

ESSAYS ON EARLY MODERN EUROPEAN POPULAR CULTURE AND THE
FORMATION OF NATIONALISM

by

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FORMATION OF NATIONALISM

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ABSTRACT

The first essay in this collection explores the literary history of Catalonia, mining for pre-modern expressions of separatist nationalism. The literature of Catalonia from the twelfth century to the modern period is divided into distinct movements—Golden Age, *Renaixença*, *Noucentisme*, and the contemporary period—but themes such as embracing and preserving the vernacular and likening the small, sea-bounded region to ancient Greece unite the literature into a distinct heritage. The second essay expands this scope, evaluating literary history, pre-modern expressions of nationalism, and popular culture in Catalonia, France, and England. The third essay builds upon the historiographical foundations of the previous essays and examines the French trade in *bibliothèques bleues*, including the contributions of the Oudot family and Marie Promé, also known as “la veuve de Nicolas Oudot.”

Preface

I decided to structure this Departmental Honors project as a collection of essays rather than a larger research project in order to showcase my evolution as a scholar at TCU. In Fall 2019, Dr. Campbell and I discussed how to take these strands of research and combine them into a more cohesive project, but we eventually decided that to do so would be to cram too many themes together. The first essay is from Dr. Campbell's History Major Seminar of Fall 2018, where, under the parameters of studying an element of Catalonian separatism, I evaluated the literary history of Catalonia, especially as it pertained to nationalism. While researching this literary history, I found quite a few rhetorical devices linking Catalonia to ancient Greece, which is especially interesting given that the Catalans conquered and held Athens for much of the fourteenth century. Moving from that point, the second essay explores cultural manifestations of early modern nationalism, France and England especially. While conducting this research, I applied for the TCU SURF award, as well as the Medici Archive Project Seminar on Early Modern Book History. During the summer of 2019, I had the privilege to visit the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris and use their primary source material to support the third essay, which evaluates early modern popular culture, *bibliothèques bleues*, and the Oudot family publishing dynasty. These essays show not only my progression as a scholar as I learn to combine primary and secondary research and work my way through historiographical issues; they also show the growth of a relationship between scholar and mentor—thank you Dr. Campbell.

Table of Contents

Catalan Literature and Language: ‘All the eloquence, elegance, and learning of the Greeks’ ___**3**

Conceptualizing Identity in Early Modern Nationalism _____**32**

‘La Veuve de Nicolas Oudot’: Early Modern French Popular Culture, *Bibliothèques Bleues*, and
Women in Publishing _____**51**

Catalan Language and Literature: “All the eloquence, elegance, and learning of the Greeks”

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In the rhetoric surrounding Catalonia's ongoing separation debate, one of the most commonly cited reasons for national sovereignty is the existence of a language and culture that is entirely unique from the rest of Spain. As a direct expression of the Catalan language, Catalan literature has a rich and original history, highlighted by separatists as a factor which sets it apart from Castile. Therefore, as language becomes crucial to the argument of nationhood, literature, as the manifestation of the language, becomes an important product of examination for scholars to further understand the Catalan claim to independence. In studying Catalan literature throughout its history, one finds that it is strongly rooted in a sense of place and always conscious of perceiving or manufacturing identity. Of course, the language is only spoken by a small percentage of Spaniards, and written by an even smaller percentage, so those authors that choose to write their works in Catalan do so deliberately. In other words, those that choose to write in Catalan versus the dominant Castilian must already have some sense of Catalan pride. Thus, the literature produced in the Catalan language is an excellent way for contemporary scholars to understand the context of the current separatist debate.

Catalan pride has its roots in a sense of originality and cultural superiority over the rest of the Iberian Peninsula. Interestingly, the literature often calls upon parallels between Catalonia and ancient Greece to amplify the impression that they are a sovereign, sophisticated cultural entity. Literature throughout Catalan history, especially that of the modern era, creates a vision of Catalonia as the cultural descendants of ancient Greece: two enlightened nations of people separated by time and distance but united in their value of sovereignty and learning, surrounded by larger national entities that threaten their independence and sophistication.

Catalan language and literature has a major role in establishing identity in key historical moments: the "Golden Age," or early European Renaissance, the mid-nineteenth-century

Renaixença, the early twentieth century *Noucentisme*, and the contemporary period. In organizing these literary eras, it would be vastly inappropriate to claim that these periods were the only times in which literature was produced, but these moments are the most distinguishable in crafting a national identity. Catalonia occupies a unique political situation in which, in times where the political climate favored Spanish centralization and the Castilian monarchy, often the Catalan language endured repression. In certain periods, namely the century following the consolidation of Castile under the marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella in 1469, and the half-century of Franco's dictatorship following the Spanish Civil War, the use of Catalan was expressly forbidden. In other, less explicitly repressive times, Catalan was the language of the streets, the language of the home, but not the language of scholarship and official business. Scholars and authors published in Castilian while vendors bartered in the market in Catalan. The literary eras discussed in this essay represent periods where literature published in the Catalan language was not only allowed, but encouraged to flourish.

Earliest origins of Catalonia to the “Golden Age” of Literature

A study of the early origins of Catalonia reveal an area steeped in rich legends and a proud, autonomous people. Roughly, during the early 1000s, the duchy of Barcelona gained autonomy from its surrounding two larger powers, the Muslims to the south in modern-day Spain and the Franks to the north in modern-day France. Catalan history gives homage to Guifré, or Wilfred the Hairy, for leading the campaign to wrest Barcelona from the Muslims; legend claims that, when he died in battle, his comrade dipped fingers in his blood, and the four red lines became the stripes on the Catalan flag.¹ The adoption of a meaningful and mythical origin story

¹ Michael Eaude, *Catalonia: A Cultural History*, p. 33.

is essential to nation-states, and Catalonia has no shortage of legends to venerate. Shortly after, in 1060, Catalans adopted the *Ustages* of Barcelona, an early code of law which predates the British Magna Carta by 150 years. This treaty limited the power of the king or baron of Barcelona and Aragon, not in favor of peasants, of course, but in favor of the burghers and counts which controlled smaller pockets of territory.² The effectiveness of this document in practice is unknown, but contemporary Catalan nationalists often cite this moment in history as proof of their freedom-loving spirit in comparison to Castile and as proof of their tendency to form and honor pacts between the people and government.

Free from both the Franks and the Muslims, Barcelona and its environs gained in territory and hegemony over the next two hundred years. Catalonia added Valencia and the Balearic Islands to its dominion, and, fueled by the desire to extend trade, began expansion into the Mediterranean, occupying Athens, Greece from 1311-1388. This Mediterranean hegemony put Catalonia at the forefront of classical rebirth—Catalans experienced the European Renaissance almost a full century before the rest of the Iberian Peninsula, emphasizing Greek classical influences over Roman classical influences.

