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Breton nationalism in literature

The construction of nationalism and a collective identity in the *Barzaz Breiz*, *Le pain des rêves* and *Le cheval d'orgeuil*

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Abstract

The present thesis focuses on the relationship between Breton nationalism and literature. The analysis is based on the questions how a historical narrative and a collective identity are created in three Breton literary works. The works analysed are the *Barzaz Breiz*, *Le pain des rêves* and *Le cheval d'orgeuil*. The method used in the analysis is a historical and literary narrative analysis, analysing relevant excerpts with a connection to either (cultural) nationalism, the construction of a collective identity or the view on the Breton society. The drawn conclusion is that the created historical narratives differ greatly between the books, with the *Barzaz Breiz* being focused on historical victories, while *Le pain des rêves* and *Le cheval d'orgeuil* recreate an everyday narrative in a historical setting, aiming for recognition and nostalgia. All three of the works are related to the development of self-consciousness and strengthening the will to preserve and spread the Breton language and culture. Nationalism, though more cultural than political, is visible in the use of Breton words, descriptions of Breton culture and tradition and how the love for the own community, even after a traumatic past, inspires pride in the Breton identity.

Keywords: Nationalism, Collective identity, Literature, Brittany, Minority Language, Regionalism, Narrative analysis, Historical narratives

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1. Introduction

It is said that the pen is mightier than the sword: the written word, literature and journalism have a greater power persuading people of certain ideologies, acts, and ideas than violence and war. The power of poetry and fiction is their possibility to put feelings into words and provoke specific sentiments by the reader. For ages, literature has been used to inspire social changes. Romanticism, for example, had one of the main goals to engage people against social inequality. During later times, books like *To Kill a Mockingbird* or *1984* have changed many people's lives and views on society.

The ties between language and national identity are strong. Especially for minorities, such as Bretons, whose distinctive language is one of the most visible differences distinguishing them from the national (French) identity. Literature is an important aspect of gaining self-conscience, knowing that their language is worth it to be spoken, written, and read. A book makes a language touchable and gives it value.

In Brittany, a region in France with a distinct history, culture and minority language, literature and tradition has been of great importance. France has been known for their forced assimilation for centuries of all minorities. The longing for change exists among most minorities, with examples like *la loi Molac* (2021), a progressive law promoting public and free education in minority languages in 2021, being countless. Unfortunately, this law was almost completely censured by the French state before it could be officialised in April 2021. The only reason being *"La langue de la République est le français"*[1] (French constitution, art. 2, 1958), and quite literally without any space for minorities to co-exist within the classroom, which makes that minority literature is of even greater importance in transmitting the language, ideas, and culture for future generations.

1.1 Purpose and research questions

The present thesis aims to provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between Breton literature and nationalism, with a focus on the construction of a historical narrative legitimizing a collective Breton culture and identity. This is especially interesting because literature is one of the places where Breton ideas can be expressed freely, in an otherwise hostile environment towards minority languages. To be able to provide answers for the proposed goal, this research is based on excerpts of three Breton nationalist literary works from different epochs, the *Barzaz Breiz* (1839), *Le cheval d'orgeuil* (1942) and *Le pain des rêves* (1975), where the narrator

[1] "The language of the Republic is French"

proposes a specific image of Breton history, culture, or identity. The following questions will be discussed: *How is a historical narrative and the idea of a collective identity created in a few Breton literary works? How is Breton cultural nationalism portrayed in these works? What are the similarities and differences between the different works?*

1.2 Previous research

The present study is inspired by Badone's article *Folk literature and the invention of tradition: the case of the Barzaz Breiz* (2017). Badone argues in her article for the importance of the Barzaz Breiz, the invention of traditions, and the construction of a Breton identity over the past few centuries. She also addresses the fact that it is unsure to what extent la Villemarqué invented his own traditions and rewrote the ballads he obtained during his research. But Badone concludes that *the Barzaz Breiz* has been important for the representation of the Breton identity and for Breton self-definition in relationship with others. In this way, *the Barzaz Breiz* is inextricably linked to Breton nationalism.

This study will work with the same point of departure, in the idea that literature is of importance in gaining a self-consciousness and spreading ideas. This study will work with several nationalist theories and link the influence of the literary work to the Breton community and the construction of nationalism and a collective identity. The main difference with Badone's study is that this thesis is not as focused on the controversy of the book and this thesis is based on a narrative method, analysing excerpts rather than placing the literary work in a historic context. Another difference is that this study has a chronological perspective as well, analysing not only *the Barzaz Breiz*, but two modern works too.

1.3 Research limitations

The present study will be limited in several ways. The proposed analyses will be based on English and French translations of literary works originally published in Breton. There is a possibility that the original narrative has been slightly altered in the *Barzaz Breiz*, where the translator has aimed to keep the original melody and a comparable level of refinement. This study will not be able to comment on the use of Breton, other than the sporadically used Breton words. Regarding the abundance of Breton literature existing, this study will neither be able to draw conclusions about all literature and the creation of nationalist sentiments and collective identity nor draw conclusions about the chronological development of Breton literature in general.

1.4 Disposition

This study commences with a discussion of the material used for the analysis, followed by a historical and cultural contextualization in chapter 3. Chapter 4, the theoretical background, addresses the nationalist theories of Gellner (1983), Hobsbawm (1983) and Anderson (1983), as well as linguistic nationalism. Chapter 5 explains the use of (historical) narrative analysis and as a method, followed by the analysis in chapter 6. The analysis continues with a conclusion in chapters 7 and a discussion and a proposal for future research in chapter 8.

2. Material

The material of this study consists of three Breton nationalist literary works: *The Barzaz Breiz* (1839), *Le pain des rêves*[2] (1942) and *Le cheval d'orgeuil*[3] (1975). Henceforth, these works will be abbreviated in the following way: Barzaz Breiz as BB, *Le cheval d'orgeuil* as LCDO and *Le pain des rêves* as LPDR. The pages indicated refer to the editions reported in the bibliography. BB is originally collected and published by Théodore Hersart de la Villemarqué, but this thesis works with Tom Taylors translation of BB, also known as *Ballads and songs from Brittany*. This translation, as addressed in the preface, is based on a selection of ballads and is thus not identical to the original. LPDR is an autobiography written in French by Louis Guilloux. LCDO, written by Pierre-Jakez Hélias, is written in Breton originally but translated to French by the author himself. The excerpts will be selected according to their relevance for the construction of a historical narrative, the idea of tradition and historical continuity, the narrator's view on Breton nationalism, culture, and identity. The original excerpts will be included in chapter 9. All translations are my own.

3. Historical and cultural contextualization of Brittany

Brittany is one of the most distinct regions of France, both because of its geographical situation and the fact that its culture differs greatly from the French. Brittany's history has known many discontinuities and many different rulers, which shaped and reshaped the specific Breton identity and resistance. The roots of the Breton identity were already created during antiquity: before the Romans took over the area of present-day France, the Celts were the main group inhabiting Brittany. Though the influence of the Celts on the French language is practically

[2] Bread of dreams
[3] Horse of pride

invisible[4] (Zufferey & Moeschler, 2010), the Breton language has been influenced to a greater extent, which also explains that the Breton language is a Celtic language and not roman, like French. Originally, there are four distinct Breton dialects, but since the 19th century, the Breton language has been standardized through the use of media, literature, and bilingual education in Brittany (Ofis Publik Ar Brezhoneg, 2022). During the 19th and early 20th century, speaking Breton in French schools was forbidden, thus creating bilingual environment, where Breton was spoken at home and French at school (Le Menn, 1975). This changed only with *La loi Deixonne* (1951), allowing the facultative education of regional languages. Even though this law had little effect, it allowed the creation of the Diwan schools in 1976, which tried to compensate for the lack of Breton education in the preceding decades (Diwan, n.d.).

During the early Middle Ages, Brittany became an independent kingdom, successfully fighting the Frankish kings and the Merovingian dynasty (Cornette, 2008). The religious independence during this time only strengthened political independence even more. This seeming peace came to an end when the Normans invaded. During the high Middle Ages, Brittany became a feudal state, while still being a quite independent region between England and France. Even when Brittany became a vassal duchy in the 12th century, Brittany still enjoyed bigger independence and more peace than most other regions in France. After the 100 years' war, when two families disputed the ownership of the duchy, Brittany came to its peak of power, with great importance for art and Breton culture and tradition during the 14th and 15th centuries (Ibid.). This all came to an end when the power of the French king Louis XI increased and Brittany became a part of France, though this didn't change a lot for the Breton population. But when the French state started centralizing in the 17th century, limiting the local autonomy, and demanding higher taxes, the lower nobility started rebelling after a revived self-consciousness of the Breton identity. This continued until the end of the Ancien Régime (Ibid.).

During the 19th and 20th centuries, the Breton economy stagnated. At the same time, during romanticism and celtomania, writers and folklorists started collecting and writing down the Celtic cultural heritage, starting with the *Barzaz Breiz* in 1839 (Ibid.). Ironically, during this time of growing cultural conscience, the use of patois languages, like Breton, in education was strongly discouraged and Brittany became more and more integrated with the rest of France.

[4] A few exceptions are toponyms (Verdun, Paris), and a handful of words like *mouton* (sheep) and *sapin* (fir tree)

Monnier (2001) and Denis (2001) have raised the question of whether there is a political Breton nationalist movement. The question is more "how to be Breton" and a refuse to fully integrate into the French society than a demand for autonomy. There have been some separatist movements (like the current *Emgann*) since the 1930s, but these have never had a big following (Gemie, 2012). It is difficult to discuss *the* Breton nationalism, simply because there have been many small movements discussing the Breton identity, but with different, and sometimes even contradicting political views. In many of these questions, culture, language, identity, and politics are intertwined (Ibid.). The Breton nationalist movement has its roots in several historic developments. The first one is the contradictive conservative attitude of the nobility in Brittany during the Ancien Régime (Ibid.). The nobility spoke French and wanted to integrate into the French society but wanted to preserve the Breton identity and longed for the independence Brittany once had. Interesting is that the nobility saw the Breton language merely as a hinder in communication and not an integral part of being Breton. The church has also been important in the Breton question, with their important role in establishing schools, their role in society, the publication of the first Breton dictionary and pilgrimage, which inspired artists and tourism (Ibid.) Another process that led to the emerging of the Breton question was the publication of the *Barzaz Breiz* (1839), which aimed to present the most authentic form of Breton culture. This book inspired a form of political nationalism based on racism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which explains the direct collaboration of the Breton political institutions with Nazi Germany during the second world war. This also explains why Breton political nationalism never became popular. But also, the fact that Brittany is divided in both political views and language, makes that there is no classic political nationalism in this region (Ibid.).

