

MYTHS OF AUTHENTICITY AND CULTURAL PERFORMANCE: BRETON
IDENTITY IN THE POETRY ANTHOLOGY, 1830–2000

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In the preface to his anthology *Poètes de Bretagne* of 1979, Charles Le Quintrec wrings his hands at the state of contemporary French poetry. He is especially scornful of Parisian cliques, with ‘leurs petits cocktails, leurs petits plaisirs, leurs tables rondes radiophoniques et leurs dîners-débats’, petty concerns which have reduced the art form to mere word games.¹

The poets of Brittany, he argues, are fundamentally different people:

Les poètes armoricains ont toujours cherché le contact des hommes. Ils n’ont pas écrit pour leur propre satisfaction, pour leurs plaisirs piégés, mais pour les autres, pour essayer d’aller voir ensemble ce qu’il y a dans la lumière et encore derrière la lumière du menhir et de la fontaine. C’est en cela, essentiellement, que les poètes d’Armor sont différents des poètes français et surtout des poètes parisiens qui aiment tellement se transformer en parfumeurs. Sur nos landes, on se moque pas mal de sentir bon! [...] Il n’y a pas de parfumeurs, ni de joyeux drilles, ni de divins bouffons chez les poètes de la lande. La grande majorité d’entre eux est incapable de vous ficeler quelques acrostiches et ne savent pas les lais pour les reines. De leur ignorance monte un chant plus âpre, plus instinctif, et, je serais tenté de dire, plus authentique. (pp. 16–17)

Le Quintrec mobilizes all the clichés which have accumulated in literary representations of Breton authenticity: rootedness in place, an intense affective relationship with the environment, a sense of community and solidarity, singularity of purpose, an essential difference. He insists repeatedly on the primacy of instinct – as here, a positively connoted ‘ignorance’ – over the artificial, learnt values of bourgeois culture. Yet the authenticity which Le Quintrec claims for the poets of Brittany is a highly problematic idea to which even he does not fully commit (‘je serais tenté de dire’). What is literary, cultural or ethnic authenticity, and how is it constructed? To what uses is it put, by whom, and why? How do its proponents negotiate the constant risk of cliché? And how does this authenticity relate to

regional or national languages, a question which Le Quintrec sidesteps here? By exploring how Breton identity is represented in the poetic anthology, a genre which has enjoyed something of a totemic status in the region's imaginary since the nineteenth century, we will see how closely the idea of Brittany is bound up with the idea of poetry, and how these two mutually supportive constructs maintain their relationship to each other. My corpus of a dozen anthologies, while not exhaustive, includes the most prominent examples from the last two hundred years, either entirely in French or with French translations of Breton texts. While displaying clear similarities and continuities in their subject matter and recurrent imagery, they provide evidence of three distinct chronological phases in the poetic construction of Bretonness:

1830–1918

Barzaz-Breiz: chants populaires de la Bretagne

ed. by Théodore Hersart, Vicomte de La Villemarqué (Paris: Perrin, 1839)

Anthologie des poètes bretons du XVII^e siècle

ed. by Stéphane Halgan, le comte de Saint-Jean (pseud. Adine Riom), Olivier de Gourcuff and René Kervilier (Nantes: Société des bibliophiles bretons et de l'histoire de Bretagne, 1884)

Le Parnasse breton contemporain

ed. by Louis Tiercelin and J.-Guy Ropartz (Paris: Lemerre, 1889)

Les Femmes poètes bretonnes

ed. by Mme Eugène Riom (Nantes: Société des bibliophiles bretons et de l'histoire de Bretagne, 1892)

Les Poètes du terroir du XV^e au XX^e siècle

ed. by Adolphe van Bever, 4 vols (Paris: Delagrave, 1909–18)

1918–71

Les Bardes et poètes nationaux de la Bretagne armoricaine: anthologie contemporaine des XIX^e–XX^e siècles

ed. by Camille Le Mercier d'Erm (Rennes: Plihon & Romay/Paris: Edward Sansot, 1918)

Défense de cracher par terre et de parler breton: anthologie bilingue

ed. by Yann-Ber Piriou (Éditions Pierre Jean Oswald, 1971)

1976–2003

Poètes bretons d'aujourd'hui

no ed. (Quimper: Éditions Telen Arvor, 1976)

Poètes de Bretagne

ed. by Charles Le Quintrec (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1980)

La Bretagne en poésie

ed. by Jean-Pierre Foucher (Paris: Gallimard, 'Folio junior', 1982)

Poésie de Bretagne aujourd'hui

ed. by Max Pons (Fumel: La Barbacane, 2002)

Poétique Bretagne

ed. by Alain-Gabriel Monot (Spézet: Keltia Graphic/Coop Breizh, 2003)

I will examine each phase in turn before discussing the tensions between the dominant trends which emerge: certain editors' framing of their project as a kind of anthropological document; the difficulty of expressing, preserving or (re)inventing a regional 'essence'; the implications of the touristic gaze which such anthologies invite; and the implications for poetry which must, in such collections, navigate between tradition and invention, individual and community.