Oratory records from the Catalan Parliament, dating from the Middle Ages, illustrate the Catalan tendency to distinguish themselves from the Iberian tradition and to align themselves with a Greek, Mediterranean identity. The orator pokes at the Roman Empire, saying, “that same Catalonia that has won the vast Island of Italy, --Sicily and Sardinia, --which the Romans in their first conquests...took so long to conquer.”³ This jab, while not only placing Catalonia on par with the Romans, consciously breaks from the ideology of the rest of Spain, which identified proudly as a product of the Roman Empire.

² *Ibid.*, p. 50.

³ William J. Entwistle, "The Rebirth of Catalonia." *Romanic Review* 18, (1927) p. 12.

The orator goes on to say, “who has converted to the Catalan tongue that most ancient and famous Athens, fount of all the elegance, eloquence, and learning of the Greeks.”⁴ When the orator points the conversion of Athens to the Catalan tongue, he suggests that, not only are Catalans the cultural descendants of the ancient Greeks, but Catalans are taking Greek ideals and enhancing them. Interestingly, the marker of cultural dominance rests in “the Catalan tongue,” meaning that the language is the most important indicator of national sovereignty. As Catalans controlled Athens, the Athenians spoke their tongue; in parallel, as long as Catalans retained their language despite Castilian control, the Catalans are still sovereign.

The administration of Athens as a colony printed laws and treatises in Catalan, one of the first governments in Europe to deviate from Latin and use the vernacular in important civic documents. Catalan became the official language of Athens, and, in the words of Kenneth M. Setton, “the smooth and liquid speech of French knights and noble ladies gave way to the harsher tones of the language one still hears in the streets and shops and mills of Barcelona.”⁵ The widespread use of Catalan in an area so culturally historic as Athens gave Catalan writers the confidence to adapt literature into their own language. At that time, Catalan writers were on the cutting-edge; they would have felt as if their tiny Iberian region was on the cusp of becoming a Mediterranean empire. It is with this spirit that the Catalan Renaissance and “Golden Age” of literature began.

The Catalan experience of the Renaissance exemplifies itself notably in its treatment of poetry. In 1395, Barcelona hosted the first *jocs florals*, adapted from a similar French contest held in Toulouse. The “floral games,” held annually and supported by the municipal government of Barcelona, awarded florally-themed gold and silver prizes for the best poetry, determined by a

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁵ Kenneth M. Setton, *Catalan Domination of Athens: 1311-1388*, p. 216.

panel of learned patrons. A feast and festival accompanied the event, ensuring the patrimony of the entire city, peasants and all, which emphasizes the cultural significance Catalans placed on their poetry.⁶

Prior to the Catalan “Golden Age,” the dominating poetic tradition was Provençal courtly ballads. Catalan writers experimented with mixing Catalan and Provençal, but remained within the genre structure of the drawn-out, usually performative exposition of knightly heroes and their frustrated, unrequited love. With the rediscovery of classical tradition, coupled with the humanistic innovations of individuals, the poetic canon evolved to an altogether more psychological, introspective style of writing. In Catalonia, this personalization of works ultimately included writing in the vernacular. One of the first and most celebrated poets to write his work entirely in the Catalan language was Ausiàs March, a Valencian knight born around 1400. March exposed himself to the classical rebirth in Italy by participating in several military campaigns that took him to Corsica and Sicily.⁷ Stylistically, March used the vehicle of the Catalan language to break away from the Provençal ballad tradition and wrote more compact poems on a variety of subject matter, including ruminations on grief, God, and predestination, as well as physical longing and romantic love.

Modern Catalans cite March as groundbreaking and as proof of their literary superiority, but his work is most appropriately classified as a segue between the medieval courtly ballads and the tightly worded, psychological poems of the Renaissance. March is unique in his use of Catalan, and in his expansion of subject matter, but he merged these changes with tradition in a manner that makes the transition smoothly. For instance, his section of poems on love echo common medieval tropes—frustration, unrequited passion, and scant physical description of the

⁶ Eade, p. 46.

⁷ Robert Archer, *Ausiàs March: Verse translations of thirty poems*, p. 25.

actual woman (or man!) to whom the poem is addressed. Take, for instance, a selection from poem II, “If I have kept my feelings to myself, / it’s not, be sure, because I lack true love. / My ailing heart burns hotter than the sun in June, yet unrewarded it remains.”⁸ These lines begin to show a psychological complexity, but have not yet broken away from typical subject matter: unrequited love and intense frustration.

March’s literary genius truly begins to show itself when he branched off love poems to express feelings on other subjects. His poems on grief are intimate, raw, and imaginative. Biographically, March, who was previously a courtier and a bit of a dandy, went into a deep period of mourning following the death of his beloved second wife. The personal experience he drew upon to express grief makes his work evocative and multifaceted, true work of the Renaissance. For instance, in his poem “XCI,” March wrote, “If ever my pain I start to forget, / there’s one sure way that I can bring it back / I think of her deeds of love, and pain takes flight.”⁹ These lines highlight the intimacy of his verses and connection to his personal life.

March’s expansion on subject matter frees him to express thoughts on a variety of contemporary ideas. For instance, in the same poem on grief, March voices lines which align with humanist thought of the day. He wrote, “So closely twined with body is the soul / that simple can be deemed no human act.”¹⁰ In these simple lines, March moved away from medieval thought, which abhors the body and things of this world in favor of the ecclesiastical. Instead, March suggested that since body and God-given soul are, if not one, then closely related, therefore the body is something to be celebrated. Furthermore, individuals and their earthly achievements are noteworthy and important, a development of Renaissance humanist thought.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

Catalans today consider Ausiàs March the first great figure of the “Golden Age.” Two full-size statues stand in Valencia of the poet, one in front of the Central Municipal Library, and a large stone monument with a portrait bust graces the entrance of a historic secondary school. His work of bringing literature into Catalan vernacular established a precedent for Catalans to consider themselves scions of high culture and sophistication. Also, his inspiration from the classics and the Mediterranean world echoes throughout Catalonia’s various literary periods and into the present day.

When the Western world thinks of its first great novel, the result is usually *Don Quixote*, but the Western world does not often give due credit to its literary predecessor, *Tirant lo Blanch*. In fact, Cervantes even credits Joanot Martorell, the author of *Tirant lo Blanch*, as an inspiration. *Tirant lo Blanch*, published in 1490, is probably best classified as a bridge between a medieval creation and a Renaissance product, sandwiched between the heroic epic and the modern novel. Written entirely in Catalan, the prose narrative recounts the story of the White Knight in four parts, as the knight travels, conquers, and experiences foreign lands. The scholar Joseph Vaeth supposes that Martorell drew inspiration from the story from several different real-life Catalan knights, creating a work that encapsulates the Catalan spirit. *Tirant lo Blanch* is an innovative text, precipitating the modern novel, containing interspersed dialogue on a number of psychologically complex issues, like politics of the day and newer religious ideas. Also, Martorell subtly lampooned the knight, depicting his heroic actions with an air of questionable morality.¹¹ Martorell’s understated satire of the chivalric code ultimately prompted Cervantes to write *Don Quixote*, but Martorell’s originality in the medium gives Catalans more fodder for their claim of cultural superiority.