After the second world war, Breton culture revived during the thirty years of economical growth. Kendalc'h, the confederacy of Celtic circles was created in 1950 to promote Breton culture, the Deixon law in 1951 made it possible to teach Breton as an optional language in school and the production of Breton literature, among others the Breton literary and cultural magazine *al Liamm* and many authors publishing either in Breton or about Brittany (Monnier & Cassard, 2012).

4. Theoretical background

4.1. Ernest Gellner and high cultures

Gellner's theory describes how nationalism is the result of the development of a so-called *high culture* in an industrialised society. Gellner describes nationalism as follows:

> But nationalism is *not* the awakening of an old, latent, dormant force, though that is how it does present itself. It is in reality the consequence of a new form of social organization, based on deeply internalized, education-dependent high cultures, each protected by its own state. It uses some of pre-existent cultures, generally transforming them in the process, but cannot possibly use them all. (Ernest Gellner (1983), *Nations and Nationalism*; 46).

According to Gellner, nationalism is a consequence of industrialized society. Before industrialization, the agro-literate society is marked by a "cultural discrepancy", with a low culture among the commoners and a high culture among the nobility. The lack of a homogenous culture makes the existence of nation-states unlikely (Özkirimli, 2000;109). The industrialized society, on the contrary, goes hand in hand with a homogenous, high culture, created by literacy and schooling. The centralization of modern societies, along with the division of labour and increased need for social mobilisation, made the ability to communicate with larger groups of people, without any context, necessary. Thus, the natural consequence was to focus on education, where a high culture could be developed. This process was accelerated by industrialization, which made old occupations disappear and created an interesting social mobility for those with an education. In this way, low cultures were forced to adapt to the high culture in order for the individual to survive. Thus, our education has extreme power in shaping our culture and way of thinking. This shared culture created through exo-socialization is something which, in combination with our will, is the only explanation for the comradeship felt between two citizens of the same nation state (Gellner, 1983).

As Gellner phrases it, nations do not exist, only cultures do (Ibid. p 47). Unlike nations, cultures fade over into each other. In the past, nations and cultures didn't converge. According to Gellner (Ibid.), both wild and cultivated cultures exist. Wild cultures come to life spontaneously, and it is intrinsic to human nature to develop a language and behavioural rules, cultivated cultures are more developed forms of wild cultures, sustained through for example literacy. They would probably not survive without specific efforts dedicated to keeping this culture from going extinct. During industrialization, high cultures became necessary for the functioning of everyday life. The popularised high cultures became in need of a supporting political framework and every high culture wanted autonomy. But not every wild culture can become a high culture. Most of them, without any prospects, go extinct. Yet when a high culture cannot be satisfied with its political needs, nationalism comes to life (Ibid.;48-50).

4.2. Andersons *Imagined Communities* and the role of print

Anderson (1983;144) describes nationalism as the fear for the *other* on one hand, and the love for the *self* on the other. Anderson proposes to think of nationalism as a kinship, or even as the

successor of religion, instead of treating it as a political ideology, with no mere goal than just the existence of a nation (Ibid.;5-6). The nation he defines as an "imagined political community- and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign", which is also the base of his theory (Ibid.). The nation is an imagined community because even the citizens of the smallest village cannot possibly know every single other person living in their village. It is the idea of a shared community that creates *deep horizontal comradeship* and solidarity. Yet this entity has to be limited, because even the most open society cannot accept everyone as one of their own (Ibid.). This doesn't mean that the imagined community needs to be sovereign. A community can be imagined on many different levels, local in a village, regional, for example in Brittany, but also on a global level, as is the case with for example the catholic church.

The imagining is the base of the idea of community and can be strengthened through the use of mass print. The book is the first product that, once produced, can exist entirely on its own without needing other products. This was a great difference from all the products already existing. In this, books and other print media had the revolutionary power to contain and spread ideas (Ibid.;33). Through print media, we gain consciousness about the world around us.

To explain the emergence of nationalism, Anderson goes back to early modern times. The success of the reformation has shown the importance and the power of print and added that there existed a considerable variety of vernacular languages, made that shifting to vernacular literature was a natural step in the search for economic markets and profit (Ibid.;38-41). During the 17th and 18th centuries, the vernacular languages gained more interest and prestige and were elevated to the same status as Latin or Greek. At the same time, the print language became a standardized version of spoken dialects, which further enhanced its status. This standardization was needed to make the centralised modern nation work (Ibid.; 68-76). The need for literacy increased as a consequence of industrialization and the growing need for communication without context. Simultaneously, economic growth made purchasing mass-print media possible. The higher rates of literacy, economic and technical developments enabled mass-print media to unlock their full potential for spreading ideas and strengthening the imagining of the nation. Newspapers, one-day bestsellers, helped the imagining of the state by just being visible everywhere and developing a consciousness about belonging to a specific nation (Ibid.;30-6).

Anderson (1983.;141) states that nationalist literature is the consequence of nationalism. The love for the own nation is usually bigger than the hatred for another, which is usually visible in the affectionate use of words like *motherland*. Anderson (Ibid.) also remarks that there is nothing that brings us closer to our beloved deceased than the words of poetry. The

experience of reading literature, poetry or singing songs gives us an experience of simultaneity, which creates a connection and strengthens the idea and imagining of the community. Anderson (Ibid.;135) even states: "The idea of the nation is in print". And today, even though it may not seem like it, the power of spreading ideas through literature, and any other media for that matter, is bigger than ever. More people have enjoyed an education, are capable of reading and many of them are even bilingual, which amplifies both production and demand of the written word (Ibid.).

4.3. Hobsbawm and the invention of tradition

In his book *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), Eric Hobsbawm claims that seemingly old traditions can actually be quite new and sometimes even invented. An 'invented tradition' is a broad term, that includes both traditions that were invented and formally instituted, as well as the less easily traced back traditions that established themselves widely and rapidly. An invented tradition is to be defined as "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past." (Hobsbawm, 1983; 1). This historical continuity doesn't need to stretch back to the beginning of times and is usually men-made, not the result of natural developments. These traditions are thus usually a repetitive response of a past situation to a novel situation, as a way of giving some structure to the ever-changing modern world. (Ibid.; 2).

The invention of tradition is mainly a process of formalization and ritualization, with a reference to the past by repetition (Ibid.;4). The invention of tradition is something of all times, even though the fall and rise of new societies creates a need for new traditions that constructs the idea of historical continuity and thus legitimize the existence of said group. Old habits can be used in new contexts, old models can gain new purposes. New traditions could be created by adapting older pre-existing traditions or rituals, or they could just be invented out of the blue to establish an idea of historical continuity (Ibid.;9).

4.4 Linguistic nationalism

Language is one of the main factors used in our identification process, usually in combination with our descent, history, and culture (Blommaert and Verschuren, 1998). A distinct language is usually a sign of a distinct group identity, which makes that social groups with their own language are treated as another 'ethnic' group. States strive to be homogenous, with one language, one culture, one religion, etc., because it is easier to govern and control. This leads

to marginalization and forces assimilation of minorities. But since language is such an important part of our identity, revolt and nationalism are only a natural consequence (Ibid.). The demand for an own state has always been there, yet marginalized voices have been overpowered by either an empire or a bigger nation-state, which is the case with Brittany. Linguistic nationalism is not to only to be linked with lower class extremism, but also with higher education and plurilingualism and has not much to do with political opinions in general. This shows that the cry for homogeneism is instinctive (Ibid.).

According to Bryan Meadows (2014), nationalism and the thought of homogeneity influences our perception of plurilingualism in a negative way. Meadows cites Herder and Fichte (1769), who noted is the relationship between language and nationalism one of great importance, with the national language as the core to our national identity. According to Meadows (2014), this "core essence" is what legitimizes the existence of a nation state and that this state needs to reflect the people's identity. If a social group is governed by a state that doesn't confirm their collective identity, this group cannot attain national liberty. Meadows (2014) addresses Herders' theory about national diversity articulates that each nation should accept every other nation's unique national identity, in order to obtain the nations complete liberty. The nationalized identity can thus be threatened when languages and cultures cross borders or exist within a nation as minority groups, as would be the case for Brittany. Yet cultural and linguistical paradigms do not follow borders and linguistic differences are not solid in their natural state. The differences are usually socially constructed and follow political ideologies. This makes that non-linguist individuals can react in negatively to plurilingualism (Meadows, 2014).

Many European minority languages have found their revival in literature, beginning with the cultural movement of romanticism (Marfany, 2004). As Marfany states: "They [writers] see in every single literary act of presence by the endangered language a positive act of resistance, a deliberate contribution to its potential survival." But the existence of literature, oral traditions and theatre in vernacular languages has been a continuity, only to be disrupted by literacy in the vehicular language which made that literature in the state language had to be preferred over patois, this coming with the centralization and modernization of the nation state (cf. Anderson, Gellner). Nation-states have even been forced to address the people in their mother tongues, to be sure that their ideas were understood. Ironically enough, minority languages only seemed to revive when the national language was strengthened and threatened to take over during romanticism, which provoked the writing of historical narratives in their

native language. The reaction was to either be promoted to being an upper-class language or being degraded to the proletariat language (Marfany, 2014). One of the ways for a language to survive and still be relevant, was to be put in print, in order to produce upper-class culture. This in relation with Anderson's theory about the spread of print (1983) can strengthen the imagined community and revive the minority language and culture.

As noted by Asier Amezaga (2019), the author publishing in minority languages struggles for recognition. Less speakers mean less readers and thus less chance to succeed. Literature is the result of conscious choices made by the author and thus, publishing a work in a minority language has been decided consciously. There have to be specific links with identity of the minority group and their history and culture. If not, the book would probably have been published in any other, bigger, language.

5. Method

5.1 Narrative analysis

We are surrounded by stories and narratives all the time in everyday life. The role of narratives, according to Alexa Robertson (2000; 219), is to entertain, educate, socialise, and create a feeling of community. Humans could even be called narrative beings instead of rational ones (Ibid.). Through the stories we tell and are told, we can understand the world we live in, our society, politics, and culture. This understanding can only be done by relating to the world around us, like the power structures and their functioning (Ibid.).

Narratives work like a basic framework to organize our experiences and understand the world. Through narrative analysis, we can understand how identities are created and conserved. Stories not only show what has happened more objectively, but they also can show one's subjectivity and how individuals give meaning to events and actions (Robertson, 2000). That doesn't only work on an individual scale but on a collective one too. The continuity comes from a constructed and shared social history in which we project ourselves. One of the narrative analysis' strengths is that this is a qualitative method that can nuance a story more than quantitative studies (Robertson, 2000; 246). Consequently, this method focuses more on the meaning of something on an individual level and human acting instead of the collective and statistical meaning. A narrative analysis also gives a place to marginalized voices that are usually overpowered (Ibid.; 221).