In the first phase, 1830–1918, Breton exceptionalism is presented as belonging within the French nation-building drive which intensified around 1880 under the Third Republic. In the preface to *Barzaz-Breiz: chants populaires de la Bretagne* (1839), the collection of folk poems which put the question of authenticity at the forefront of nineteenth-century debates on regional literary expression, Hersart de La Villemarqué argues that 'l'histoire de la Bretagne a toujours été mêlée à celle de la France, et la France est aussi celtique par le cœur que l'Armorique est française aujourd'hui sous le drapeau commun', acknowledging 'l'expression énergique et fidèle d'une nationalité vivace que la France a eu tant de peine à absorber'.² A similar historical *appartenance* is proposed by the editors of the *Anthologie des*

poètes bretons du XVII^e siècle in 1884, which provides a regional complement to the profusion of *histoires littéraires*, from Sainte-Beuve onwards, seeking to trace a coherent line back via Molière, Ronsard and Villon to the literary roots of the nation.³ With studies of around twenty poets from the French-speaking nobility, the collection weaves Brittany into the literary narrative of France while maintaining its difference, holding its own against dominant national trends: ‘la Bretagne, affirmant une fois de plus sa ténacité proverbiale, donne un dernier asile à la Pléiade proscrite, battue en brèche de tous côtés, et, jusqu’en 1625, en plein triomphe et trois ans avant la mort de Malherbe, le *ronsardisme* y fleurit à l’aise’.⁴ Similarly, while the publication of *Le Parnasse breton contemporain* by Louis Tiercelin and J.-Guy Ropartz in 1889 constitutes a landmark for Breton literary visibility, featuring poems from over ninety living poets, it does so within a Republic of the regions, aspiring towards the centre rather than opposing it. Indeed, the title establishes a clear association with the original *Parnasse contemporain*, that generation-defining statement which appeared in three volumes between 1866 and 1876; throughout, the forms are Parnassian, with countless alexandrines and sonnets alongside some octosyllabic quatrains and terza rima; and the collection is dedicated to Leconte de Lisle, ‘maître incontesté autour duquel s’est fait le mouvement de rénovation poétique de cette fin de siècle’ who, while born on l’île Bourbon, was of Breton descent on his father’s side.⁵ The volume even opens with five of his poems, including the distinctly un-Breton ‘Les Roses d’Ispahan’ and ‘La Maya’ which contrast starkly with the quaint – and forgettable – depictions of *couleur locale* which follow.

This sense of identifying with the literary trends of contemporary Paris continues in *Les Femmes poètes bretonnes* of 1892, in which Adine Riom draws together poems by writers from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, including some known beyond Brittany such as Adélaïde Dufresnoy, La Princesse de Salm-Dyck (Constance Salm) and Éliisa

Mercœur. While there is little evidence of a Symbolist influence in the volume itself, Riom identifies *la femme bretonne* in terms strongly marked by the dominant poetic movement of the period, packaging Breton particularity for a specific market beyond the region. In a short preface, under her pseudonym le comte de Saint-Jean, she writes:

La femme bretonne comprend la Nature, non à la manière des savants, qui sans cesse cherchent à la dévoiler; mais elle la comprend avec sa propre intuition; car la nature, comme les diamants, a des facettes et des reflets multiples. [...] La femme, dès le premier gonflement de la sève, perçoit ces arômes si doux devenus insaisissables pour ceux qui sont accoutumés aux parfums irritants que les chimistes nous ont offerts.⁶

Mélanie Waldor's poem 'La Bretagne' offers another auto-exoticising gesture, presenting the province as a site of nature therapy to which the city dweller might retreat for a rest cure, with clichés taken from the colonial imaginary: 'Ainsi dans un hamac, mollement balancée, / La jeune Indienne oublie, endormie et lassée, / L'orage du matin' (p. 66).⁷ This first phase of difference within assimilation, during which Breton poets see themselves as if from the centre, closes with *Les Poètes du terroir du XV^e au XX^e siècle*, published in the 1910s by Adolphe van Bever, a Parisian of Dutch descent. In keeping with the Third Republic's rhetoric of variety in unity, expressed in educational texts such as *Le Tour de la France par deux enfants*, van Bever sees in the great diversity of the regions a contribution to the greater glory of the nation: 'le souffle de toutes nos provinces passe dans l'Âme française et la fait vibrer harmonieusement'.⁸ In this period, therefore, the 'other' against which Breton poetry defines itself in anthology form is created through dichotomies such as countryside over town, or 'chant' over 'maniérisme et hermétisme' (p. xiv), but these moral and aesthetic oppositions do not disrupt the fundamental principle of political allegiance to the nation.

During the second period, 1919–71, there are fewer collections, but two anthologies of note articulate a new demand for Breton independence. In 1919, Camille Le Mercier d'Erm, co-founder of the Fédération régionaliste de Bretagne in 1911, publishes *Les Bardes*

et poètes nationaux de la Bretagne armoricaine, a monumental volume featuring eighty-one poets across 803 pages, and including only ‘des œuvres consacrées à la glorification de la seule Bretagne’.⁹ While Le Mercier d’Erm offers aesthetic considerations in a long introduction, it is clear from his preface – an exchange of letters with Anatole Le Braz – that the collection also constitutes a political statement:

Nous marchons au Fédéralisme universel et rien ne doit empêcher que la Bretagne aspire à prendre son rang dans la confédération future des Etats-Unis du Monde; rien ne doit s’opposer à ce que la langue bretonne soit enseignée, parlée et cultivée, si nous le voulons ainsi, conjointement avec la langue française et la langue internationale qui ne saurait être que l’anglais.

Le Home-Rule pour la Bretagne! le Home-Rule pour tous les peuples et pour tous les individus! (Preface, pp. xxiii–iv)

For Le Mercier d’Erm, the efforts of his predecessors are insufficiently representative of Breton difference: he dismisses the *Parnasse breton contemporain* – ‘ce n’est là, somme toute, qu’un excellent recueil de poésies françaises’ – and chastizes van Bever, not only for devoting a mere 186 pages to Brittany, but also for the reductive gesture of assimilation which *Les Poètes du terroir* represents, for the distortion it imposes upon ‘la Bretagne, abusivement assimilée aux “terroirs” patoisants du pays de France, [...] si profondément différenciée aux points de vue ethnique, linguistique et littéraire’ (introduction, p. xxx).