¹¹ Joseph A. Vaeth, *Tirant lo Blanch: A Study of its Authorship, Principal Sources, and Historical Setting*, p. 8.

Renaixença

After the unification of Spain under Ferdinand and Isabella in the late 1400s, the Catalan language was banned in monasteries, schools and other public places, so noteworthy advancements in literature were all but impossible.¹² The next important stage in the development of Catalan literature occurred in the mid-1800s, when a perfect storm of Romanticism swept Europe, bringing appreciation of nature and folklore and recognition of regional cultures. Catalan writers began composing in their own language, celebrating their history and folktales, gaining global recognition.

In the Romantic era, where travel accounts reached new heights of popularity, English-language newspapers recognized Catalonia as a region culturally and linguistically different from Spain. One of the earliest travel accounts to highlight Catalonia appears in the London publication *Oriental Herald and Journal of General Literature*, titled “Recent Account of the City of Barcelona, From the Notes of a Resident” and published in October of 1828. The author lauds Barcelona as a city of industry and innovation, describing the leaps made in commercial enterprise. He also describes, in a rather incredulous tone, the cultural significance of Barcelona, detailing the various theaters, the opera house, and the university. The account then extends to a brief elucidation on the history of Barcelona and Catalonia, including the mythical origin story of Wilfred the Hairy, up until the merging of Aragon and Castile. The author even mentions the *Ustages* of Barcelona, the Catalans’ early pact with their government. Finally, the rest of the account includes a walking description of Barcelona for potential travelers, outlining places to visit and restaurants to try.¹³ As far as travel literature goes, this account is not altogether unique,

¹² Eade, p. 59.

¹³ “Recent Account of the City of Barcelona, From the Notes of a Resident.” *The Oriental Herald and Journal of General Literature* 19, no. 58 (October 1828): p. 29-38.

but what makes the essay important is its early recognition of Catalonia as a region with a distinct culture and history. By reproducing and giving stock to the mythic origins of Catalonia, this commentary resurrects centuries of history buried under years of Castilian centralization. Since this account was in an English-language newspaper, it is apparent that the recognition of Catalonia was on the rise, and there was an audience anxious to digest history and literature from this culturally unique location.

Almost forty years later, in 1869, the London-based *Cornhill Magazine* published an extensive travel account of Barcelona titled “Lions of Catalonia—Barcelona.” In reading the two travel accounts in succession, one can track the development of the outside recognition of Catalonia, moving from a quaint locality mostly overlooked by international travelers to a formidable region that deserves recognition on a global scale. In describing the Catalan origin story, this author omits the prowess of the first barons of Barcelona, rather calling attention to Catalonia’s ancient origins. The author describes the ancient sites of interests, writing “Classically, then, Catalonia is the most ancient Roman part of the great Roman province.” This recognition of Catalonia’s ancient origins further serves to elevate the region from a backwater, quaint area to one of which Britons should take note. The author continues, “The Catalan is one of the distinctist figures in the motley group which makes up...Spain.”¹⁴ To illustrate his point, the author describes the nature of the Catalan language, spoken in everyday life but seldom used in matters of the scholarly sphere. In this account, while nationalism itself does not yet appear, one can begin to discern the stirrings of Catalan patriotism, as the author includes inferences about the wish for cultural recognition.

¹⁴ “The Lions of Catalonia-Barcelona.” *The Cornhill Magazine* 20, no. 116 (08, 1869): p. 184

The London periodical *Saturday Review* included, in 1857, an extensive write-up citing Catalonia's rich history in literature and exploring some of their unique folkloric culture. Interestingly, when introducing the subject, the paper writes, "Catalonia, like Portugal, was at an early period under the sway of a foreign dynasty."¹⁵ Here, at a time when international audiences were just beginning to take note of Catalonia's existence and cultural autonomy, this author already places the area on the plane with Portugal, an established nation, and deems Castile a "foreign dynasty." In other sources, nationalism does not yet seem to be prevalent; perhaps the author deems the idea of a suppressed culture, under the thumb of a foreign entity and thus frozen in time culturally to be more romantic.

During this cultural rediscovery of Catalonia, Catalans themselves began to revive the rich literary tradition of the "Golden Age." In 1859, Barcelona revived the *jocs florals*, which had been discontinued in the centuries following Ferdinand and Isabella's unification. Rebranding the games as *Patria, Fides, Amor* (Country, Faith, Love), the scholarly panel awarded prizes to the best patriotic poem, religious poem, and love poem. If a poet won all three, they were crowned the *Mestre en Gai Saber* (Master of the Gay Science). As they did with the earlier manifestations of this event during the Renaissance, the citizens of Barcelona flocked to the contest. The intellectual class sponsored ever-growing prizes and the public patrimony of poetry moved Catalan literature and language from an informal dialect to the highbrow cultural sphere.¹⁶

The author of the article in the London *Saturday Review* goes on to laud the "Golden Age" of Catalan poetry, then indicates that the literature is amid a rebirth, but notes that this

¹⁵ "Catalan Ballads and Children's Stories." *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 3, no. 70 (Feb 28, 1857): 202-203.

¹⁶ Eade, p. 61.

rebirth is rurally focused, designated to the “forests and the mountains.” Consistent with the focuses of Romantics, the author does not express that this rural focus is unfortunate, rather the author paints a tranquil scene of the Catalan landscape with “guitar-playing and singing...the odour of flowers and the golden wings of birds beloved by queens.” The article includes transcriptions of three folktales and one poem, all dating back to roughly the medieval era. The framing of these stories affect how the reader intakes them; by waxing eloquent on the peace of rural life before transcribing the stories, the reader is tempted to interpret the stories as evidence that Catalonia is the epitome of idyllic, pastoral indulgences.

The folktales transcribed in the article, three in prose and one in verse, all date back to the medieval era and were kept alive through oral tradition. The first folktale, titled “The Pilgrim’s Return” (*La Vuelta del Peregrino*) was chosen by the author for reprinting because of the “peculiarly graceful” opening, where a beautiful lady lies sleeping under the shade of a pine-tree. A knight comes by, disguised as a pilgrim, waking the lady and telling her he has just returned from his pilgrimage. She asks for news, and he tells her that a man, fitting the description of her husband, died on the journey and his body lies one hundred miles away. Despite the difficulties in travel, the lady is determined to see her husband’s body, and upon seeing her dedication, the knight throws off his disguise and reveals himself to be her husband.