A narrative is, according to Robertson (2000), a story of what happened, either fictional or non-fictional. Barbara Czarniawska (2004; 13) starts her book *Narratives in Social Science Research* with a more elaborate definition, taken from Roland Barthes (1977; 79):

> Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances – as though any material were fit to receive man's stories. Able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all these substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, […], conversation. Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives.

Narrative analysis is grounded in literary analysis, where the produced texts on their own, and not the intentions of the writer, are the main focus (Czarniawska, 2004, p.14). Though narratives can be completely different, on abstract levels there are similarities, and it is important to differentiate between a series of acts and the author's storytelling (Robertson, 2000; 223). This study will analyse the literary works with the holistic-content mode and a sporadically categorical-form mode, meaning that it focuses on the content of an entire story and analyses different parts of the story in the light of the complete narrative, and the use of language on a stylistic and linguistic level (Robertson, 2000; 229-30). The holistic-content mode will give a deeper understanding of the complete literary work and will aid the interpretation of the specific excerpts, which is highly valuable. The use of language can also be crucial for spreading ideas, so this will be analysed when relevant.

5.2 Historical narratives

As Nelly Blanchard (2006) states in her discussion about the goal of the Barzaz Breiz, *"L'histoire cherche à convaincre, la littérature à séduire."*[5]. Historical narratives are a literary genre, but more than just literature: instead of amusing the reader, they give meaning to what is said, and they give a background that legitimize ideas, feelings, cultures, and identities from a historical perspective. Many scholars, like Anderson (1983) and Hobsbawm (1990), agree on the importance of historical narratives in shaping and maintaining the imagined community.

A historical narrative is necessary for the construction of a collective identity, creating diachronic lines between the past and present (Liu & Hilton, 2005). History can reveal our identity, our background, and our future (Ibid.). The portrayal of a collective identity can shape the ideas of a historical continuity of what once was, what now is and the relation with other groups. Consequently, history is the core of the construction of our culture, identity, norms and values, to both newcomers and future generations. Historical narratives are of importance for

[5] History searches to convince, literature to seduce [my translation]

a collective identity and not only for collective political memory "because it offers concrete events and people with widely shared emotional resonance whose relevance to the current situation is open to interpretation" (Liu & Hilton, 2000; 2). Different social groups within one people can have polemical views on the social representations of history. Although new traditions can be invented (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983), history can give a stronger sense of shared meaning through social representations. How history is portrayed also depends on the current political narrative: the historical narrative is shaped by current events in order to give meaning to what is happening. Here, traditions and the perception of history can be altered through a new interpretation of historical events.

6. Analysis

6.1 *Barzaz Breiz*

BB contains many different ballads, introduced with some explanatory notes and usually some explanations about the used language. The English translation, *Ballads of Brittany*, starts with an introduction written by Tom Taylor, which addresses the Breton culture, the goal of la Villemarqué and stylistic choices made while translating. La Villemarqué's goal was to obtain all different existing versions of the same ballad and to go back to its most authentic version. Tom Taylor addresses the fact that the original ballads in Breton usually rhyme and alliterate and are written in an iambic metre of eight feet, which he has tried to preserve while translating the ballads. We have to keep in mind that these linguistical choices can have resulted in a slightly changed narrative to approach the original genre.

The original BB is divided into three sections: *chants historiques*, *chants d'amour* and *chants religieux*[6], where Tom Taylor only decided to have historical songs and songs related to customs and traditions. The ballads are a written down version of the oral bard tradition and la Villemarqué claims to have collected all of the songs himself as research. When BB first was published, his work received much praise, among others from the well-known French author George Sand (Badone, 2017), which made him be elected for *l'institut français*. But after the third edition, he became an object of more criticism, when other scholars failed to reproduce and find the ballads used in BB. Even though la Villemarqué had been invited to reveal his sources and transcriptions, this never publicly happened. It is said that he only allowed a few of his close acquaintances to take a look at his original transcripts. During the

[6] Historical songs, love songs and religious songs

rest of his life, de la Villemarqué was criticized for this, yet he never refuted the claims that he wrote the ballads himself (Laurent, 1989).

Only in the 1960s, it has been revealed that de la Villemarqué's work might be based on the Breton oral tradition, but many of the ballads have been subject to rewriting, to please the reader. Gourvil (1959) argues as well that de la Villemarqué has tried to make the ballads seem more antic than they originally were. According to Laurent (1989), who had access to the original manuscripts, la Villemarqué's goal was probably to restore the ballads to a higher standard, and to provide those who thought less of the Breton people with clear argumentation why that was not the case. BB was a way of emancipation for the Breton people and the "product of sentiments of national or cultural inferiority" (Badone, 2017).

6.1.1 Enemy and hero images

There is almost nothing that can unite a social group more than a communal enemy. A type of othering on a higher level, makes small differences within one group seem less important and can thus create a community feeling. This is one of the ways of identity building that is used frequently in BB, within a historical perspective. BB commences with the song called "wine of the Gauls" (p.1). According to Tom Taylor, the Gauls in this song are the Frankish Gauls, the enemies of the ancestors of the Breton people. About which battle and in connection to which time this song is sung, is unclear, which is usual for literature based on oral traditions. At the first glance, this song seems quite innocent, comparing different sorts of alcoholic beverages. But upon closer inspection, it is clear that there is a dichotomy between the Gaulish red wine and the other alcoholic beverages like cider, mead and white Breton wine: the Gaulish wine is always better, yet only better "to be spilt". Especially the second part of the poem makes the irony of the wine of the Gauls clear: it is not their wine that should be spilt, it is their blood. This is already foreshadowed in the third stanza, "better blood grapes bleed Than our mead – better blood grapes bleed!", this is continued in stanza seven, where "wine and blood they run Blent in one, - wine and blood they run!". The tenth stanza gives clarity: "'Tis the Gauls blood Runs in flood, - Tis the Gauls blood." The second part of the ballad, even called "the dance of the sword", leaves us no doubt that this is in fact war poetry. The oxymoron "dance of the sword" foreshadows the paradoxes that are further explained in "Glee of dance and song, And battle-throng, Battle, dance, and song" (stanza 14) and in "song of the blue steel" (stanza 16). This shows the great pride the Bretons take in going to war, fighting for themselves while protecting their loved ones.

It is very interesting that this is not a typical way of othering, where usually the most desirable traits are attributed to the ingroup and the lesser ones to the outgroup, even though it is clear that the Bretons are “valiant” (stanza 6). This ballad rather hides their insults in plain sight, complimenting the Franks on their excellent “wine”. The medieval setting of a battle between the Bretons and the Franks, the predecessors of the French and thus the *original enemy*, creates a feeling of continuity where current conflicts between these groups are legitimized through history, at the same time as it creates a community feeling through a communal enemy. The pride that is felt in the poem is a pride that can still be felt in the present: a pride of past victories as a group and it gives hope for future victories against the French, may it be in a way with a lesser thirst for blood. This strengthens the community feeling, as well as the fact that this song was sung simultaneously. This can be connected to Anderson’s theory of the imagined community. Singing ballads would have strengthened the community feeling in the present time when sung during the battle, as well as it strengthens the communal feelings in both a horizontal way among society, as vertically with the presumed ancestors of the community.

Not only in the ballad “Wine of the Gauls” are we met with hero images, but also in the ballad “The march of Arthur” (p.23), these are visible. The ballad is about the apparition of a troop of soldiers under Arthur’s command in the mountains, a myth in many Celtic countries foreshadowing war. The ballad glorifies warfare and acts of valour, with many descriptions like “ If in the fight we fall, so best Bathed in our blood—a baptism blest; With joyous hearts we'll take our rest.” (Stanza 12) and “If we but fall where we have fought, As Christian men and Bretons ought. Such death is ne'er too early sought.” (Stanza 13), which implies that there is no greater goal in life than dying for your country.

The ballad “Alan-the-Fox” (p.27) also addresses enemy and hero images. The Gauls and Saxons addressed in this ballad are actually Normans, which is explained in “shorthaired” according to la Villemarqué. Many of the enemies addressed in the Breton songs are called Gauls, which would be comparable to for example barbarians in other cultures. The sobriquet that the Breton hero Alan has received is “fox” because he has fox-like characteristics. He “yelps” when he goes to war, his “eyes are two bright blades” and he has sharp fangs and swift feet (stanza 1), among others. The Bretons in this poem are being portrayed as brute killing machines, which is clearly visible in “I've seen the Bretons whetting their weapons, one and all. Not on a Breton whetstone, but on harness of the Gaul” (stanza 2) and “I've seen the Bretons reaping upon the battlefield, 'T was not blunted sickles, but sharp swords that they did wield.

They reaped not our own buckwheat, nor the rye of our Bretayne, But the beardless Saxon ears, and the short-haired Gaulish" (stanza 3), where there is a very visual comparison being made between harvesting grain and killing the enemy. These characteristics have made Alan-the-fox the head of the Bretons and made that he became well known in all of Brittany, as is noted in "And to Brittany's four corners the Fox's fame did bear" (stanza 4). The heroes, the personification of the Bretons, are usually kings or mythical persons, which even further enhances the glorification of the "self".

It is interesting to note, that the enemy in the last two ballads is not called by name (or by the wrong one) and that the main focus lies in addressing the positive and hero-like characteristics found in the in-group. The construction of the self and a positive self-image is thus worth more than the description of the other, who is nothing else than just an *enemy*. These enemy images are also visible in a handful of other ballads, such as in *Jean o' the flames* (p.135)*:* "Nothing like Gauls' bones for the ground Gauls' bones, beat small as small may be. To make the wheat grow lustilie" (stanza 17), and in *Du Guesclin's vassal* (p.141): "By the saints that Bretons have in awe. So long as lives one Saxon, will be neither peace nor law!" (stanza 18).

Much of the created historical narrative comes from different battles with different enemies, with the possibility of them being Gauls, Norsemen, Normen, Saxons, or Franks, yet the circumstances are usually unclear. What was the reason for the battle? What happened during the battle, except for the enemies' deaths and the heroes' survival? Much of the historical narrative is based on the loose myths surrounding possible historical battles, but that has since been changed and romanticized to make a good song to lift the spirits for the soldiers forced to fight in upcoming battles. Many of the analysed ballads show a clear bloodthirst and are usually very visually, something we arguably wouldn't be too amused about now when creating nationalist literature, but which also enhances the feeling of historic accuracy: the strong war heroes fighting the Gauls. The historic victories and the portrayal of the Bretons as the *good guys* make the Breton community feel a connection with their ancestors and a newfound pride in their heritage. Ironically enough, it also provides evidence of why the Bretons are different from the French: because it has always been so, they come from different people and have always had disputes.