While Le Mercier d’Erm recognizes that monolingual collections such as *Bleuniou Breiz* (1862), *Bleuniou Breiz-Izel* (1902) and *Breiziz* (1911) are at a significant disadvantage thanks to their small readership, he protests against the almost complete absence of Breton from the *Parnasse* and *Les Poètes du terroir*. In his collection, therefore, the large proportion of poems in Breton enjoy pride of place in the top two-thirds of each page, with French, to which he tartly refers as ‘cet *espéranto* des diplomates’, printed in a slightly smaller font in the footnotes (introduction, pp. xxxii–iii).

In 1971, Yann-Ber Piriou goes much further, making the Breton language the central pillar of his *Défense de cracher par terre et de parler breton: anthologie bilingue*.¹⁰ Whereas Le Mercier d’Erm had attempted to justify the inclusion of poets writing in French – ‘si la langue diffère, l’inspiration reste identique, puisant son origine dans l’ardeur d’un même patriotisme breton’ – Piriou rails against the French state’s efforts to eradicate Breton, and more broadly, against ‘la politique de génocide culturel perpétrée en Bretagne’ since the nineteenth century.¹¹ For him, ‘les tentatives de récupération des Le Braz et des Le Goffic avaient abouti à des échecs’ because they were writing in French, ‘une langue étrangère’ which could never capture the truth of the Breton people, for whom ‘les mots et les phrases de notre langue n’ont pas encore perdu leur pouvoir magique. Rien qu’à les entendre, rien qu’à les dire, la porte s’ouvre aux sortilèges’ (*Défense*, p. 29). Thus Piriou only includes poems originally written in Breton, with facing-page French translation, and throughout the volume, claims are made for a kinship with other colonized peoples, ‘tous les petits peuples bâillonnés de ce monde’ (p. 42), articulating a cry of rebellion and resistance which harnesses the energy of the recent wave of French decolonization across northern and sub-Saharan Africa to demand the same for Brittany. Quoting a song from the *Barzaz-Breiz* which details injustices done to the Breton people, Piriou asks: ‘Où sommes-nous donc? En Bretagne, en Algérie, au Kurdistan ou au Vietnam?’ (p. 19). His featured poets go further, appropriating the language of slavery from the African context: ‘Me zo Breizhad. Me zo bet sklav’ (Je suis Breton. J’ai été esclave) states Per Denez in ‘Negro Song (à la manière de Langston Hughes)’ (pp. 72–3), a sentiment echoed by Erwan Evenou in ‘Plouk’:

Arab, va breur karet	Arabe, mon frère bien-aimé
[...]	
N’on ket gall evid eur gwenneg	Je ne suis pas français pour un sou
[...]	
Sonjit ivez:	Dites-vous:
Eñ zo arab ivez	Il est arabe lui aussi.
[...]	

Peogwir 'oah sklaved,
Peogwir 'oan sklav ivez.

Puisque vous étiez des esclaves,
Puisque moi aussi j'étais un esclave.

Ha bremañ pa n'hoh ket mui,
Me zo manet hoaz,
[...]
Hoant am eus bout arab.

Maintenant vous ne l'êtes plus,
Mais moi je le suis resté,
J'ai envie d'être arabe. (pp. 104–9)

French functions here not as the victorious language of the colonizer, but rather as a lingua franca allowing a vital sharing of experience among all the peoples who have fallen foul of France's colonial project, both at home and abroad:

C'est à tous les lecteurs de langue française que ces poèmes s'adressent. Et tout d'abord aux Québécois, chez qui nous comptons tant d'amis; aux Africains et aux Antillais qui savent ce qu'«être colonisé» veut dire; aux Français; aux Occitans, aux Catalans, aux Basques de l'Hexagone. (p. 46)

As we enter the third phase of Breton anthologies, however, the precise political concerns of Le Mercier d'Erm and Piriou give way to a wider variety of themes and a new focus on the aesthetic dimension. There is evidence of a broader range of dialogues, notably with US poets, moving beyond the pan-Celtic affiliations of 1880–1920 and the identification with post-colonial nations in the 1960s–70s. The criterion for inclusion shifts from birthright to cultural affinity, which both allows for a wider selection of poets and suggests that, in order to be complete, studies of francophone Breton literature should include texts written by outsiders.

The first collection, *Poètes bretons d'aujourd'hui*, published in 1976 by Éditions Telen Arvor, is an intriguing anomaly in that it features no editor's name, no introduction and scant information on the poets, leaving the poems to speak for themselves without any ideological framing. The volume opens with a brief note – 'Ce livre est moins une anthologie qu'un choix limité de poètes parmi les plus représentatifs de la poésie bretonne d'expression française aujourd'hui' – and while the term 'representative' is as slippery as 'authentic', this