The next transcription, “The Knight of Malaga” (*El Caballero de Málaga*), rendered in verse, is the story of a lady, locked in a tower at sea to prevent her from marrying her love, whom then swims out to rescue her. He drowns on the journey, but sells his soul so that he may see the lady one last time. When he reaches the tower, the pair jump together to the sea. The poem ends with a warning to parents not to deny their daughters the right to marry. The author of

the article also notes that versions of this tale exist in several languages, but it probably originated from France and was adopted by neighboring cultures.

Preceding the next transcription, the author gives a short introduction, explaining that there is a Spanish parallel to this tale, *El Conde Floris*, but that the Catalan version, “The Count Alarcos” differs in a few elements. The story is of a Count that has just received a royal edict to kill his wife. When he returns home to her, and he reveals the cause of her sorrow, she immediately volunteers to be sacrificed. The Count murders her with a bundle of simples, contained in a web of embroidery she had wrought after they had just been married.

The final folktale is the longest, a *roundalla*, or children’s story called “The Three Love-Oranges.” A prince searches for three love-oranges, and when he opens the first two, beautiful women spring forth, but immediately die of thirst. Before he opens the third, he finds a well, and gives the third woman water before she can die like the first two. He proposed marriage to the third woman, which she accepted, and he goes to fetch a carriage, leaving her by the well. Next, a “negress” appears (although the author notes that in some versions, a Hungarian gypsy woman) and, jealous of the orange-woman’s beauty, turns her into a dove and rides off with the prince herself. However, the prince sees the dove flying around him, and when he touches it, the dove turns back into the beautiful lady, whom he then marries.¹⁷

Of course, these folktales are only a sampling of the rich history of Catalonia, and analysis of these alone cannot produce a conclusion about Catalan culture as a whole, but there are common themes running through the tales that allows one to get a sense of the types of stories that participants of the *Renaixença* venerated. For instance, loyalty and a sense of duty seem to be integral elements to the resolution of the story. Catalans are not entirely unique in this

¹⁷ "Catalan Ballads and Children’s Stories,” p. 203.

aspect, as these stories are often meant to instruct children on good character traits. Still, when compared to tales from other nations, with heroes that rely on wit and cunning to save their own skins, it is quite interesting to see that the Catalan characters are duty-bound to one another, seen in characters like the pilgrim's wife, the Count's wife, and the Malaga knight. Also, interestingly, in several of the tales, there exists a French or a Spanish duplicate, which has a similar storyline but differs in key elements. The heritage of the folktales reiterates that Catalonia is influenced culturally by both France and Spain, but still retains its own experience.

From the point of the *Renaixença* on, Catalan literature proves to be firmly rooted in a sense of place. The most celebrated poet of the *Renaixença*, Jacint Verdaguer, published in his vernacular works in praise of the landscape of Catalonia and the freedom-loving, independent people who populate it. In fact, Verdaguer seemed to embody everything the *Renaixença* stood for: praise of rural landscapes and celebration of peasant and Catalan culture. At the 1866 *jocs florals*, he won two of the three top prizes, causing a stir, as he dressed in traditional peasant clothing rather than the robes of a student. A brief sampling of the opening of his most celebrated poem, "L'emigrant," displays why Verdaguer's work was celebrated foremost among romantics, "Beautiful valley, cradle of my childhood, / white Pyrenees / Banks and streams, hermitage hanging in the sky."¹⁸ The celebration of bucolic scenes and peasant lifestyle becomes less fashionable as the Romantic era draws to a close, but Verdaguer's work effectively associates the literature and spirit of Catalonia with its geographical location, which becomes a mainstay of Catalan literature.

Noucentisme

¹⁸ Eade, p. 65.

Noucentisme, which translates from Catalan literally as “1900ism,” covered, roughly speaking, the literary climate between 1910-1936. Catalan writers build upon *Renaixença* literature, but rather than extolling the virtues of peasant life and the countryside, the *Noucentisme* authors shifted their focus to urban experiences, rooting themselves in the streets of Barcelona. This era coincides with a political explosion of Catalan autonomists who relied heavily on literature and language to fuel the rhetoric of their aims. With this movement in literature and politics, Catalans captured the eyes of the global community. Building upon the *Renaixença*’s recognition of Catalonia as a separate cultural entity, these writers aimed to elevate their culture from a regional curiosity to be on par with the nations of Europe. As a result, the writers became much more nationalistically motivated, or so it appeared to outsiders; the English-language sources, when discussing the literature and culture, almost always circle around to discuss the Catalan wish for independence, or, at least, sovereignty.

In one of the earliest English-language sources to recognize the *Noucentisme* movement, Ben Ray Redman wrote a 1922 *New York Times* article in response to a book on a recently published book on modern Spain. Redman noted that the book deals at length with the “Catalan question,” offering that the chief causes for Catalan nationalism are borne from economic concerns, but conceding that those economic concerns spur on the redevelopment of the Catalan language in written form. Redman wrote, “The Catalan literary revival was the inevitable consequence of the impulse towards nationalistic expression.”¹⁹ Though Redman did not divulge any more details, as the article is rather brief, this write-up signifies the first direct intertwining of Catalan literature and separatism, a lasting hallmark of how Catalan literature is to be interpreted throughout the twentieth century.

¹⁹ Ray Redman, Ben. "Spain Enters a New Epoch." *New York Times*, Jan 08, 1922.

Several years after Redman's article, J.B. Alemany published another brief write-up in the *New York Times* titled "Great Catalonians," where he began by lamenting the treatment of Catalonia's cultural legacy under the oppression of Castile. He noted that most Americans, even Spanish linguists, barely know that Catalonia even exists. He urged his readers to take note of the "tour de force" of the writers, dramatists, and artists of Catalonia, concluding, "There are more great sculptors and painters in Catalonia now than in all the rest of Spain."²⁰ Here, the author not only recognized the existence of Catalonia, but clearly pitted the region against its Castilian counterparts. He presented Catalonia in a way he hopes will appeal to the sensibility of American readers—a charming Old-World region, culturally rich and liberal in ideals, perennially crushed under an oppressor. To the American outsiders to whom Alemany addressed, rediscovering Catalonia is not enough; it must be vindicated and rescued from its oppressors.

Alemany's connection between the Catalan arts and nationalist separatism is echoed by a 1933 edition of the London *Saturday Review*, which labeled the Catalan Renaissance as "one of those politico-intellectual movements that so often accompany revolutions or nationalist upheavals."²¹ Although the cavalier tone emphasizes that the author was an outsider merely observing the issue and not living through the upheaval, the fact remains that the explosion of Catalan culture captured global attention, with English language sources zeroing in on the connection between cultural richness and political autonomy.