Anderson's (1983;p.141) statement that nothing brings us closer to our beloved deceased heroes than the sweet words of poetry, is something that is illustrated in the ballad Bran of Kerloän (p.51). The poem starts on the battlefield, where "sore wounded lies the good knight

Bran" (stanza 1) after the Bretons won the battle. The wounded Bran is forced to stay in bed and he demands to see his mother one last time, asking the messenger to wave a white flag on the ship if his mother will be arriving soon and a black one if she isn't coming. Everyday he asks his warder: "What flag? what flag blows out to sight? Is't of the black? is't of the white?" (stanza 30). When he replies it appears to be black, Bran gives up all hope and dies. When his mother arrives, she is devastated and demands to see his son. When meeting him, she held him in her arms and "[…]clasped him amain, And from that embrace never rose again" (stanza 46) Both mother and son are depicted as birds in the last part of the poem, Bran as a young crow and his mother as a corbie: "So sweetly sing these birds, and clear. The great sea stills its waves to hear, And aye their songs one burden hold, All save the young crow's and the corbie's old" (stanza 54). It is clear that dying for the motherland Brittany is one of the most valuable and honest sacrifices one can make and something that will never be forgotten, as is visible in the bird's song and the ballad on its own: "Sing, birds o' the land, in merry strain, You died not far from your own Bretayne" (stanza 57).

6.1.2. Breton traditions

The second part of BB addresses several Breton traditions. One of the traditions described by the la Villemarqué is the June feats in the song of the June feast. Tom Taylor notes in the introduction: "This is one of the most ancient Breton festivals—evidently a relic of the Druidic ceremonies of the summer solstice. It is now rare, being confined, says M. de la Villemarqué, to some cantons of Vannes and a few villages of Cornouaille" (p.175), which shows why BB could be a perfect example of Hobsbawm's theory of invented traditions. The tradition takes place around the druidic stone, where a chosen 'master' and his 'mistress' of choice, together with the two from the preceding year, sing the song of the June feast while exchanging a silver ring and some coloured ribbons, as is sung in "Take back your ring of silver, and give or keep it still" (p.176) and "When I was young, three ribbons at my button I did show ; One was green, and one was blue, and the third was white as snow" (Ibid.). The tradition appears to be ancient and especially the connection with the past master and mistress from the year before, creates the idea of continuity, while it is highly unlikely that this tradition has existed like this, unchanged, for centuries. There is only the appearance of continuity with the Celtic and druidic past, that has seemed to be forgotten in all the other aspects of daily life. Also, the fact that it is only still celebrated in a few villages makes that the value of this tradition for the whole Breton community is only found in the representation and the renewed spread of the tradition and keeping it alive because it is written about. This tradition is thus likely to be somewhat

invented, maybe not the roots of it, but definitely in the way that it gets more importance through spreading it via BB.

La Villemarqué does not only describe this tradition but also has included many traditions concerning marriage, of which a few are described in Hélias' LCDO a few centuries later. One of these is the traditions of the matchmaker and other traditions that precede the wedding, like *the asking of the bride* (p.166). In this song, the reluctance of the bride is represented by a defender and the messenger, representing the feelings of the groom, who is looking for his "dove" (p.168). The defender goes to look for her but returns while saying "Ne'er a dove there have I seen; But I found great wealth of posies, Bloom of lilacs, flush of roses", when he brings the messenger a little girl (Ibid.). This is not the bride the messenger had in mind, so the song continues while the defender brings out different people until the bride is found.

Other wedding traditions named in BB are for example the *soupe au lait* and the coif worn by the bride that is decorated with small mirrors (p.197). Tom Taylor, and maybe la Villemarqué as well in the original version, compares the wedding traditions with the ones existing in Ireland, which also enhances the idea of continuity in both history and culture with the Celts. The poor are invited the day after the wedding to celebrate with the bride and groom, the day known as *the day of the poor* (p.174). The poor will be treated to food and the newly wedded couple with dance with them. This hospitality is representative of the Breton culture is the strong community feeling where people care for each other, which is something Hélias comments on as well.

The abundance of songs and descriptions of all the traditions in BB for the first time put in print gives an image of which ways the Breton culture is distinct from the French one, but more importantly, putting it in print gives it status. It shows that the Breton culture and language are just as interesting and just as sophisticated as the French culture and language and that there has been a historical continuity between the literary oral tradition and the romanticized literature in the 19th century. At the same time, it strengthens the imagining of the community when it is acknowledged that these traditions, whether invented or not, are used across all of Brittany and that the songs are sung simultaneously, even though we don't know everyone who is a part of the community. The structurization of the ballads was what was needed to make them accessible to the whole community and to make the traditions legitimate. Not only are these traditions being acknowledged and represented, but they are also spread even further and give a newfound awareness to the Breton culture.

6.2 *Le pain des rêves*

The autobiographical novel LPDR describes the life of the around 11-year-old narrator in the early 19th century, just before the first world war, in a small Breton town. The book starts with the description of two pictures in a schoolbook, foreshadowing the two parts of the book. Both pictures show a Breton family, one in poverty that depicts sadness, hopelessness and misery. The following picture, the one fascinating the narrator the most, shows a happy family, a lightness and happiness that is unknown to the main character, who grew up in a stable, crammed with his mother, grandfather, his ill brother Pélo. The first part of the book, *le Grandpère,* talks about the misery, the poverty in which the family of the narrator lived in, which becomes even worse when his grandfather suddenly passes. The family cannot stay in their home and almost become beggars. In the second part of the book, *La cousine Zabelle*, this suddenly turns when the family is offered housing in the richer area of town and when their cousin Zabelle comes around, offering to help the main character with school, so that he later can go to high school and succeed in life.

The book is about hopes and dreams and that, no matter how hard life seems to be, there is always "bread of dreams", happiness found in friendship, stories, theatre, and songs that give hope and inspire dreams. Because as the book shows, when the family seems to be at their lowest point, things can only get better. The book shows the struggles for the Breton community to adapt to the centralization and assimilation, the differences between provincial life and city life and the feeling of embarrassment for your culture and background. LPDR is characterized by describing style, which seems almost romantic. The descriptions and details are abundant, and the language is poetic and, when compared with LCDO, the language is more refined, and the portrayal of emotions and thoughts are more visible than the factual descriptions in LCDO.

The historical narrative that is created in this novel is not as much based on big historical events, often discussed in schoolbooks or other literature, and engraved in a people's collective memory. LPDR is a book that creates an every day historical narrative, depicting life as it was and how it was experienced– maybe slightly romanticized through the authors memories and literary ambitions. This might even be more interesting when discussing historical narratives, because the big events are usually extraordinary happenings and ruptures of everyday life, while this book takes a more banal approach discussing everyday hardships. The struggle for lower classes to earn their wages, find jobs, the social differences that aren't really visible otherwise.

Since the events described in LPDR are not really to be factchecked because of their everyday nature, we need to trust Guilloux that he describes his life and surroundings in a truthful manner. Even though Guilloux cannot have read the autobiographical pact proposed by Lejeune (1975) when LPDR was published, we can still apply its rules for a deeper understanding. Since Guilloux never confirms the identicality of the author, narrator, and main character and neither the fact that he tries to recreate reality in a truthful manner. So, we don't know for a fact whether the situations described are fully historically accurate.

This of course doesn't change the fact that the power of this novel lies in the descriptions of the banality of everyday life. Just the conscious decision of writing about something so overlooked as the poverty of the lower class, the fact that there were families who were forced to live in stables, the cultural differences between life in rural Brittany and the exciting cosmopolitan lifestyle in the capital and the colonies, yet also the culture classes and differences in language, makes that in the eyes of the Breton community the Breton identity and culture gains value. Things that aren't worthy, won't be discussed or written about. Like Guilloux says himself, "history is just less terrible than fairy tales. Spilled blood is not real blood and the tears, that have been dripping in so many wounds without healing them, weren't real tears either" (p.96-7). The power of the literary narrative is that it gives a face to the pre-existing historical narrative. Just dry facts and numbers will not make people feel moved, gain consciousness about who they are and about social justice. The key to understanding literature, and nationalism for that matter, is the influence of emotions.

It is through the retrospective reflexions and descriptions of the environment the author grew up in, that he gives meaning to the things that happened to him and undoubtedly many others. Many readers from Brittany- and the rest of France- will recognize the classroom scenes, being scolded at for reveries about far away countries or a distant past, the culture clashes between the high, centralized culture of the city and the low culture of the countryside, marked by the absence of even an active theatre. Also, the descriptions of traditions, the accents of different people, the descriptions of the different streets and houses are recognizable for everyone who has been there, creating a nostalgia and longing for what once was.

The excerpts coming from LPDR can be divided in *strengthening the community, the relation with Brittany, the Breton language and the relation with France* and *the personification of the other*.

6.2.1 Strengthening the community

LPDR doesn't really address many traditions, in contradiction to BB and LCDO, but there is one exception: the procession of the plague victims, as addressed in the following excerpt:

> I only want to remember one of them, the most dramatic and the most beautiful one all year. It is the procession of the plague victims I'm talking about. Some two hundred years ago, maybe even more, a plague ravaged the province. When the scourge disappeared, the survivors undertook great processions to thank heaven and, more particularly, the virgin [Mary]. What remained is a pilgrimage that takes place at night, no doubt in memory of the nocturnal removal of the bodies. (p. 140).

The procession has clear ties with history, making that through repetition, the Breton community feels connected with each other in horizontal ways, throughout society, as vertically, with history and their ancestors who survived the plague. Interestingly enough, the narrator adds the following remark not much later, where he unknowingly describes Hobsbawm's theory of invented tradition and its importance in creating a community feeling:

> There are these moments preceding big festivities, where there is such a unanimity, a kind of perfection that is different from the one created by the festivity itself, but whose repetition in the same shape struck us year after year and which we are still waiting for. (p.145).

It is interesting that the narrator doesn't describe the unanimity created through the execution of the tradition, but rather through the preparations for said tradition that creates a feeling of brotherhood. The festivities are the shared goal, which makes that everyone comes together, yet it is during the preparations everyone assembles, starts talking and is forced to cooperate. But this kind of unanimity is usually forgotten, since the main tradition is the highlight, thus creating a positive surprise time and again. The tradition thus strengthens the ties of the community and creates the idea of nationhood at the same time.

