

REGIONAL PLURALITY AND THE PRE-NATIONALIST PROJECT IN FRANCE AND FRANCOPHONE EUROPE (1480s-1550s)

As of 1992, the constitution of the Fifth French Republic specifies that the official language of France is French. No provision is made for any regional or minority language in metropolitan or overseas France. Although France signed it in 1999, France has yet to ratify the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages; this decision, which many have attempted to contest over the last twenty-five years, is justified by the simple fact that to do so would be considered 'unconstitutional'. This constitutional resistance towards minority and regional languages is just the latest step in a language policy that stretches back to the sixteenth century (and beyond) characterised by: *vergonha* campaigns in Occitan-speaking regions in the south of France throughout the twentieth century; the *rapport Grégoire* of 1794 which proposed to *anéantir les patois et d'universaliser l'usage de la langue française* (eradicate patois and universalise the use of the French language); and the promulgation of articles 110 and 111 of the ordinance of Villers-Cotterêts in 1539, signed into law by François I, declaring French, and not Latin, as the sole language to be used in legal and administrative documents.

Since the early days of the Renaissance in northern France (circa. 1480-1550), France, whether as a kingdom, an empire or a republic, has sought to establish a monolingual cultural bloc in which the usage of French as the sole judicial, legislative, administrative and educational language reflects a centralised and standardised governance centred around Paris and the Île-de-France. This effort has come at the cost of many minority and regional languages, both in metropolitan France and overseas. With the loss of regional language comes the loss of regional identity. The standardisation of the French language as the sole official language of the Republic has resulted in a general assimilation of regional culture and identity to a so-called 'Frenchness', a social construct built around the linguistic and political capital of Paris.

The project proposed seeks to study the origins of this centralised and arguably 'pre-nationalist' language policy in late fifteenth and early sixteenth century France by taking into account the artistic production of a number of literary and political figures in the Kingdom of France and surrounding Francophone territories. The study intends to consider questions of national and regional identity and belonging and how they might interact during this period of marked 'nationalisation' under the Valois kings of France. Focussing on the early days of the Renaissance in France to just before the eruption of the Wars of Religion, this period of approximately eighty years from the 1480s to 1550s will provide this project with its chronological limitations. This period allows for the study of a wide range of writers in various genres that each evoke the political and linguistic tensions that play out between the image of a singular *France*, united by one language, one culture and one territory, and the reality of a political space divided by both linguistic and territorial barriers. Within the period specified, this project would address not only the Kingdom of France and its regional diversity, but also other French-speaking regions that inhabited its moveable and undefined linguistic borders, such as the Burgundian Low Countries.

In this temporal and spatial context, some authors will certainly provide fruitful ground for research: the *Grands Rhétoriciens* of Burgundy, such as Jean Molinet and Jean Lemaire de Belges, or indeed the later Poitevin *rhétoricien*, Jean Bouchet; the Marot family, Jean the father, native to Caen and Clément the son, half-Gascon, native to Cahors, and supposedly a latecomer to the French language; Vasquin Philieul, the first French language translator of Petrarch and native to the Comtat Venaissin, a multilingual pontifical state in what is now Provence; and even certain members of the *Pléiade*, such as Jacques Peletier du Mans and Joachim du Bellay, who evoke with vivacity and pride the regions of their birth. The latter authors have already been the subject of great study and, as such, would not form the heart of this investigation, but provide an insight into regional identity in and around the court in the latter part of the period specified (1540s-1550s).

This project is to be an investigation into the ways in which writers of this period seek to affirm or erase regional identity or identities whilst they confront a policy of linguistic standardisation and political centralisation. Several approaches that would enrich and inform this investigation are to be considered. Firstly, the study would undertake a literary approach that addresses the written evocation of regional landscapes, customs, languages and accents, and of regional mythology and folklore, with a particular focus

on traditional perceptions of ethnogenesis. Secondly, regionalism is to be questioned from a linguistic viewpoint — though not in a scientific sense —, analysing the first French grammars and treatises on orthography and pronunciation to understand how regional language and dialect might leave its mark on spoken and written French and how a nationalist language policy might seek to erase such traces. A third political approach would tackle the tensions and relationships between regions, both within and without France, regional *parlements*, and the French court. This would be the occasion to discuss the propagandistic nature of nationalist language policy: can we, for example, identify the origins of *vergonha* politics in these early moves to standardise the French language? A fourth approach would aim to take a closer look at the material representation of authors and their regional identities by analysing the network of paratexts (prefaces, title pages, dedicatory letters, royal or parliamentary privileges, etc.) that accompany publications during the Renaissance. That is to say, how do these authors present themselves and structure their texts as physical objects in order to highlight national or regional identity.

This project, which would be carried out within École doctorale III « Littératures françaises et comparées » at Sorbonne Université in *co-tutelle* with the Faculté de Lettres at the University of Geneva, will rely almost entirely upon literary sources to develop a line of questioning that seeks to explore the relationships between the ‘nation’, an emerging ‘nationalism’, and regional identities. These relationships are plural and reflect a cultural and linguistic diversity that France’s national-monolingual language policy erases, whether intentionally or not. This project is thus entirely pertinent to the Flagship 2 thematic area of interdisciplinary research: « Multilingualism, pluralities, citizenship ». The project supposes and highlights the existence of a diversity and plurality of culture and language within and around the Kingdom of France at the beginning of the Renaissance that has slowly been eroded and erased as the French State has sought to refine and centralise a vision of French identity. The texts to be studied were often, if not always, produced in a certain proximity to the court and its linguistic policies; perhaps this took the form of a royal patron, or simply the need to obtain royal privileges to publish in France.

The highly politicised nature of almost all literary production during this period means that to study these questions of plurality and multilingualism within a literary context does not at all exclude a more political analysis of the contemporary linguistic and cultural situation. Literary production in the multilingual France of the early Renaissance, in the French-, Dutch- and Walloon-speaking Burgundian Low Countries, or in the Italian- and Provençal-speaking pontifical states of southeastern France, was intrinsically linked to nationalist, regionalist and/or propagandistic projects that sought to strengthen or cut ties with the Valois court in Paris. The impact of this early nationalist project on modern visions of ‘Frenchness’ cannot be understated. The aim of this study is to ‘denationalise’ or ‘*défranciser*’ our understanding of French literature and culture during this period; to understand that an entirely monistic view of a so-called Frenchness is inapplicable to a diverse and plural reality. As *la Francophonie* has expanded over the centuries, we have increasingly come to realise that to write in French does not necessarily equate to being French. In decentring the national-monolingual perception of France by focussing on the regional plurality of French culture and its literary production, we can see that this more modern transnational approach sheds light on the diversity of French culture and the instability of a perceived ‘Frenchness’.

The objective of this study is therefore to place an emphasis on the rich plurality of the early modern French nation-state, to understand the influences of multiculturalism and multilingualism, both domestic and transnational, on the literary production of the early French Renaissance, and thus, to reintegrate regional ‘Frenchness’ into discussions of French identity in the early days of a burgeoning French nation, dominated by a policy of national-monolingual self-perception that persists to this day.