American awareness and celebration of Catalan culture continued throughout the 1930's in spite of, or perhaps owing to, the Spanish Civil War ravaging the Peninsula. A 1937 *New York Times* article jubilantly announced that the Councillor of Culture of the Catalan Generalitat of

²⁰ Alemany, J. B. "Great Catalonians." *New York Times*, Apr 18, 1926.

²¹ "The Catalan Renaissance." *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 156, no. 4062 (Sep 02, 1933): 245.

Barcelona authorized the shipping of over 100 volumes of Catalan history and classical works to the New York City Public Library. The announcement concludes by adding that a second shipment of books of contemporary Catalan authors will be on its way from Barcelona shortly.²² The operation of a cultural cabinet outside of Madrid's control proves the nationalistic usage of culture, and the American acceptance of such works demonstrates the Catalan aim to promote their culture on a global scale.

During this period, several key archaeological sites were unearthed, providing concrete evidence for a Greek presence in Catalonia prior to the conquest of the Romans, and bolstering the sense of connection that Catalans felt with ancient Greece since their medieval Mediterranean empire. Archaeologists suggest that colonists from Rhodes set up a trading point circa eighth century BCE in the modern-day town of Roses, and more significantly, Phocaeans established the Catalan settlement of Emporion (now Empúries) around 575 BCE. From the Emporion site, archaeologists recovered several ancient sculptures in relatively good condition, including one that was identified as Asclepius, the god of healing and medicine. Even though the sparse Greek settlements in Catalonia, which most likely served as trading posts rather than colonies, pale in comparison to the pronounced Roman presence that came later, these sites are the only proof of a Hellenistic presence in the entire Iberian Peninsula.²³ The knowledge that Catalonia was the chosen place for Greek exploration further ignited the cultural pride of Catalonians. More so than the ancient Romans, the ancient Greeks provided fodder for rhetoric; Catalans could liken themselves to these Mediterranean-centered, culturally enlightened peoples.

²² "Catalonia Sends Books for Public Library Here." *New York Times*, Mar 12, 1937.

²³ Cristina Rodriguez-Samaniego, "Greek and French: A New Vision of the Catalan National Myth of Origin at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century through Sculpture."

Propelled by these discoveries, Catalan writers and artists drew heavily their sense of Greek origins, placing themselves at the cultural forefront of Spain. Rodriguez-Samaniego notes that the *noucentista* movement links itself inextricably with the construction of a national identity that based itself upon Greek heritage. Rodriguez-Samaniego mostly explores the Greek inspirations of visual art during the *Noucentisme* period, but the homage to Greek culture was present in literature as well. Eugeni d'Ors Rovira, the philosopher, writer, and journalist who coined "*Noucentisme*" refers to ancient Greece numerous times in his prose. A prolific essayist in addition to his longer, philosophic works, Rovira published several short pieces on the archeological site Empurion, musing upon its mythical properties.²⁴

The Catalan interest in Greek heritage exemplifies itself in the study of ancient Greece in the academic sphere. In Alejandro Coroleu's review, "Classical Scholarship, Cultural Prestige, and National Identity in Modern Catalonia," he notes that, for the first time in centuries, universities in Barcelona made a noted effort to preserve and promote Catalan culture and the language. Between 1870 and 1936, Coroleu notes, studies at Catalan universities of Greek and Latin classics grew exponentially, proving that the promotion of Catalan literature and the association with classical heritage were part of the same movement. Spearheaded by the dozens of translations completed by Carles Riba, chair of Greek Studies at the University of Barcelona, translating classical works into Catalan was a major step in validating the language on a European scale.²⁵

A 1939 *Irish Times* article, titled "Catalan Poet to Give Public Lecture," describes Riba's upcoming lecture at Trinity College, Dublin. Dated May of 1939, this was a fractious period, as the Republicans would have just lost in the Civil War less than a month prior. Perhaps that is

²⁴ Rodriguez-Samaniego.

²⁵ Alejandro Coroleu, "Classical Scholarship, Cultural Prestige and National Identity in Modern Catalonia," p. 610

why the professor had to give his lectures outside of Barcelona, moving to a climate which may have held more sympathy towards him. The brief article noted Riba's position at the University of Barcelona, and mentioned his prolific work in translating Greek works into Catalan, including "The Odyssey." The article also established that Riba is a major figure of the Noucentisme literature revival as a professor, poet, and critic.²⁶

Of course, one must keep in mind the political nuances present in the document, as the article was written at a time rife with uncertainty, on the cusp of Franco's ban of the Catalan language. The article does not specify, but the poet could conceivably have been in exile, which would be very significant as he would still be promoting Catalan literature and its connection to Greek heritage. Finally, the article noted that Riba would be giving the lecture in French, which seemed significant, as he would not be delivering it in Catalan.²⁷ Of course, an Irish audience would most likely not understand Catalan, but the other conceivable option would be for Riba to deliver the lecture in Castilian; the choice to speak in French seems like a politically conscious choice against the use of Castilian. This article, though brief, provides direct proof that the Catalan revivalists of literature, particularly during the *Noucentisme* movement of the early twentieth century, emphasizes their classical Greek roots both to validate the Catalan culture and separate themselves from the rest of Spain.

Contemporary Era

Following the victory of the Francoists in the Spanish Civil War, the new fascist government enacted policies which banned the speaking and writing of regionalist languages, included Catalan. Writers continued using Catalan discreetly as a form of subversion, but

²⁶ "Public Lecture by Catalan Poet," *The Irish Times*, May 05, 1939.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

literature was not free to use as a tool of public expression until the establishment of democracy in the mid-1970s. Contemporary Catalan authors, from the fall of the Franco regime until the separatist crisis of the present day, continue grounding their work in a sense of place and emphasizing Greek influences, while tackling the issue of constructing a post-Franco identity. The work draws upon injustice and anger at the atrocities and cultural repression of the Franco dictatorship. In fact, much literature and popular culture of Catalonia polarizes the Nationalists and Republicans, skewing cultural memory to portray the Franco era as rife with shadowy villains and virtually under martial law.

In Stewart King's article, "The Palimpsestic Past: Crime Fiction, Cultural Memory, and Catalonia," the author uses the extended metaphor of a palimpsest to explain how the Catalans have treated the construction of their post-Franco identity. As a palimpsest is repeatedly erased and written over, so the modern Catalans have repressed and manipulated their perception of the Franco years. The cultural storyline promoted by modern Catalans illustrates a completely free, autonomous nation that was brutally taken down by the Franco dictatorship, and now can become free again, once out of the shackles of Castilian control. To support this interpretation of the modern Catalan separatist's thought process, King evaluates several major bestselling crime novels published in Catalan in the past several years. The bestsellers had a common theme—the villains were always shady Francoist crooks who were now profiting from the contemporary government. The heroes of the stories were consistently Catalan, which continues polarization between Castilians.²⁸

Contemporary Catalan poetry attempts to construct a post-Franco identity by continuing to draw upon a perceived classical heritage, while promoting the validity of Catalan culture.