The strength of the Breton community feeling is not only visible in the descriptions of the tradition. The community feeling is present throughout the whole book, with many descriptions of the neighbours, who are all called by name and described in detail, but also in the fact that the community is always there to give a helping hand. Examples of these are La Pinçon, the neighbour, taking care of Pélo when needed, family sending money to help the poor family members, and Marceline, one of the rich ladies in town, helping the family with housing and a job for the mother. The smalltown community feeling is thus subtly visible throughout the whole book, yet there are some exceptions where this is rendered more explicitly, for example during the grandfather's funeral service:

> Countless figures appear in their windows. The people crowded around the chariot. Thereupon the bells, the violins and the brass band led their cheerful accompaniment, to which songs answered. It was like a triumph. The whole town was there. It was like witnessing the return of a loved one who had been a prisoner for a long time and whose ransom had finally been paid. (p.258)

As is shown in the excerpt, “the whole town” shows up to give their condolences to the family and to commemorate the grandfather. The music, songs, and the fact that the narrator describes it as a “triumph” make it clear that the grandfather was a beloved person in the community, but also how much the community cares about each other, which is once again underlined in “It was like witnessing the return of a loved one who had been a prisoner for a long time and whose ransom had finally been paid”. At the same time, the book also shows the feeling of community vertically through history within the family, as shown in:

> For all these reasons, and because in our children’s minds the wonder was still multiplied, we never thought without believing that it was a fairy tale maybe, of people who lived in Paris or maybe in fantastical countries as Canada, Dahomey[7] or even India. And yet, they existed in flesh and blood, just like any other we saw here going about their business, on their two feet. But they were of our blood. If they forgot us, which was the case for the majority of them, the forgetfulness would end one day, because it didn’t come from their hearts. Be that as it may, didn't they remain, from us to the world, our link, our passage? They were for us like the glorification of ourselves. […] a big old album, covered in some way or other, resembling mother-of-pearl, contained the photographs of our gods. And it was there when my mother wanted to pull out her sideboard for us and open it under the lamp, that we learned our mythology. (p.54)

Even though the children have never met their distant relatives who moved away to Paris, or “fantastical countries as Canada, Dahomey or even India”, the community with them is imagined through looking at photographs and telling stories, which makes it feel like they know them. Through the photo album, the historic ties between different family members are strengthened, even if there is no contact anymore, which is even underlined in “they were of our blood” and “didn’t they remain, from us to the world, our link, our passage?”. It makes the children conscious of their ancestors and where they come from, thus aiding in the construction of their own identity. Especially for the narrator, who is always preoccupied with dreams of faraway lands, you can feel the affection for his ancestors and distant relatives through his linguistical choices such as “a fairy tale”, “the glorification of ourselves” and “our mythology”.

6.2.2 The narrator’s relation with Brittany and low self-esteem

The narrator’s relationship with his hometown is complicated. It seems like he hates the repetition and poverty, even though he describes them with some kind of childhood nostalgia, while at the same time he dreams of faraway countries and cultures. Yet in the way he speaks, a tenderness is clearly visible, as in the following extract:

> But during winter as well I loved this square. So it was almost empty, mute and as if constricted… all the doors were closed. It was the silent snow. In the kind of dusk it was, one could see the

[7] Kingdom in West Africa now called Benin

> brilliance of father Roussin's forge reflecting and moving through the windows. This was all enchanting. This was all SOMETHING ELSE. (p.23)

In descriptions of his childhood town like this, you can feel the love he cherishes for his homeland. LPDR was written in 1942, in the middle of the second world war, and the author tried to escape the dark reality while visiting his childhood memories. The romantic language paints the "enchanting" vision of a snowy square right in front of us. With the capitalization of "SOMETHING ELSE", we can see that this was something that was felt strongly. The great amount of detail in the descriptions, not only here, but throughout the whole book, shows how meticulously the author tries to approach his childhood, his nostalgia and love for his country and past, no details are forgotten.

Yet at the same time, the narrator[8] longs for another life, a life filled with travels, adventure, and wealth, as is explained in "It seemed to me, while seeing these maps, the promise to me was made that one day my wish would become reality.[9]" (p.87). While looking at the maps in school and listening to history, the narrator's mind often starts wandering, musing on distant lands, which leads to him being called "lazy" and scolded on several occasions.

6.2.3. The Breton language and relation with France

In contradiction to both BB and LCDO, LPDR doesn't show a sense of pride in the Breton language at all. While the other two books have been written in Breton, LPDR has only been written in French. This could of course have to do with economical reasons, but it is more likely that we can find the reason for this while reading between the lines to see that in meetings with uncle Paul and cousin Zabelle, shame and embarrassment usually predominate. The following excerpt shows this unequal relationship between the two cultures:

> … Once his [the teacher] review was finished, he opened the classroom door, where he stepped inside. We follow him, in a row, and he would sing a song in which we all joined in unison:
>
> To die… for the… Fatherland!
>
> To die… for the… Fatherland!
>
> So we go around the classroom, bawling with all our hearts, tapping the floor in time with our clogs. We were happy with the beautiful ensemble of our singing and proud to know French. (p.93)

It is made clear that the state tries to centralize and assimilate the Breton speakers into French society, trying to make the kids pledge allegiance to the "fatherland" France, as an example of

[8] Even though the narrator and the author are the same person, it is important to differentiate the two. The author feels nostalgic while writing the book in 1942, the narrator is a child longing to escape.
[9] Il me semblait, à la vue de ces cartes, que la promesse m'était faite qu'un jour mon désir deviendrait une réalité. (p.87).

banal nationalism and unknowingly trying to affect the pupils. It is safe to say that these chants are a part of creating a homogenous culture, as suggested by Gellner (1983), and that they are not related to war since the plot takes place just before 1914 as noted in the blurb. Through songs, the community feeling is strengthened while at the same time a feeling of happiness and pride is provoked, thus only reinforcing the feeling of community. While "proud to know French" suggests that French is not the pupils' first language, we cannot constate any harsh feelings about their mother tongue. We know only for sure that the main character does in fact speak Breton until much later in the book, when he states: "[…] biri meaning "lamb" in our patois"[10](p. 415).

6.2.4. The Breton people and the personification of the other

In LPDR, the "other" is embodied in the characters uncle Paul, who lives in Paris, and the rich cousin Zabelle, who has lived in the colonies with her husband for a long time. It is through these characters, that the narrator comes in contact with the French and more upper-class culture, which is completely strange to him. The narrator comments for example the "Parisian style" in the following excerpt:

> It was more a pleasure than one of a surprise and it suited, as he believed, his Parisian style. Because Parisian he was as a matter of fact. It was in Paris he had spent the most beautiful part of his life – his youth – and he intended to spend the rest there as well. He did have nothing else than disdain for his homeland, to which, however, he remained so attached. (p.207)

For the narrator, Paris is something that becomes a synonym with everything that is good, while his homeland, Brittany, is seen as something you shouldn't be proud of but feel disdain for. This feeling is also explained in "The contempt of the Parisian for the poor provincials that we were and that we would doubtless remain forever, was evident in all of Uncle Paul's remarks and in his manners in general" (p.210). Uncle Paul also had a different way of speaking, connected to different traditions and a completely different lifestyle in the capital, connected to wealth and fun, as is shown in:

> But our uncle had a different use of language. He knew that *déjeuner*[11]was at noon, that we *dine* in the evening around seven or eight and that supper is at midnight. But we, that which we call *déjeuner*[12], was dipping a piece of bread, often too dry, in our coffee. We dined at noon with cabbage soup, and we had supper in the evening at seven. As for midnight meals, we didn't even dream that there could be such a strange species of men in the world, who got up from their bed to eat when it is so nice to sleep. (p.218)

[10] biri voulant dire « agnelle » dans notre patois.
[11] Lunch
[12] Breakfast

Uncle Paul's life in Paris seems completely alien and far away from the main character's everyday life. Even in "often too dry" and "cabbage soup", we can see the family's shrining poverty in great contrast to uncle Paul's seemingly luxurious lifestyle and how big the differences are between Brittany and the capital.

The second "other" who contrasts the Breton community is Zabelle, who takes, like the French, the task upon her to "socialize" and introduce the main character to the French lifestyle, in order for him to find his way to high school and society later in life. How Zabelle treats the family and how they treat her, can be understood as exemplary of the relationship between the Breton culture and the French "high" culture:

> The arrival of cousin Zabelle was finally announced for the following day by telegram: - my children, my mom said, it is not time to yawn anymore. I will have to make fricot[13]. Our cousin is a picky eater. I run to buy a chicken. You will run my other errands for me. (p.299)

As is shown in this excerpt, the family tries to do their best to welcome Zabelle in a way that fits her expectations, with a freshly made fricot, chicken, a clean house and everyone wearing their Sunday clothes. The family is trying their best, but they are met with mockery:

> Cousin Zabelle started laughing. A laugh of cruelty in a single flight, almost on a single note vaguely trilled like a lark, mixed with some impure night bird. My face turned red. (p.308)

This interaction can be seen as exemplary of the relationship between the Breton people and the rest of France. Brittany was seen as backwards, poor and provincial and not at all on the same level of sophistication as the capital. The same goes for the Breton language. Even though the Bretons tried their best with learning to speak French and try to fit in, while not trying to lose their own identity at the same time, they are, just like the family, met with mockery, which made many generations grow embarrassed and ashamed of their background and identity. This has, among other things, caused the decline in Breton speakers, simply because it wasn't believed to have a future. Ironically enough, it is also Zabelle who proposes to get involved in the main character's education and mannerisms. She starts inviting the main character to revise his schoolwork together, and later they have family dinners, described in the following way:

> What those meals were like, where it was not that difficult to imagine how much and how everything was new to me, the festive appearance of a tablecloth on a table and how souped served in a tureen made my eyes shine, this is where I leave the reader his freedom. What a talent they all had in their manners! Everything embarrassed me, but them! They were ease themselves. (p. 403-4)

As shown, the narrator is not at all used to habits such as tablecloths and tureens, something he might never even have heard about before, but which made him quite uncomfortable as well,

[13] A specific kind of stew

as noted in “everything embarrassed me”. At the same time, Zabelle and her company “were ease itself”, which shows the struggle of Breton people to find their way in French society.

6.3 *Le cheval d’orgeuil*

LCDO is, just like LPDR, an autobiography. In contrast to LPDR, the autobiographical pact (Lejeune, 1975) has been followed: the main character, narrator and author are pronounced to be the same person and the story seems to be based on reality, without any trace of fiction, as the author admits: “And believe me if you want: there is no trace of a lie in this story, from my side anyway!”[14] (p. 98). Hélias has taken the task upon him to describe his childhood, family, the environment he grew up in and, at the same time the complete Breton cultural patrimony in a meticulously naturalistic way. The result is a dense book, less poetic and even more describing than LPDR. Hélias never shies away from adding more detailed descriptions about traditions that seem as banal as washing clothes.