volume seems to place the poetic text, rather than cultural identity, at the forefront of the reader's experience.¹² Among the twelve poets included, there are those who are well known for the passionate political dimension of their texts, such as Paol Keineg, Xavier Grall and Yvon Le Men, and in places the tone and imagery are familiar. Grall, for example, sounds a recognizable note of melancholy defiance: 'Bretagne, ma demeure / il faut que survive / le kyrie dans ton âme de sel' ('Notre-Dame-des-Îles', *Poètes bretons*, p. 29); 'Menhir / Je veux une mort verticale / Parmi les ronces paysannes' ('Menhir', p. 37); 'je te bretonniserai / contre vents et marées / viens avec moi compagnon / je te gaëliserai en mes sauvages rimes / je te décrocherai de leur immonde Seine' ('Je t'adjure, toi...', p. 40). However, there are many non-localized, unplaceable poems which could easily feature in an anthology of French poetry *tout court*, such as those of Georges Drano, Herri Gwilherm Kerourédan, Paul-Alexis Robic or Guillevic, who by this point had been publishing with Gallimard for thirty-four years and was translated into over forty languages. In many of these texts, poetry serves not to confirm the subject's cultural identity, but rather, operates as a site of destabilization and self-questioning: 'Il y a quelqu'un d'hésitant en soi / une face qui hésite en face de soi' (Drano, p. 13); 'Partir / le cœur vide / la tête sans mémoire' (Gérard Le Gouic, p. 121); 'Si peu semblable à moi-même / Quand je me vois à distance / Dans l'eau morte d'un poème' (Robic, p. 189). As well as these more universal texts, the specific locations also broaden out beyond Brittany. Rather than excerpts from his famous polemic *Le Poème du pays qui a faim* (1966), Keineg – who had moved to the US a year previously – contributes twelve short *poèmes inédits* in which Breton locations such as Kerouzac'h, Ouessant, Rumengol and Kimerc'h feature alongside 'Croquis d'Olinda' (p. 86), depicting the coastal town in Brazil, and 'Désert de l'Arizona' (p. 89).¹³ The influence of US Beat writers is visible: Grall contributes 'Kerouac Song', which claims the counter-cultural icon for Brittany:

Kérouac est mort... Il pleut sur Brest. [...] Rêvons aux princes et aux ducs et aux rois / et faisons de Jack Le Bris de Kérouac le grand aristocrate de la divine chevalerie de la route. [...] Kérouac is dead, very well, good-bye farewell / [...] Il y a un barde qui s'en va. Il y a un barde qui s'en vient. (pp. 32–4)

while *Le Men's* freewheeling, socially conscious free verse echoes Allen Ginsberg: 'NOUS SOMMES DE L'ÈRE ATOMIQUE / CONTRE HIROSHIMA ET POUR LA PÉNICILLINE' (p. 129).

This privileging of poetry continues in *Poésie de Bretagne aujourd'hui*, a short volume published by Max Pons in 2002 with invited contributions, all *textes inédits*, by thirty poets. It marks a new generation compared with the *Telen Arvor* collection of 1976 – only Kerourédan and Le Gouic from that volume also feature here – and it is the only one in our corpus to include Heather Dohollau, an incomer of whom Pons notes: 'Une des plus grandes voix de la poésie bretonne d'expression française, cette galloise d'origine, de l'avis de tous les poètes bretons, occupe une toute première place'.¹⁴ Pons presents his own external position as an advantage – 'n'ayant aucune attache avec cette région je me sentais entièrement libre' (p. 8) – but, perhaps because of this outside perspective, his brief 'Préambule' is significantly more picturesque and indulgent than the poems he includes. Recalling memories of childhood holidays in 'la magique baie de Douarnenez', Pons constructs the familiar opposition between 'l'hermétisme', 'la fumisterie', 'l'expression tarabiscotée' of contemporary French poets and their Breton cousins:

Ces poètes bretons, d'expression française, me semblent pour la plupart chanter juste. [...] On réalise très vite qu'ils ne sont pas des poètes d'eau douce. [...] Ce qui s'écrit, actuellement, dans cette province de l'ouest, porte la marque des éléments dominants qui la régissent. On y surprend les embruns du vent marin, les coups de boutoir de la houle, la poignante mélancolie des cornes de brume et les envolées carillonnantes des cloches qui battent comme des cœurs dans leurs campaniles dentelés et inimitables. [...] Qu'on m'accorde le crédit de croire que ce ne sont pas là de simples *clichés* mais bien de fortes réalités. (pp. 8–10, original italics)

There is thus a strange tension in this volume between the touristic framing device, which insists on an essential link between place and writing, and many of the poems which Pons selects. Boats, moors, heather, standing circles, druids and cider are all present and correct, but they are in the minority among texts with a much broader range of reference: Gilles Baudry contributes textual responses to the music of Sibelius, Satie and Bach (pp. 15–17); Kerourédan takes the reader to Venice in ‘une gondole d’obsidienne’, with its ‘lagune de spectres’ and ‘Deux Pierrots masqués de noir’ (p. 69); and Jean Rio describes a Prague ‘aux doigts de pluie’ where ‘Je chante les poètes assassinés’ (p. 106). Many of the nature poems lack any local specificity and offer, rather, reflections on language and poetic expression, as in these sparse lines by Jean-Pierre Salaün: ‘L’invisible / Ne se donne pas / Il se devine / Aux confins du silence’; ‘Au pays / De la vérité des vents / Le visible révèle / L’invisible / L’invisible magnifie / Le visible’; ‘Visages de vents / Dans la frénésie des temps / La mémoire connaît / La langue des morts / L’esprit transcende / Les frontières des mondes’ (pp. 107–9). The volume places before us the tension, inherent in any discourse of authenticity, between the locatable ingredients of a cultural identity – traditions, character, topography, language – and the danger of those elements becoming fossilized as clichés which exclude any other kinds of expression. To his own rhetorical question, ‘Y aurait-il encore une “matière de Bretagne”?’ Pons offers a firm ‘Je le crois’ (p. 9), but as a nostalgic, lyrical outsider, his touristic gaze finds only what it seeks. As John Urry observes in his study of the visual dimension of tourism, ‘looking is a learned ability’, ‘the pure and innocent eye is a myth’, and the tourist gaze feeds into a ‘self-perpetuating system of illusions’.¹⁵ We might, then, think of the poetic anthology as an example of what Dean MacCannell calls ‘staged authenticity’, a space in which the projection of a touristic desire encounters the performance of what it has been led to expect.¹⁶ Yet these third-phase anthologies counteract such a tendency by dint of their very diversity. While some poems may deal in familiar imagery and

sentiments, others remind us that Breton ‘essence’ cannot be reduced to endlessly repeated clichés which hinder the processes of growth – including transnational, translingual encounters – which allow it to evolve.