²⁸ Stewart King, "The Palimpsestic Past: Crime Fiction, Cultural Memory, and Catalonia," p. 818.

“The most beautiful Catalan in the world” by Blai Bonet, published in a collection of translated Catalan poetry written between 1978-2002, represents the most recent flowering of Catalan literature, preceding and surrounding the contemporary separatist debate. This poem, like many of its contemporaries, is firmly situated in a sense of place, dedicating the first stanza to using language associated with trees native to Catalonia, the “olive-tree,” “motherly arms of figs,” “slow-growing holm-oaks,” “painted apple-orchard,” etc. In the second stanza, the author transitions from conjuring images of earthy forests to rocky crags and the breezy ocean, writing, “sea: dramatic genius, salty deeps, / rocks like honeycomb, salt-pan creeks...”²⁹ The natural language in the poem reminds readers of Verdaguer’s bucolic work in the *Renaixença*, which may be a conscious choice by the author as a symbol of Catalonia’s reemergence from a period of cultural oppression.

The author grounds her homage to the landscape of Catalonia in the nationalist question by using this line, “Close to the ground, like common speech once more.” Bonet firmly connects the landscape to the Catalan language, insinuating that the speech and land go hand-in-hand. The “once more” refers to the flowering of the Catalan language after many years of its repression under the Franco regime. In connecting the poem to the connection of Greek heritage, the author includes, “the wind that blows from Greece.”³⁰ Here, the author uses “wind” as a metaphor for classical ideals and culture, suggesting that Catalonia has a direct link to the ever-venerated Greeks.

Moving through the same poetry collection, “Words for a stonecutter” is an homage to Joan Miró, a Catalan *Noucentisme* artist from Barcelona. Like other contemporary Catalan

²⁹ Blai Bonet, “The most beautiful Catalan in the world,” translated by Anna Crowe, 1987, *Light Off Water: XXV Catalan Poems 1978-2002*, p. 43.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

poems, this piece has a strong sense of place and landscape, tying the power and meaning of the land to Joan Miró's brilliance as an artist. The connection between land and art reveals itself in these lines, "the rain cannot make him wet, / cannot make him wet at all, / because of the virtue intrinsic to each stone."³¹ In other words, the poem insinuates that Miró and the land work together, and the magic of his work is directly related to the artist's connection to Catalonia.

This poem also connects the Catalan flowering to classical influences, saying, "translucence of Baal's temple, of the sea of Ur and Astarte, / of a torch in the precinct at Eleusis, translucence of an olive trunk." Though Baal's temple and Ur aren't exactly what comes to mind when discussing classical sources, the author of the poem insists that Catalonia is part of an ancient tradition, more cultured and more historic than their Castilian counterparts. Moving across the Mediterranean to the Greeks, the author mentions Eleusis, a Greek precinct, in a direct homage to Catalan literature's classical Greek influences.³² By mentioning the olive trunk, which would be present both in Greece and Catalonia, the author firmly links the two areas both in culture and physicality.

A 2005 article on the Welsh-born writer Richard Gwyn displays the classical and Mediterranean connections of Catalonia. The write-up promotes his novel, *The Colour of a Dog Running Away*, which is set initially in Barcelona, but the heroes are forced to give chase to a mystery in Crete due to some ancient connection. The content and setting of this novel prove that even English-language authors have noticed, however abstractly, the Catalan linkage to ancient Greece.³³

³¹ Pere Gimferrer, "Words for a stonecutter," translated by Christopher Whyte, 1980. *Light Off Water: XXV Catalan Poems 1978-2002*, p. 27

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Williams, Sally. "Western Mail: A Homage to Catalonia," *Western Mail* (Cardiff, Wales) July 30, 2005

Why Greece?

Throughout this paper, the reader may be struck with questions of why, of all influences, the Catalans emphasize a Greek identity above all else through a range of historical periods and literary styles. For one, Catalan nationalists wish to associate themselves with a Mediterranean-centered identity, setting themselves apart from the rest of the Iberian Peninsula and its Atlantic orientation. From Catalonia's earliest origins, its hegemony has operated in the Mediterranean, even attempting to make an empire by conquering Athens and Sicily before Castilian centralization. During the "Golden Age" of Spanish exploration in the American colonies, Catalonia stayed well out of the race, leaving the exploration and administration of the colonies in Castilian hands and focusing on continuing trade in the Mediterranean. In fact, the hesitancy to interact with the colonies ultimately led to the revolt of 1640, when Catalans refused to pay taxes to the Spanish crown for administration of the colonies. This conflict was an example of the Catalan's deliberate cultural alignment with the Mediterranean over Iberia, and the usage of a literary association with Greek heritage as a rhetorical tool to reiterate this alignment.

Even though *nation* is a relatively modern term, and did not appear in true until after the Enlightenment, the ancient Greeks' experiments with democracy make Hellenistic culture prime for use in rhetoric concerning the formation of free nations. To the modern mind, the idea of the ancient Greeks conjures images of seafaring, freedom-loving, democratic, culturally superior people, which translates to a very powerful rhetorical tool for Catalan separatists. Since the Western world generally considers ancient Greece to be the foundation of Western thought, the cultural alignment with ancient Greece is a tactic for Catalans to validate their culture, placing it on par with one of the most romanticized societies that has ever existed.

The communication scholar César Garcia notes that Catalan nationalist rhetoric operates using storylines, which serve to inform, persuade, and ignite the emotions of separatists.³⁴ The foundational legends of ancient Greek heritage is another storyline to complement the separatist issue, and literature provides an outlet for Catalans to utilize these storylines. From the poetry of the *Noucentisme* to the poetry of the contemporary period, the almost spiritual connection between Catalan writers and the classical world serves to validate Catalan culture and manufacture a sophisticated identity in the eyes of modern separatists.

Conclusion

Through the investigation of commonalities among the various literary eras of Catalan history, this paper has established that Catalonia does contain a literary history that is entirely unique from the rest of Spain. However, the acknowledgement of a rich literary tradition does not solve the main inquiry facing today's Catalans, which is whether an autonomous culture justifies the creation of an autonomous state. This particular question outgrows the scope of this essay, but surely one can conclude that culture and literature are an excellent vehicle for the consumption of separatist rhetoric. In other words, the true motivations for Catalan autonomy may lie in economic and financial particulars, but nothing is quite as effective in mobilizing the population to support such a measure as emphasizing the area's uniqueness in language, culture, and scholarship. The rhetorical significance of Catalonia's culture is especially poignant because the language has undergone periods of extreme repression, even banishment. In mobilizing Catalans to support autonomy, separatists need only to remind them of the periods in which the government could have arrested them for speaking Catalan, and hint that such times could come

³⁴ César Garcia, "The Power of Myths and Storytelling in Nation Building: The Campaign for the Independence of Catalonia from Spain," *Canadian Journal of Communication*, vol. 43, issue 2, p. 282.

once more if Catalans continue to allow Castilian centralization. Emphasizing the uniqueness of Catalan culture not only serves to motivate Catalans, but the outside world. It is all too easy for separatists to propagate the impression to other nations that Catalans, those whose culture derives itself directly from the ancient Greeks, are at risk from the tyranny of Madrid. Therefore, although the literature and language of Catalonia may not be the deciding factors in Catalan independence, one must certainly acknowledge the rhetorical power that rests in such a rich literary history.