The book commences with descriptions of his parents’ life, his grandfather, and his birth. The book follows his childhood more or less chronologically, with sometimes a flash-forward with relevant information or remarks from the narrator, while writing the book, like when describing the cradle, he used to sleep in as a new-born, which now was used for his own grandchild (p. 49)[15]. The book addresses almost every aspect of Breton life, varying from page-long descriptions of religious traditions like weddings, funerals and baptism, or Christmas and Easter celebrations. The differences between Breton and French, school culture, family relations, work on the land and friendship. Not only does the book contain the story following the author’s life, but there are also a few appendices describing the traditional Breton costume for women, maps, and critical debates discussing the content of LCDO.

Towards the end of the book, Hélias addresses the changes in culture that have taken place during his lifetime. That the community feeling has diminished, that the Breton language is spoken less and less, and the newer generations are leaving the countryside behind. He shows a sceptical attitude towards these changes, out of which the nostalgia and his reasons to write LCDO shine through. It is nothing new that a changing society provokes conservative attitudes.

[14] Et croyez-moi si vous voulez : il n’y a pas un poil de mensonge dans cette histoire, du moins de ma part à moi (p.98)

[15] Ce berceau (qui est, au moment où j’écris, celui de mon petit-fils) est exactement la réplique de l’unique berceau dans lequel avait dormi successivement ma mère, mes oncles et mes tantes. (This cradle (which is, at the time of writing, my grandsons) is the exact replica of the cradle in which my mother, my uncles and my aunts had slept successively).

But at the same time, he shows trust in the Breton community, and hope for the future where a newfound pride and consciousness of the Breton identity will be spread.

With the goal of preserving the Breton language and Breton cultural heritage in mind, LCDO contains a lot of nationalist and regionalist references. Because of the density of the work, not every single aspect can be analysed, and a selection had to be made. The following excerpts can be divided into a few categories: *Breton traditions and everyday life*, *The French and Breton language*, *Low self-esteem* and *Future prospects and newfound pride*.

6.3.1 Traditions and daily routines

As it is Hélias' goal to describe the full Breton cultural heritage, LCDO is filled with descriptions of traditions and characteristics of the Breton culture and community. One of the traditions that takes an important role in Breton society is storytelling, as is shown in:

> When the evening falls, grandfather starts to tell [stories] for two or three kids who soon become six, seven around him with their baskets. The women first, then the men, are coming home for the soup. Not seeing their girls and boys, they worry and return to the field. The children are huddled against an embankment, with the clog maker in the middle who tells "how a Breton became king of England". The parents, not daring to interrupt the storyteller, sit down for a moment to listen. (p.113-4)

Storytelling and singing songs have a similar role as the spread of print, be it on a smaller scale, but also creating a tighter imagining of the community. The only difference with Anderson's theory (1983), is that the small community on a neighbourhood level is not only imagined but a real community at the same time, where everyone knows each other. But throug the fairy tales told by the grandfather, historical narratives, and connections with the past, creates and strengthen intergenerational ties. At the same time as the stories are being told, knowledge and valuable lessons about values, norms and culture are passed from older to younger generations. Not only through telling stories about a mythical past the Breton community feeling is strengthened, but food is also an important aspect of Breton culture:

> Thus, in our society, food is one of the most important businesses. Not only because it is the concern of the peasants who have behind them centuries of deprivation aggravated from time to time by famines the memory of which is not completely lost yet. Not only because the destiny of our people is to extract from the earth enough to eat for themselves and many others. But because this food on the one hand conditions the health and illness of each of them, on the other allows to estimate the quality of the relations which unite the different social groups. (p. 453)

As is shown here, food is what brings a community together: cooking food, eating meals together and having special foods connected to special traditions, creates a community feeling and is connected to the hospitality Hélias remembers from his childhood. The role of food traditions has been strengthened because of famines in preceding centuries that still survive in

the collective memory and thus, traditions connected to food are a sign of wealth and prosperity. As Hélias remarks, food is connected to our wellbeing and our personal relations, something which is shown in a tradition already described in BB, the day of the poor:

> […] the parents of newlyweds often manage to ask them to do them a favour by coming to serve the wedding meals, which allows the poor people to enjoy the feasts in the same way as the others with only a white apron over their best suit for a few hours a day. (p. 502)

This passage is a great example of how food and traditions combined, bring different social groups together, and create a feeling of unity and community. The poorest people are usually marginalized in society and inviting them to the wedding feasts, brings people in contact and inspires a tighter-knit community. Another tradition named in both BB and LCDO is drinking the milk soup:

> In the evening, late at night, there will be a burlesque milk soup ceremony. […] In reality, we are beginning to forget the symbolism of this soup whose old people recall that milk marks the sweetness of conjugal life, while salt, pepper, garlic, and vinegar widely dispensed will signify sourness, quarrels, domestic scenes, and the miseries of this life. (p.521)

Since we don't know the origins of these traditions that were described in BB, it is very interesting to see that they are still in use several centuries later, even though "we are beginning to forget the symbolism". But still, the feeling of continuity with the past is strong. The repetition of tradition in the same manner time and again and the symbolic nature of the tradition makes that the norms and values are transmitted, unconsciously, to the newlyweds and everyone participating. The symbolism of the milk soup shows that marriage is more than just sweetness: it is difficult and miserable as well.

6.3.2 The French and Breton language

LCDO is a way of resisting the assimilation of the Breton speaking community since the centralization and industrialization of France. This is visible not only in the content of LCDO but in its linguistic choices as well. To begin, LCDO is originally written in Breton, which in itself already augments the status of the language. But even in the French translation, the presence of Breton is highly visible in the abundant use of Breton words. In LCDO, almost every page contains at least one, but usually more, words, nursery rhymes or songs, for example in "louzou"[16] (p.136) and "boued touseg" (p. 373)[17].

Throughout LCDO, it is made clear how the narrator, and the rest of the Breton community for that matter, view their native language. The relationship with both French and

[16] Medicinal plants, vegetables
[17] mushroom

Breton is complicated. French is the language that gave possibilities, that was the language that would lead to a great future and being able to speak French gave prestige, yet at the same time, the language was connected to punishment in school. The Breton language is connected to shame, the idea that it is a peasant's language for the poor, and without any prospects of survival. Yet it is the language closest to their heart, their identity, and the Breton pride. This is already visible in the following excerpt when the main character asks his grandfather to teach him to make clogs:

> - will you learn me to make clogs, grandfather? – no, my son. Your food would be too lean. Shoemaker, I wouldn't say. It is better to learn to read, write and speak French. You will have bread and meat every day. And you would go on leather[18]. (p.109)

The great value that is given to knowing French is clear: without French, you won't be able to make a living, to earn enough to live a comfortable life. This can be connected to Gellner's theory, where he states that education is one's key to succeeding in life and thus needing to adapt to the country's high culture. But adapting to using French was far from easy. The struggles that came with having to learn French in school are visible in for example: "At school, it is forbidden to speak Breton. You have to start using French right away, what misery! (p.230)[19]", but also in:

> We soon put ourselves to torture, filled with goodwill, to create short sentences in French. Is it our fault if Breton words slip into it? Besides, only the teacher would notice it. When he hits the table with a ruler, we know that we made a mistake. He then repeats the sentence with the French word. "I saw an *eur c'hwede* this morning," said one of us. The teacher wrote on the blackboard: a lark. Repeat after me: "I saw a lark this morning". (p.231)

The linguistic choices of this excerpt already show the dreadful attitude the narrator and his classmates had to be forced into speaking French. "Misery", "torture" and "hits the table with a ruler", show the negative connotations and effects on the young kids who were trying their best, as shown in "filled with goodwill". But what was the point of using French? It was clear that Breton was the easier option, understood by all, even the teacher. The only reason for speaking French was "for their own good", which is hard to understand when you have never felt the necessity of speaking French. Learning the language had to be forced and the younger generations were punished for not being able to answer adequately in French and switching to Breton, as is visible in "But the older we get, the more punishments rain down on us. Always

[18] Shoes, as opposed to wooden clogs.
[19] À l'école, il est interdit de parler breton. Il faut tout de suite se mettre au français, quelle misère !

for our good" (p. 223).[20] But why it was necessary to speak only French at school, was hard to understand for the students. Everyone, even the teachers, had Breton as their mother tongue, so why bother with French? The answer to that question is found in "they [the teachers] had orders to do how they did it. Whose orders? Government people" (P.229). But why the government people don't want Breton to be spoken, is not entirely clear, except that it is for their "own good" (Ibid.). With all the focus on French and the negative connotations the education gave to speaking Breton, the status of the Breton language diminishes, as is shown in: "we would be justified in believing that Breton is not written, never read." (p.228). Since the students never came in contact with the written Breton language at school, it almost seemed like it didn't exist, that their native language was made up and not worthy of being read. This also made that when the Breton language was observed and used during class, it made a great impact on the students:

> One day, in history or geography, I don't remember anymore, we come across the word menhir (long stone), a Breton word that seems to have been invented, in a dictionary last century. Moreover, it is right that his brother *dolmen* is a beautiful solecism[21]. But here we are, hearing it pronounced in French or reading it in a French text […]. (p.232).

This passage shows how important it is for a minority language to be acknowledged. The use of a small, insignificant word such as *menhir* or even a faulty word like *dolmen* in French, made such an impact on the author that it is remembered many decades later. This also shows that, if one word can make such a difference, imagine the importance of seeing a book being written about your cultural heritage, in your native language, after years of being punished for who you are and where you grew up.

6.3.3 Low self-esteem

Interestingly, LCDO describes the same feeling of not fitting in in the French society and a shame surrounding the Breton identity as LPDR. How the Breton language and community were seen by outsiders, the French in general in LCDO, and by Paul and Zabelle in LPDR, has deeply affected the main characters and how the Breton community saw their own language and identity, inspiring shame, and a longing to forget where they came from and their cultural heritage, as Hélias shows in the following passage:

> To further complicate the situation, the children of the country who go to Paris to earn their bread since the first world war, very quickly became to hate their language, synonymous with poverty, a symbol of ignorance and promise of derision. It is just if they don't curse their parents for this

[20] Mais plus nous avançons en âge et plus les punitions nous pleuvent dessus. Toujours pour notre bien.
[21] Solecism: a language mistake

> heritage more deplorable than a hereditary physical defect. They have barely spent a year working a low job in the capital when they return to the countryside trying to impress their family of "worm-cutters". (p.242)

As is shown in this excerpt, when the Breton youth left Brittany for France for better employment and came into contact with the country's high culture, they quickly became aware of the backwardness of their hometowns. They started realizing that others, and later themselves as well, didn't see the Breton language as something to be proud of, as it was understood as a sign of poverty, ignorance and strongly connected to peasantry, comparable to a "hereditary physical defect". The negative attitude and embarrassment are also visible in the use of "worm-cutters", which can be understood as a pejorative term for farmers. This feeling of inferiority of the Breton community can be linked to the will to escape of the main character in LPDR. The feeling to create something better for themselves, trying to adapt to the French lifestyle and forgetting the hardships of life in the Breton countryside, which is inseparable from poverty and hopelessness. This negative self-image comes from contact with the "Parisians", as is expressed in the following passage:

> Those who ventured to laboriously compose a sentence in French aroused the hilarity of the "Parisians". Because of this linguistic inadequacy, the Bretons were taken for fools or remained with the lads whose intellectual coefficient was not worth theirs. […] For Bretons, moreover, the "Parisian" is an individual who is both attractive by his ease, his easy speech, his resourcefulness, and formidable by his banter, his witticisms that leave them speechless, with "their mouths open like the bilibou bird". (p. 241-2)

Just trying to formulate sentences in French, which is not going well, is enough for the Frenchmen to mock the Breton community for being "fools" or of lower intellect. In this passage, othering is clearly visible. But different to "normal" othering, where the higher valued characteristic is attributed to the ingroup, is this the opposite. The characteristics such as easy speech and resourcefulness are connected to Parisians, just because they know how to articulate themselves in the French language. But the mockery doesn't only happen sporadically, as Hélias shows in his descriptions of school life in the big city, where he and his Breton classmates are called "peasants, violent people, savages" and bullied time and again by their French-speaking classmates.