The inherently constructed nature of the authentic as it oscillates between inward- and outward-looking modes of expression and representation is exemplified by two slim volumes which are presented as literary tourist guides: *La Bretagne en poésie* (1982), edited by Jean-Pierre Foucher for Gallimard’s ‘Folio junior’ series, and *Poètes de Bretagne* (2003), edited by Alain-Gabriel Monot for a small Breton publisher.¹⁷ Both are illustrated: the children’s volume with photographs and drawings of Breton costumes, customs and landscapes; Monot’s with watercolour portraits alongside a brief biography and one short poem by each of the thirty poets included, giving the appearance of the sort of volume that a tourist might pick up in a souvenir shop. Adding to the impression of orientation around touristic experience, the ‘Folio junior’ anthology is organized by themes – countryside, seascapes, towns, children’s rhymes, customs, legends, faith – which imply the discovery of a place and a people. Short prose texts by canonized ‘French’ authors confirm this sense of travel writing: Balzac’s description of the château de Fougères in *Les Chouans* (1829), an extract from Flaubert’s *Par les champs et par les grèves* (1847), Colette’s sketch of a coastal rock formation at Rozével from *Le Blé en herbe* (1923) and a passage from Julien Gracq’s *Au château d’Argol* (1938), while one of several texts by Châteaubriand – the iconic and oft-quoted passage from *Mémoires d’outre-tombe* which borrows from the travel writing of Jacques Cambry – reads like a guide book: ‘Le printemps, en Bretagne, est plus doux qu’aux environs de Paris, et fleurit trois semaines plus tôt’ (p. 45). A small number of poems and songs in Breton, with French translation, are included for the sake of ‘justice et souci d’authenticité’, while a broad selection of folk ballads illustrates ‘la conscience de l’identité bretonne glorieusement permanente au long des siècles’ (p. 7).

While this use of touristic signifiers might appear reductive, Foucher allows for greater breadth of inclusion and a more playful approach. Alongside markers of historical authenticity such as the centuries-old *poésies populaires*, the performative folklore of Brizeux, Le Goffic and Le Braz, or the stock imagery of Heredia's Parnassian sonnet 'Bretagne', he includes poems by outsiders such as Queneau and Reverdy, as well as three from *L'Oiseau veilleur* (1980) by the only translingual writer here, Susan Wise, a native of California who moved to France aged ten and published in French. While all these poems feature broadly marine themes, none refers to a specifically Breton context. Queneau's 'Les Hippocampes' describes a chess board which falls into the sea, the knights transforming into wooden sea-horses (p. 61), while 'Buccin' simply depicts a child listening to the sound of the sea in a seashell (p. 62).¹⁸ Reverdy describes 'un arbre orienté vers le ciel' and 'une pluie d'étoiles', with only 'cette procession sombre [...] avec des bougies' perhaps suggesting a Breton setting (p. 51).¹⁹ Foucher includes Laforgue, born in Montevideo to a mother with Breton roots, but although his 'Air de biniou', the last poem in *Des Fleurs de bonne volonté* (1886), begins 'Non, non, ma pauvre cornemuse, / Ta complainte est pas si oiseuse' (p. 43), the focus is on the poet's characteristic anxieties over sexual desire, and the eponymous Breton bagpipe functions as an imperfect parody of the poetic lyre, similar to the broken barrel organs of *Les Complaintes*, rather than offering any sustained reflection on his maternal heritage. This anthology, therefore, offers a space of play and exploration in which the reader can compare multiple performances of Breton identity as it negotiates between tradition and creativity. This is well illustrated by two poems by Max Jacob, who embodies precisely this tension: 'Quimper' (p. 81) from *Le Laboratoire central* (1921) and 'Noces de Cana' (p. 110) from his posthumous *Poèmes de Morven le Gaëlique* (1953). Foucher's brief notes highlight both Jacob's genuine sense of Breton identity – 'en tous lieux, je ne vis que de la Bretagne et c'est pourquoi la Bretagne s'ouvre en moi' – and his irreverent delight in

adopting playful personas, ‘personnage déchiré, jouant sans cesse sa propre parodie pour mieux masquer un incessant drame intérieur’ (p. 153). Several critics have shown how the poems Jacob wrote throughout his life as his alter ego Morven are a pastiche, rather than a parody, of traditional Breton themes and forms.²⁰ What is authentic, as shown by Jacob’s correspondence, is his affective bond with an idea of Brittany which held personal significance for him, which he took seriously and to which he gives playful, but not dismissive, expression in poems unpublished as a collection during his lifetime.