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Conceptualizing Identity in Early Modern Nationalism

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Overview

Although many scholars categorize nationalism as a distinct nineteenth-century invention, the cultural continuities that formed the idea of a national identity existed for centuries prior. Pre-modern nationalistic cultural continuities rest mainly in the cultivation of a distinct linguistic and literary identity that are unique to the specific national era. In each nation's early modern literary history, one can trace back key moments that were foundational in the galvanization of a distinct cultural and national identity. This paper will discuss foundational moments in the literary histories of France, England, and Catalonia. Of course, in the discussion of such a broad and complex topic of nationalism, it is impossible to give justice to all the factors that go into creating such a phenomenon. This paper does not wish to delve into essentialism by describing these varying regions, nor does a distinct literary tradition constitute nationalism. However, a distinct literary tradition *is* one of the fundamental building blocks of culture that nationalism rests upon.

This paper will attempt to distinguish and compare moments in literary history that consolidated a sense of national continuity and fostered rhetoric in latter centuries that shored up nationalistic sentiments. As nationalism in the political sense relies on a common sense of the past and a current sense of community, this paper will discuss literature divided into two categories of nationalistic sentiments: popular culture and classical Greek, or elite humanist, elements. Dividing the discussion of literature into these elements allows one to analyze the various functions of literary nationalist discourse, that is, engaging a rich past while fostering a contemporary sense of community. Rather than sources falling distinctly into one category, popular or elite, they functioned within both spheres, and authors often bridged "high" and "low" culture to create a work that appealed directly to the people of their respective nation.

For one, popular culture, while notoriously hard to track for the early modern period, is an organic indicator of nationalism, testing whether the average working-class person conceived their identity as French, or Catalan, or English, rather than Parisian, Valencian, or Cornish. For the next category, interestingly, much nationalist rhetoric contains references likening their culture to the culture of ancient Greece. The reader may be struck with wondering why, above all other influences, rhetoricians tend to emphasize Greek heritage; the ancient Greeks' experiments with democracy make Hellenistic culture prime for use in rhetoric concerning the formation of free nations. To the modern mind, the idea of the ancient Greeks conjures images of seafaring, freedom-loving, democratic, culturally superior people, which translates to a very powerful rhetorical tool for nationalists. Since the Western world generally considers ancient Greece to be the foundation of Western thought, the cultural alignment with ancient Greece is a tactic to validate culture, placing it on par with one of the most romanticized societies that has ever existed. The identification with ancient Greece also signifies a top-down nationalistic agenda; whereas popular culture is more organic—as organic as rhetoric can be! —the affiliation with classical identity is decidedly artificial.

Modern vs Premodern Nationalism

The defining text of nationalism, Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, has stood for over thirty years as the authority on the political phenomenon. Anderson primarily argues that nationalism (“with a capital ‘N’”) is the result of a coalescence of factors exclusive to late eighteenth century.³⁵ However, over the past decade, scholars have modified Anderson's thesis, proposing that, while nationalism in its connotation of the political phenomenon indeed rests in

³⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 21.

the late eighteenth century, the cultural continuities that constitute imagined communities existed for centuries prior.

One particularly noteworthy challenge, or rather, modification, to Anderson's thesis is Caspar Hirschi's *The Origins of Nationalism*, which gives credit to the Roman Empire's dissemination of Hellenistic principles of nationhood across Europe, and to the Catholic Church for preserving these influences throughout the Middle Ages. He argues that the term *natio/nacio* appears in early medieval manuscripts in referring to "fatherland," which closely ties to the patriarchal concept of nationhood present in ancient Greek and Roman tradition. Hirschi asserts that the Council of Constance, held from 1414-1418, with the goal of resolving the Great Schism, is an example of early modern nationalism in political practice, as representatives from each region acted in the interest of their nation rather than the general interest of the church. Then, Hirschi observes that the Wars of Religion that followed contained examples of nationalism as a political doctrine, as regions usually chose to adhere to Catholicism or Protestantism according to the best interests of those ruling the nation.³⁶

In response to these arguments that the term nationalism encompasses cultural continuities that have existed for centuries prior to the "official" manifestation of nationalism in the late 1700s, some scholars have argued that these so-called cultural continuities are actually the result of an "invention of tradition." In other words, when the conditions for nationalism came to fruition in the eighteenth century, it became trendy for historians and scholars of that period to engage in scholarship that supported the assertion of their region's nationhood. Those scholars, say, of English literature would dig into their literary past and highlight authors that exemplify "Englishness," even if their work was not interpreted as such during their lifetime.

³⁶ Caspar Hirschi, *Origins of Nationalism: An Alternative History from Ancient Rome to Early Modern Germany*.

Scholars also invested in the study of ‘folk,’ or everyday people, as further justification for nationalist unity. As Peter Burke writes, “Craftsmen and peasants were no doubt surprised to find their homes invaded by women with middle-class clothes and accents who insisted they sing traditional songs or tell traditional stories.”³⁷ Thus, scholars who support a modern interpretation of nationalism assert that these cultural continuities are irrelevant because they were only interpreted as nationally charged during the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

However, in response to the “invention of tradition” conundrum, proponents of premodern manifestations of nationalism, like Caspar Hirschi and Lotte Jensen, argue that the phenomenon of inventing tradition is nothing new. Founding fathers, national heroes, traditional costumes, emblematic animals, language, and histories are national elements of popular culture that Europeans have invented since the medieval period. Yes, these scholars concede, the nationalism of the eighteenth and nineteenth century led to a reinterpretation of national history and popular culture, but those interpretations do not change the fundamental elements of culture that nationalism builds itself upon.