Yet all these excerpts need to be nuanced, as Hélias notes: "We always forget that we are transplanted, immigrants despite ourselves in a civilization that was not ours."[22] (p.530). Bretons are living in France and have the French nationality, but that is one of the few things they have in common, yet they are always believed to fit in and understand the French language

[22] On oublie toujours que nous sommes des transplantés, des immigrés malgré nous dans une civilisation qui n'était pas le nôtre.

and culture, while they should be compared with the situation for foreigners. No one expects an expat to be able to speak the language on the same level as a native speaker, and usually, these people are met with compassion and admiration for trying to learn the language. This is not at all the case for the Breton speaking community, because they are expected, as real Frenchmen, to be able to speak the language and to find pride in that.

The lower status of the Breton people, bullying at state schools and the prejudices against the Breton speaking community has undoubtedly affected many people, among whom the author himself, and their self-image, as kids and during later stages in life, as is visible in:

> I lead a double life and it seems to me that I always will. For three quarters of the year, I am a high school student, student, pawn, tutor, teacher, or I happen to practice different night jobs to be able to finish my degree in difficult times […]. The last quarter of the year, I am in my village, I resume my mother tongue, and I abandon my intellectual worker's cast-off to slip into my peasant environment […]. (p.538)

When the narrator admits he leads a "double life", it seems that being Breton and French at the same is impossible. The Breton identity is something you should be ashamed of and something that should remain hidden.

6.3.4. Future prospects and a newfound pride

As a result of the low self-esteem, the lesser status of the Breton identity and very few prospects as a Breton speaker during many decades as a consequence of centralization and assimilation, the number of speakers of Breton declined steadily. A reaction to that, in combination with economical growth after the second world war, was the gain of consciousness of and the will to preserve the Breton language, culture and identity. Even something like tourism, as is noted by Hélias in "The appetite of the ordinary tourist, his daily bread, is the local colour[23]"[24](573), has increased the demand and interest for Breton craftsmanship, cuisine and traditions.

But as the author states: "It is not enough to say: I am Breton, or even: I speak Breton. It is even less than enough to put a kabig[25] on your back […]".[26](p. 600). Only speaking the language and admitting the Breton identity is not enough to keep the Breton culture alive, it needs active use for it to stay relevant and to be able to make changes. An increased use of the language and traditions will create a snowball effect and probably result in more recognition and political rights. Hélias pronounces a sceptic attitude towards the changing times, the loss

[23] Local culture, traditions, and characteristics
[24] L'appétit du touriste banal, son pain quotidien, c'est la couleur locale
[25] A breton coat
[26] Il ne suffit pas de dire : je suis breton, ni même : je parle breton. Il suffit encore moins de se mettre un *kabig* sur le dos […] ».

of tradition and the results of the forced assimilation of the Breton people, yet he is hopeful for the survival of the Breton identity and proud of the developments in preserving the Breton language and culture, as a counterreaction to the changing times. As he states:

> But I also knew that a civilization never dies completely, that it continues to feed the generations succeeding its apparent death in-depth, like groundwater and that it reappears, sooner or later, in a free source or in a fountain. I knew that a language, even when it has disappeared from use (and this is far from being the case for Breton), is of concern to scholars who are trying to unravel the features of the current world. (p.603)

Hélias compares culture with groundwater in this excerpt. Even though culture sometimes seems to die, this is not the case. Like groundwater, a river disappears underground, not visible but still existing, ready to emerge again, as a wilder culture, "a free source", or a more cultivated culture like a "fountain". And not only culture will survive, but also extinct languages will also in a way survive through them being subject to research. So even without active measures, the decline of the Breton language and traditions won't lead to the oblivion of the Breton identity. But as Hélias lifts, the Breton community has been investing more time and action into preserving their local traditions and characteristics, as with the creation of *Celtic Circles*:

> In Breton speaking Brittany, *Celtic circles*, groups of young people who set themselves the goal of restoring the costumes, the songs, the dances, the games of their peasant tradition, which are visibly in perdition. Of these groups, after ten years, one can count several hundred. (p. 574)

Not only the preservation of the Breton language is an important aspect of preserving the Breton cultural heritage, the visible aspects such as dances, costumes, and games are important in spreading consciousness about the Breton identity. The more visible aspect of these traditions and accessibility to these activities make that they are more appealing than learning a language for example. These activities do not only create a higher self-consciousness among those executing them in the Celtic circles, but they are also inviting when the groups dance during social activities or events, thus creating a community feeling with everyone participating and sparking an interest, which is visible in the growing popularity of these circles around 1975 when the book was published. This renewed interest has also made that the Breton language slowly, yet steadily, starts gaining back terrain, as Hélias notes in "Breton defeated French at Nantes and Rennes, ran his way to Le Mans, went up the Loire to the source." (P.616)[27].

[27] Le breton vainquit le français à Nantes et à Rennes, courut sa lancée jusqu'au Mans, remonta la Loire jusqu'à la source.

7. Conclusion

The historical narratives that are created in BB are very different from those in LPDR and LCDO. Even though the historical narratives in BB are numerous, they always portray the Breton community as the "hero", winning battles against the enemies, which gives the idea that the Breton community is strong, invincible, and historically seen as the "victor", thus legitimizing, and strengthening the nationalist and separatist feelings in later times, as well as giving a higher status to the Breton culture by putting a refined version of Breton oral traditions in print. The latter two works are mainly focused on the construction and retelling of everyday life in a historical setting, rather than that they are based on big historical events. Everyday life is something that is often overlooked, but which contains more information about how life really was for those living in a specific time. Through the countless descriptions of the main characters' lives, their feelings, and experiences, they give a face and emotions to history, which is undoubtedly provoking emotions than the violent ballads in BB. Through the descriptions of everyday life, the normal Breton is represented, which is the main goal of minority literature. Breton people reading LPDR and LCDO can recognise the experiences and feelings of the characters and will feel heard and understood in their struggles. The descriptions of something so overlooked as the daily life will make it gain value and makes the Breton community gain more self-consciousness and strengthen their will to preserve the language and culture.

The Breton nationalism that is described in these works, is not as much a political nationalism, but rather a cultural nationalism and becoming self-conscious. Just the act of writing in Breton, about the Breton people and Breton cultures, gives meaning. Cultural nationalism is visible in the use of Breton words, in the traditions and the victories in BB, in the daily life filled with ups and downs in LPDR and the number of all descriptions of traditions, how small they might seem, in LCDO. Even though the relations with the state are named sometimes, for example in the personification of the state as Paul and Zabelle in LPDR and through having to speak French in school in LCDO, separatist movements or a wave of explicit anger towards the state are never addressed. Instead, the nationalistic literature read is about representation, the recognition of feelings, the hardships of life and the traumas of not fitting in as a minority and being different, but at the same time about gaining consciousness of the specific cultural identity, language and about feeling a that you should feel pride about who you are and where you come from. The love and nostalgia for times that have been and not much about trying to convince the reader about specific political views or violence. But

that doesn't mean that there is no relation between the political developments, literature, and other cultural outings, it is just that these relationships are not articulated as much in the works read.

Even though all the works are very different in nature, there are still countless similarities. All of the main characters in the ballads and in LPDR and LCDO are part of the Breton in-group, meaning that the point of view is usually the one from the Breton community, not the other. But the other's view is still visible in the described culture clashes, it being on the battlefield, in school, or through meetings with the personifications of the "other". Another interesting similarity is the many descriptions of traditions, where it is visible that the (invented) traditions described by la Villemarqué are used many generations later and are still seen as an important part of Breton culture and identity, which shows how these traditions can create a feeling of unity and community. These traditions are visible in for example the descriptions of marriage, funerals, religion, and family relationships. All of the books describe the hardships of life in Brittany, poverty, and difficulties of not fitting in, yet they all have a spark of hope that life gets better. This is visible in the victories on the battlefield, the fact that the family's life in LPDR got better after the death of the grandfather and that, even though Hélias is a bit sceptic about the cultural developments, he admits that a culture never will go extinct. It is also remarkable, that both LPDR and LCDO are autobiographies, which means that something in the author's childhoods was worth telling. Through writing these books, the authors try to give meaning to what has happened to them and undoubtedly many others. While two of the works, BB and LCDO, are born out of a sense of pride and a newly gained consciousness of the Breton identity and culture, LPDR seems to have a different view on bretonisme. Instead of pride, the narrator seems to hide behind shame and dreams of bigger things than the poor life he has in Brittany. But the pride depicted in BB and LCDO seems to be born out of a reaction to the low self-esteem, as LCDO overlaps on that front with LPDR.

8. Discussion and future research

This study is influenced by the fact that the author doesn't have any previous knowledge of either the Breton language or culture and can thus only be seen through the eyes of an 'other'. The importance of literature for the in-group, even though that is highly individual, can only be guessed. It could also be that small nuances have been lost in translation, especially in BB. The risk for this in the other two books is minimal since they were written in French by the authors, but it could be that these nuances have been lost in translation of the analysed excerpts.

Another difficulty is that all three of the works are very elaborate and the analysis is based on a selection of excerpts, which approaches the full narrative of the works, but cannot be fully representative of the entirety of the books.

One of the original research questions about the reception of the works in Brittany and beyond couldn't be addressed in this study, simply because it is beyond the scope. This would be interesting for a future study since literature always exists in relation to the real world. Without being read, literature's influence is non-existent.

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10. Annexes

All of the excerpts referenced in the analysis are included, in order of appearance in the original work.