This sense of identity as performance also underpins the most recent anthology in the corpus, Monot’s *Poétique Bretagne*. Dismissing concerns about birthplace, language, folklore and ‘tous les poncifs d’un genre *réputé breton*’, Monot declares: ‘Est poète de Bretagne finalement [...] qui s’en réclame. En toute simplicité, en toute complexité. [...] Il n’y est besoin d’aucun papier, d’aucun certificat d’appartenance ou d’authenticité qui sont autant de leurres. Ni passeport, ni visa!’ (pp. 4–5, original italics). The first five poets included offer immediate proof of this vision of poetic Brittany as a melting pot: Tristan Corbière, the *poète maudit* of *dérision* and *auto-dérision* on the fringes of the French canon; the Marseillais Saint-Pol Roux, Brittany’s most passionate adopted son and author of the totemic ‘Bretagne est univers’ (‘Cette race divine est la race bretonne / [...] O Bretagne éternelle comme l’Univers!’), although Monot includes instead the less bombastic ‘Océan’;²¹ Jacob, with ‘Le Phare d’Eckmühl’; Victor Segalen, celebrated here for his passion for travel rather than depictions of Brittany; and Anjela Duval, a crucially important poet for the nationalist generation of the 1970s who wrote only in Breton, and whose ‘Karantez-vro’ appears in translation: ‘Mais je n’échangerais contre nul trésor / Mon pays, ma langue et ma liberté’ (p. 15). This is a Brittany in which incomers – Hervé Carn (Ardennes), Kenneth White (Glasgow), Georges Perros (Paris) – are welcome alongside both regionalist voices and those Bretons, such as Guillevic and Jean-Michel Maulpoix, who are recognized further afield

under the broader banner of French poetry. It is a Brittany where texts have the potential for universal significance, putting poetry, rather than people or place, centre stage. Indeed, writes Marc Le Gros, ‘C’est peu dire qu’on la déteste, / la couleur locale [...] nos Bretagnes à nous sont ailleurs’ (p. 57), and Armand Robin’s contribution recounts the subject’s flight from specific individuality: ‘Hâte sans fin rafraîchie, / Je me fuis de vie en vie. [...] Moi par moi délogé, remplacé / Par d’autres plus puissants habitants [...] je me ferai mouvant, flottant’ (p. 27). Yet all the texts maintain a sense of Breton locatedness. It is as if, after 130 years during which Breton identity was presented as a fixed essence in the poetry anthology, either within the Republic or in opposition to it, certain third-phase editors come to understand authenticity as both construct and performance, a dialogue to be held in the process of reading and writing, and in the productively unstable, self-reflexive act of curation itself.

In the final section of this article I would like to look more closely at the various strategies exploited by certain editors in order to negotiate what seems to be a requirement, or an expectation, of authenticity in a literary enterprise under the banner of a regional identity. Several editors in phases one and two locate this authenticity in claims for the anthropological value of their project, as if the texts contained evidence of the soul of a people. As van Bever puts it in *Les Poètes du terroir*, ‘pourquoi n’observerait-on pas dans le domaine des lettres, et à propos de quelque individualité retentissante, les mêmes lois ethniques qui dominant les races et différencient les groupes sociaux?’ (p. iv). La Villemarqué, too, presents his *Barzaz-Breiz* as ‘le tableau fidèle des mœurs, des idées, des croyances, des opinions, des goûts, des plaisirs et des peines du peuple breton, aux différentes époques de sa vie. Il s’y peint d’après nature’ (p. 523). In all cases, this essential character is presented as inextricably bound up in the poetic. In the *Parnasse*, Tiercelin claims that ‘l’idéalisme, ce trait caractéristique de la race bretonne, si bien noté par E. Renan dans ses *Souvenirs*’, is evidenced by ‘cette simple mélodie où peut vibrer toute l’âme bretonne [...]

cette âme poétique de nos bardes, de nos évêques et de nos mendiants d'autrefois' (pp. iii–iv, original italics). *Le Mercier d'Erm* opens with the oft-cited words of Marie de France, 'cet axiome de psychologie nationale: "Bretagne est poésie", par quoi se trouve constatée pour la première fois devant l'histoire la singulière identité dont s'honore à bon droit notre race' (introduction, p. iii). And *Le Braz* takes even greater poetic licence: 'ce même peuple [...] ne naît pas seulement poète: l'aiguillon poétique est en lui comme une fatalité héréditaire, comme une sorte de mal royal. C'est une lyre humaine' (preface, p. xv). The choice of the Orphic lyre, rather than the Celtic harp, betrays the importance of the centre for his cultural ambitions, as he selects a metaphor from classical culture which is rife in the self-agrandizing imaginary of nineteenth-century French poets, and which was sure to find favour among the Parisian literati. Yet even after such rhetorical flights of fancy, *Le Mercier d'Erm* assures his readers that the volume documents 'la Bretagne réelle, la vraie et vivante Bretagne' (introduction, p. xxxiv).

While this anthropological angle recedes in the third phase, replaced by openness to an idea of cultural allegiance as performative construct, it persists in the thinking of Pons, as we have seen, and also *Le Quintrec*. I have saved him for last because he is by far the most vocal and voluble of the third-phase editors in his anti-Parisian insistence on a Breton specificity, and yet his entire conception of poetry is so firmly rooted in the French national tradition – a broadly Romantic one – that he is obliged to perform numerous rhetorical contortions in order to maintain this remarkable balancing act. He is the first to admit that his selection process is artificial, and to recognize the subjective nature of cultural genealogies: 'Il a fallu que je nous invente une filiation' (p. 19). He would have liked to begin with Chateaubriand, he says, but judges him 'trop médiocre poète en vers' (p. 19), instead selecting Hugo, whose mother was from Nantes; more importantly, he claims, 'l'odeur qui se dégage des *Odes et Ballades* est de chez nous', 'l'océan de Victor Hugo [...] est l'océan

d'Armorique', and so 'Voilà pourquoi je le dis de notre clan. [...] Hugo, Breton! Sur mon honneur' (pp. 47–9). From this point onwards, he argues, 'De Hugo, à René Guy Cadou, le fil ne va plus se rompre' (p. 19), maintaining that the best work by the new generation of young Breton poets 'provient du sentiment qu'ils ont de faire partie d'une chaîne, de devoir beaucoup aux anciens, de ne les vouloir pas trahir, de ne pas travestir leur terre' (p. 24). Alongside this sense of ancestral responsibility, however, Le Quintrec also welcomes incomers, since 'C'est avec ses tripes, avec son cœur, avec son âme que l'on se fait une parentèle' (p. 48), thereby creating a convenient fluidity around the notion of belonging.

