes

1. After Clovis and Lucie make love, and Clovis says, “I could have said no,” Lucie responds, “Could you have? I wonder.” What do you think she means by that?
2. Why did Clovis choose to baptize his son? Was it fear, compassion, or a combination?
3. Why did Lucie turn herself in?
4. Lucie certainly knew Clovis would have married her if she’d asked. Why didn’t she do that?
5. Why does she say, “I don’t much care if I’m bound for heaven or hell”?

Part IV: Servant to the Lender

1. Azélie died “with a faint trace of a smile on her lips.” Why?
2. Why did Ambroise slap his son?
3. What does Ambroise mean by “live those years out loud”—and why does Leandre choose not to? Why, instead, does he choose to join “the communion of shadows?”
4. When Leandre compares his own death to leaping into the bayou, he seems indifferent to the fact that he’s going to die. Did you believe him? How did seeing his mother’s ghost change that perspective?
5. Why do you think the Angel of Death laughs and admits defeat in the end?