10.1 Original excerpts from LPDR

P. 23

> Mais l'hiver aussi je l'aimais cette place. Alors elle était presque vide, muette et comme resserrée… toutes les portes étaient fermées. C'était la neige silencieuse. Dans l'espèce de mi-jour qu'il faisait on voyait se refléter et se mouvoir, à travers les vitres, l'éclat de la forge du père Roussin. Tout cela était enchanteur. Tout cela était AUTRE CHOSE [sic].

P.54

> Pour toutes ces raisons, et parce qu'à nos esprits d'enfant la merveille s'en trouvait encore multipliée, ne songions jamais sans croire qu'il s'agissait peut-être d'un conte, à des personnes de notre famille qui vivaient à Paris ou dans des pays aussi fabuleux que le Canada, le Dahomey ou même les Indes. Et pourtant ils existaient en chair et en os, tout pareils d'autres que nous voyions ici aller et venir à leurs affaires, sur leurs deux pieds. Mais eux, ils étaient de notre sang. S'ils nous oubliaient, comme c'était le cas pour la plupart, cet oubli cesserait un jour, car il ne venait pas de leur cœur. Quoi qu'il en fut, ne restaient-ils pas, de nous au monde, notre lien, notre passage ? ils étaient pour nous comme la glorification de nous-mêmes. […] un gros vieil album, couvert on ne savait en quoi qui ressemblait à la nacre, contenait les photographies de nos dieux. Et c'était là-dedans, quand ma mère voulait bien tirer pour nous son buffet et l'ouvrir sous la lampe, que nous apprenions notre mythologie.

P. 93

> … Sa [l'instituteur] revue terminée, il ouvrait la porte de la classe, où il entrait en marchant au pas. Nous le suivons, à la file indienne, et il entonnait un chant que nous reprenions tous en chœur :
>
> Mourir… pour la… Patrie…i…e !
>
> Mourir… pour la… Patrie…e !
>
> Ainsi faisons-nous le tour de la classe en braillant de tout notre cœur, en tapant sur le plancher en cadence avec nos sabots. Nous étions heureux du bel ensemble de notre chant, et fiers de nous savoir français.

P.140

> Je ne veux me souvenir que de l'une d'entre elles, la plus dramatique et la plus belle de l'année. C'est de la Procession des Pestiférés que je parle. Il y a quelque deux cents ans ou plus peut-être, une peste ravagea la province. Le fléau disparu, les survivants entreprirent de grandes processions d'action grâce à remercier le ciel et plus particulièrement la Vierge. Il en resta un pèlerinage qui se déroule de nuit, en souvenir sans doute de l'enlèvement nocturne des cadavres.

P. 145

> Il y a dans les instants qui précèdent les grandes fêtes où se réalisa tant d'unanimité, une sorte de perfection différente de celle que réalisera la fête elle-même, mais dont la répétition dans les mêmes formes nous frappait année en année et que nous attendions toujours.

P. 207

C’était un plaisir de plus que celui de la surprise et qui allait fort bien, croyait-il, à son genre parisien. Car parisien, il l’était en tout cas de fait. C’était à Paris qu’il avait passé la plus belle partie de sa vie – sa jeunesse – et il entendait bien y passer tout le reste. Il n’avait que dédain pour son pays natal, auquel, pourtant, il restait si attaché.

P. 218

Mais l’oncle avait un autre langage. Il savait qu’on déjeune à midi et qu’on dîne le soir vers sept ou huit heures, que le souper se fait à minuit. Mais nous, ce que nous appelions déjeuner, c’était tremper le matin un bout de pain souvent trop sec dans notre café. Nous dînions à midi de soupe aux choux et nous soupions le soir à sept heures. Quant aux repas de minuit, nous ne songions même pas qu’il pût y avoir au monde une espèce d’hommes si étranges, qu’ils se relevassent de leur lit pour manger quand il faisait si bon dormir.

P. 258

D’innombrables personnages parurent aux fenêtres. Autour du char se pressait la foule. Là-dessus, les cloches, les violons, la fanfare, menaient leur accompagnement allègre, auquel répondirent des chants. C’était comme un triomphe. La ville entière était là. On aurait cru assister au retour d’un être chéri depuis longtemps prisonnier et dont la rançon, enfin, venait d’être acquittée.

P.299

L’arrivée de la cousine Zabelle fut enfin annoncée pour le lendemain par un télégramme :- Mes enfants, dit ma mère, ce n’est plus le moment de bâiller. Il va me falloir faire du fricot. La cousine est une fine bouche. Je cours acheter un poulet. Vous me ferez mes autres commissions.

P. 308

La cousine Zabelle éclata de rire. Rire de cruauté d’un seul envol, presque sur une seule note vaguement trillée comme d’une alouette mâtinée de quelque impur oiseau de nuit. Le rouge m’en vint au visage.

P. 403-4

Ce qu’étaient ces repas, où il n’est pas bien difficile d’imaginer combien et comment tout m’était nouveau, les apparences de fête qu’une nappe jetée sur une table et la soupe servie dans une soupière faisaient briller à mes yeux, voilà un nouveau point où je laisse au lecteur sa liberté. […] Quel talent ils avaient tous dans leurs manières ! Tout m’embarrassait, mais eux ! Ils étaient l’aisance même.

10.3 Excerpts LCDO

P.109

> -Vous m'apprendrez à faire des sabots, grand-père ? – non, mon fils. Votre nourriture serait trop maigre. Cordonnier, je ne dis pas. Mais il faut mieux apprendre `lire, à écrire et à parler français. Vous en aurez du pain et de la viande tous les jours. Et vous marcherez sur du cuir. (p.109)

P.113-4

> Quand le soir tombe, grand-père commence à conter pour deux ou trois galopins qui sont bientôt six, sept autour de lui avec leurs paniers. Les femmes d'abord, puis les hommes, rentrent chez eux pour la soupe. Ne voyant pas les garçons et les filles, ils s'inquiètent, retournent au champ. Les enfants sont agglutinés contre un talus, au milieu le sabotier qui raconte « comment un breton devint roi d'Angleterre ». Les parents n'osant pas interrompre le conteur, s'assoient un moment pour l'écouter.

P.231

> Nous nous mettons bientôt à la torture, bourrés de bonne volonté, pour fabriquer des petites phrases en français. Est-ce notre faut si des mots bretons se glissent dedans ? D'ailleurs, le maître est le seul à s'en apercevoir. Quand il assène un coup de règle sur la table, nous savons que nous avons failli. Il reprend la phrase avec le mot français. « j'ai vu eur c'hwede ce matin » dit l'un de nous. Le maitre a écrit au tableau : une alouette. Répétez : « j'ai vu un alouette ce matin. ».

P. 232

> Un jour, en histoire ou géographie, je ne sais plus, nous tombons sur le mot menhir (pierre longue), un mot breton qui semble bien avoir été fabriqué, au siècle dernier, à coups de dictionnaire. Il est juste, d'ailleurs, que son frère dolmen qui est un beau solécisme. Mais voilà, l'entendant prononcé à la française ou le lisant dans un texte en français […]

P. 241-2

> Ceux qui s'aventuraient à composer laborieusement quelque phrase en français soulevaient l'hilarité des « parisiens ». A cause de cette impéritie linguistique, les bretonnants passaient pour niais ou demeurés auprès des gaillards dont le coefficient intellectuel ne valait pas le leur. […] Pour les bretonnants, d'ailleurs, le « parisien » est un individu à la fois séduisant pas son aisance, sa parole facile, sa débrouillardise, et redoutable par sa gouaille, ses mots d'esprit qui les laissent bouche bée, la mâchoire « a-istribill pendante comme l'oiseau bilibou. ».

P. 242

> Pour compliquer encore la situation, les enfants du pays qui vont à Paris pour gagner leur pain depuis la guerre de quatorze en arrivent très vite à haïr leur langue, synonyme de pauvreté, symbole d'ignorance et promesse de dérision. C'est tout juste s'ils ne maudissent pas leurs parents pour ce patrimoine plus déplorable qu'une tare physique héréditaire. A peine ont-ils passé un an dans quelque bas emploi de la capitale qu'ils reviennent au pays pour faire la roue devant leur cousinage de « coupeurs de vers ».

P.453

> C'est ainsi que, dans notre société, la nourriture est l'une des affaires les plus importantes qui soient. Non seulement parce que c'est le souci des paysans qui ont derrière eux des siècles de privations aggravées de temps à autre par des famines dont le souvenir n'est pas complètement perdu. Non seulement parce que le destin de nos gens est de tirer de la terre de quoi manger pour eux et pour beaucoup d'autres. Mais parce que cette nourriture d'une part conditionne la santé et la maladie de chacun d'eux, de l'autre permet d'estimer la qualité des rapports qui unissent les différents groupes sociaux.

P.502

> […] les parents de nouveaux mariés s'arrangent souvent pour les prier de leur rendre service en venant servir les repas de la noce, ce qui permet aux pauvres gens de profiter des agapes au même titre que les autres avec seulement un tablier blanc sur leur meilleur costume quelques heures par jour.

P.521

> Le soir, tard dans la nuit, il y aura une cérémonie burlesque de la *soupe au lait*. […] En réalité, on commence à oublier le symbole de cette soupe dont les vieux rappellent que le lait marque les douceurs de la vie conjugale tandis que le sel, le poivre, l'ail, le vinaigre largement dispensés signifieront les aigreurs, les querelles, les scènes de ménage et les misères de cette vie.

P.538

> Je mène une double vie et il me semble bien que je la mènerai toujours. Pendant trois quarts de l'année, je suis lycéen, étudiant, pion, répétiteur, professeur, ou bien il m'arrive de pratiquer des différents métiers de nuit pour pouvoir finir ma licence dans les moments difficiles […]. Le dernier quart de l'année, je suis dans mon village, je reprends ma langue maternelle, j'abandonne ma défroque de travailleur intellectuel pour me glisser dans mon environnement paysan […]. (p. 538)

P.574

> Dans la Bretagne Bretonnante, des *cercles celtiques,* groupes des jeunes gens qui se donnent pour but de remettre en honneur les costumes, les chants, les danses, les jeux de leur tradition paysanne, visiblement en perdition. De ces groupes, au bout de dix ans, on peut compter plusieurs centaines.

P.603

> Mais je savais aussi qu'une civilisation ne meurt jamais tout entière, qu'elle continue à alimenter en profondeur, comme une eau souterraine, les générations qui succèdent á son apparente mort et qu'elle resurgit, tôt ou tard, en source libre ou en fontaine. Je savais qu'une langue, même disparue de l'usage (et c'est loin d'être le cas pour le breton), fait le souci des savants qui essaient à débrouiller les traits du monde actuel.