Indeed, Le Quintrec is no separatist, and his vision of poetry is so immersed in the nineteenth-century canon that even the outlandish claim he makes for Breton poets' difference – 'ce ne sont pas des baladins, des contorsionnistes, des équilibristes, des funambules, mais les gardiens sacrés des mots de la tribu' (p. 20) – uses an expression coined by Mallarmé ('Donner un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu') in an alexandrine from a sonnet dedicated to an American poet.²² While the idea of sacred guardianship might make us think of the defence of the Breton language, the 'mots de la tribu' would also seem to refer to the poetic use of French, a slippage between region and nation which is at the heart of Le Quintrec's contradictions. Moreover, while Le Quintrec claims a bardic inheritance for Pierre Kerébel – 'il a reçu en partage le rythme, la musique, la rude tendresse des vieux trouvères et la générosité des ménestrels' (p. 352) – Kerébel writes in perfect alexandrines. 'Le Vieux collègue' is a sonnet dedicated not to the bards or troubadours, but to the Republican school system which inspired his love of classical French form:

Maximes et portraits, Essais et Caractères
 Les amours de Ronsard, le manteau de Molière
 Les Pensées de Pascal, le langage des dieux

C'est ainsi que le chant, la rime et la césure
 L'hémistiche et l'envol de mots harmonieux
 Ont fait naître en mon cœur l'amour de l'écriture. (p. 354)

Similarly, while Le Quintrec sees in André Breton ‘un héritier des anciens bardes’ (p. 132), the poets he includes make far more frequent references to Rimbaud, Laforgue, Apollinaire, Supervielle, Jacob, Prévert, Queneau and Rilke.

As if attempting to anchor his shape-shifting cultural allegiances in something specific, Le Quintrec identifies a privileged relationship with, and heightened sensitivity to, the local landscape as a truly authentic marker vision of Breton poetic identity. Amédée Guillemot, he argues, was popular because his poetry offered ‘un chant qui sourdait de la terre et de l’océan d’Armorique; un chant qui se retient et qu’on ne saurait falsifier’ (p. 422), and he writes of Théophile Briant: ‘la mer bretonne lui apparaissait comme à Hugo, la plus authentique de toutes’ (p. 141). Yet readers were already tiring of such repetitive imagery by the mid-nineteenth century, and Le Quintrec himself rails against the picture-postcard approach which reduces Brittany to a museum of clichés, dismissing the folklore revivalists of the early twentieth century in terms which gloss over the complexity of the issue with a deceptively simple adverb: ‘rien de vrai, rien de vivant, rien de simplement authentique’ (p. 25). Why, then, in the face of all these tensions, all the rhetorical energy he is required to expend, does he persist in his efforts to construct a Breton poetic specificity? Why is the lure of the authentic so strong?

Regina Bendix argues in her study of anthropological traditions in Germany and North America, *In Search of Authenticity*, that ‘behind the assiduous documentation and defence of the authentic lies an unarticulated anxiety of losing the subject’.²³ The ‘longing for authenticity’ (p. 7) which she identifies in the upper and middle classes of the nineteenth century, to which all our first-phase editors belong, stems, she suggests, from anxiety caused by the disorientating pace of modernization and its attendant transformations: ‘demythologization, detraditionalization and disenchantment’ (p. 8). Similar fears for the

defence and preservation of Breton identity were stirred in the twentieth century by political, economic and cultural centralization as well as by globalization. Patrick Young has shown how, by 1900, Brittany had come to be fetishized as ‘a last bastion of authenticity in a modern world headed inexorably toward cosmopolitan sameness and superficiality’ – this projection was then internalized as a self-image so that ‘Bretons arrived at a fluid, and one might even say touristic, relationship to Breton culture’.²⁴ The poetry anthology thus represents for its editors and readers alike much more than a purely literary enterprise, and the desire for authenticity on display in these textual museums betrays a yearning, as Bendix puts it, ‘for something beyond texts, history, and language’ (p. 34). I would argue that the tensions between the fixed frame of an often evocatively illustrated title page and the diverse array of poetic texts within create a dynamic, dialogic space where this intangible essence may be constantly re-negotiated and re-invented.

The evolution of the Breton poetry anthology has revealed a wide variety of editorial strategies for constructing different, and sometimes competing, visions of cultural specificity, and shows how this vital but fragile notion has adapted to articulate the region’s ongoing reimagining during two hundred years of profound social change at local, national and international levels. What has emerged from these curatorial and curative projects is evidence of the kind of search for meaning to which poetry, as it has been conceptualized in France from the Romantic period to the present day, is uniquely suited. Indeed, perhaps they tell us as much about Breton cultural identity as they do about the French idea of poetry, a literary medium which by its very nature calls itself into question, and a reading tradition – that of Guillevic, Maulpoix, Dohollau – in which we accept to read in full knowledge of the fact that the text operates a constant deferral, projecting any idea of certainty into an unrealizable future moment where it can never be seized. Thus, while editors occupy themselves with the

delicate task of constructing a coherent vision of the regional authentic, the poetic subject in response performs an ambivalent decentring. As Perros succinctly puts it:

Je ne suis pas d'ici

Je ne suis pas de là.

Je suis de nulle part

Nulle part est partout²⁵

¹ Poètes de Bretagne, ed. by Charles Le Quintrec (Paris: La Table Ronde, [1980] 2008), p. 14.

² *Barzaz-Breiz: chants populaires de la Bretagne*, ed. by Théodore Hersart, Vicomte de La Villemarqué (Paris: Perrin, 1839), preface, pp. 7–8. For a full account of the genesis of the collection, and the long-running debate over its authenticity, see Donatien Laurent, *Aux sources du Barzaz-Breiz: la mémoire d'un peuple* (Douarnenez: Ar Men, 1989) and Nelly Blanchard, *Barzaz-Breiz: une fiction pour s'inventer* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2006). Mary-Ann Constantine explores the complex relationship between notions of forgery and translation in *The Truth Against the World: Iolo Morganwg and Romantic Forgery* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007) and *Breton Ballads* (Aberystwyth: CMCS Publications, 1996).

³ See, for example, Sainte-Beuve, *Tableau historique et critique de la poésie française et du théâtre français au XVII^e siècle* (Paris: Charpentier, 1828).

⁴ *Anthologie des poètes bretons du XVII^e siècle*, ed. by Stéphane Halgan, le comte de Saint-Jean (pseud. Adine Riom), Olivier de Gourcuff and René Kervilier (Nantes: Société des bibliophiles bretons et de l'histoire de Bretagne, 1884), p. vi, original italics.

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- ⁵ *Le Parnasse breton contemporain*, ed. by Louis Tiercelin and J.-Guy Ropartz (Paris: Lemerre, 1889), p. ii, and *Le Parnasse contemporain*, 3 vols (Paris: Lemerre, 1866–76).
- ⁶ *Les Femmes poètes bretonnes*, ed. by Mme Eugène Riom (Nantes: Société des bibliophiles bretons et de l’histoire de Bretagne, 1892), pp. 5–6.
- ⁷ For a detailed analysis of Brittany’s literary absorption into the nineteenth-century French colonial imaginary see Heather Williams, *Postcolonial Brittany: Literature between Languages* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007).
- ⁸ *Les Poètes du terroir du XV^e au XX^e siècle*, ed. by Adolphe van Bever, 4 vols (Paris: Delagrave, 1909–18), p. vii, and G. Bruno, *Le Tour de la France par deux enfants* (Paris: Eugène Bellin, 1877).
- ⁹ *Les Bardes et poètes nationaux de la Bretagne armoricaine: anthologie contemporaine des XIX^e–XX^e siècles* (Rennes: Plihon & Romay, Paris: Edward Sansot, 1919), introduction, p. xxxii.
- ¹⁰ *Défense de cracher par terre et de parler breton: anthologie bilingue*, ed. by Yann-Ber Piriou (Paris: Éditions Pierre Jean Oswald, 1971).
- ¹¹ *Les Bardes et poètes nationaux*, introduction, p. x, and *Défense de cracher par terre*, p. 41.
- ¹² *Poètes bretons d’aujourd’hui*, p. 7. Similarly, van Bever’s claim – ‘parce qu’un écrivain est né sur la terre bretonne, il ne s’ensuit pas nécessairement qu’il soit représentatif de cette province’ – raises more questions than it answers (*Les Poètes du terroir*, p. 338).
- ¹³ See the interview with Keineg in this issue, in which he regrets the extent to which his early political writing overshadowed other facets of his poetry.
- ¹⁴ *Poésie de Bretagne aujourd’hui*, ed. by Max Pons (Fumel: La Barbacane, 2002), p. 112. All poems included are *inédits*. For studies of Dohollau, see the work of Clémence O’Connor, including ‘Heather Dohollau: la poésie comme “langue inconnue”’, in *Traversées*

poétiques des littératures et des langues, ed. by Cristina Pîrvu, Béatrice Bonhomme and Dumitra Baron (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2013), pp. 197–229.

¹⁵ John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (London: SAGE, 2011), pp. 2 and 6.

¹⁶ Dean MacCannell, “‘Staged Authenticity’: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings”, *American Sociological Review*, 79 (1973), 589–603.

¹⁷ *La Bretagne en poésie*, ed. by Jean-Pierre Foucher (Paris: Gallimard, ‘Folio junior’, 1982) and *Poétique Bretagne*, ed. by Alain-Gabriel Monot (Spézet: Keltia Graphic/Coop Breizh, 2003).

¹⁸ Both poems are taken from Raymond Queneau, *Fendre les flots* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969).

¹⁹ Taken from Pierre Reverdy, *Plupart du temps* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945).

²⁰ See Hélène Henry, ‘Max Jacob et la Bretagne’, *Europe*, 348–9 (April–May 1958), 7–18; Pierre-Jakez Hélias, ‘Max Jacob et la Bretagne’, *Les Cahiers Max Jacob*, 3 (1980), 103–7; Lucienne Cantaloube-Ferrieu, ‘Les Poèmes de Moven le Gaëlique ou le lyrisme de la jointure’, in *Max Jacob poète et romancier*, ed. by Christine Andreucci (Pau: Publications de l’Université de Pau, 1995), pp. 171–9.

²¹ Saint-Pol Roux’s ‘Bretagne est univers’ does, however, feature in Le Quintrec, *Poètes de Bretagne*, pp. 100–4.

²² Mallarmé, ‘Le Tombeau d’Edgar Poe’, l. 6, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Bertrand Marchal, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, ‘Bibliothèque de la Pléiade’, 1998–2003), I, p. 38.

²³ Regina Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), p. 10.

²⁴ Patrick Young, *Enacting Brittany: Tourism and Culture in Provincial France 1871–1939* (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 2 and 212.

²⁵ Perros, ‘Je ne suis pas d’ici’, ll. 1–4, in Le Quintrec, *Poètes de Bretagne*, p.190.