One nationalist scholar, Azar Gat, even posits that to ignore these cultural foundations is dangerous, given the potent and easily disseminated nature of nationalistic thought. He writes that, while nationalism is not necessarily primordial, it is rooted in a primordial sense of kin-culture affinity. Relegating the formation of nations to a certain historical context, as many scholars are wont to do after World War II’s devastating consequences, is simply naïve, as Gat states. National thought and simple “us vs. them” rhetoric is just as persuasive in the

³⁷ Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, Ashgate Publishing, 1994, p. 3.

contemporary world as it was during the nineteenth century, or as it was during the medieval period.³⁸

Popular Culture

The study of early modern popular culture, while notoriously hard to track, provides a glimpse of the stirrings of early modern nationalism. By studying folktales, street singers, printed ballads and broadsides, chapbooks, political cartoons, travel narratives and transcribed oral stories, historians can, to an extent, reconstruct how early modern peoples conceptualized themselves. Of course, such conceptions were not homogenous, and the sources contained many varying interpretations based upon that moment in time. Working from Burke's definition of popular versus elite culture, elite or "great" culture refers to the classical tradition, including the study of Latin and Greek, medieval scholastic philosophy, and intellectual movements like the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. However, these spheres did not exist in different planes; rather, popular and elite culture functioned as a two-way street, influencing one another. In the words of the social anthropologist Robert Redfield, "Great epics have arisen out of elements of traditional tale-telling by many people, and epics have returned again to the peasantry for modification and incorporation in local cultures."³⁹ In other words, popular and elite culture cannot be separated into two neat, distinct categories except from the distant eye of a scholar, because, in practice, they are completely intertwined.

Often, these sources include overarching impressions of an "us vs. them" mentality; in other words, for example, an English source may articulate some sense of Englishness while

³⁸ Azar Gat, "Premodern Nations, National Identities, National Sentiments, and National Solidarity," *The Roots of Nationalism: National Identity Formation in Early Modern Europe 1600-1815*, ed. Lotte Jensen, p. 33.

³⁹ Burke, p. 23-24.

simultaneously spouting some anti-French stereotypes. The purpose of most these sources was to entertain, so the content itself can seem lighthearted and inconsequential to some scholars; however, the conception of distinct English and French identities, even if expressed in farcical stereotypes, should not be overlooked.

Interestingly, nationalism in its political manifestation also kick-started the study of folktales and the recording of oral histories. The purpose for recording and disseminating these folktales was twofold: one, as the provenance of folktales difficult to establish, the existence of unique oral tales and popular culture makes shared culture seem primordial, as old as the land itself, and thus nationalism seems to be a natural consequence. For example, Victorian-era chapbooks, sold for one or two pence and hawked on the street, often reprinted British folktales under “Anonymous,” which reinforced the idea that these tales belonged to the nation itself, not an individual. However, many of these folktales had shaky provenance or were not even English to begin with, like “Beauty and the Beast” or “Cinderella.”⁴⁰

Second, for smaller regions, having folktales that are in a similar vein to those of a larger, more established region can provide validation for nationalistic policies. For instance, a mid-1800s publication explored several Catalan folktales, the author noting that the tales combine story structures similar to French and Spanish tales with uniquely Catalan themes of duty and honor. These tales allow scholars to get a taste, not only of the types of folktales that come from Catalonia, but also of the historiographical trends of the nationalism movement in practice. After a centuries-long repression of the Catalan language and culture, beginning with Ferdinand and Isabella’s censure in the late 1400s, in a Romantics-inspired effort to resurrect

⁴⁰ Roper, “England—The Land Without Folklore?” *Folklore and Nationalism*, ed. Baycroft and Hopkin.

Catalan culture, the mid-1800s *Renaixença* led to the justification of the Catalan nationalist movement.

The article transcribes four folktales, the longest of which is a *roundalla*, or children's story called "The Three Love-Oranges." In the story, a prince searches for three love-oranges, and when he opens the first two, beautiful women spring forth, but immediately die of thirst. Before he opens the third, he finds a well, and gives the third woman water before she can die like the first two. He proposed marriage to the third woman, which she accepted, and he goes to fetch a carriage, leaving her by the well. Next, a "negress" appears (although the author notes that in some versions, a Hungarian gypsy woman appears instead) and, jealous of the orange-woman's beauty, turns her into a dove and rides off with the prince herself. However, the prince sees the dove flying around him, and when he touches it, the dove turns back into the beautiful lady, whom he then marries.⁴¹

Of course, these folktales reprinted in the article are only a sampling of the rich history of Catalonia, and analysis of these alone cannot produce a conclusion about Catalan culture as a whole, but there are common themes running through the tales that allows one to get a sense of the types of stories that were venerated during the *Renaixença*. For instance, loyalty and a sense of duty seem to be integral elements to the resolution of the story. Catalans are not entirely unique in this aspect, as these stories are often meant to instruct children on good character traits. Still, when compared to tales from other nations, with heroes that rely on wit and cunning to save their own skins, it is quite interesting to see that the Catalan characters are duty-bound to one another. Interestingly, in several of the tales, there exists a French or a Spanish duplicate, which has a similar storyline but differs in key elements. Therefore, the broad similarities between the

⁴¹ "Catalan Ballads and Children's Stories," p. 203.

folktales of Catalonia, a smaller, regional nationalist entity and France and Spain, two larger, established nationalist entities, provides justification for Catalonia's nationalist movement. However, since there are distinct Catalan elements, this justification can exist without becoming internationalist.

Another interesting source of early modern popular culture is the existence of street singers; often, these singers would either disseminate or procure cheaply printed ballads with anonymous sources that they could then sing in taverns or on city street corners. Since these street singers were often the chief news source for the working classes, their content often contained nationalistically-driven conceptions in recounting current events of that region. In other words, the fact that these news criers existed points to some elementary conception of nationalism, or else there would be no reason why a tradesman in Yorkshire would be interested in the workings of London's Parliament.

In England, post-1590s, street singers were part of everyday life, both for urban and rural dwellers—performers gave news, political commentary, and were sometimes hired to drum up support for a cause. The oral delivery made prosecution difficult in cases of libel or sedition, so ballads were generally an open space to make comments that would have been censored in print. Of course, this transitory nature makes street singers difficult to pin down in the historical record, but sedition trial records and surviving broadside ballad sheets give historians enough to conclude that these singers conceptualized themselves and their audiences as distinctly English. One surviving example of a “scandalous ballade’ that spread like wildfire across England” was *The Parliament Routed or Here's a House to be Let*, which discusses Cromwell's dissolution of Parliament in 1653. The ballad opens with, “Cheare up kind Countreymen, be not dismayed, / true newes I can tell ye concerning the Nation.” Although such a beginning may seem obvious to

the reader living in the post-nationalist era, the singer's address of the audience as "Countreymen" suggests a kin-culture affiliation and conceptualization of the 'Englishman.' There is a record that the ballad was performed throughout Britain over 1653 and 1654—William Clarke, military secretary in Scotland, made notes in his diary about the 'scandalous ballade.'⁴² If a Briton living in Scotland or Yorkshire did not have some concept of their identity as British, then they would not care a fig about the goings-on of Parliament in London, but the historical record proves that these people had an appetite for the news.

In early modern France as well as Britain, street singers, or *chanteurs de rue*, dominated the dissemination of news and political commentary. Much like their English counterparts, these ballad-singers could provide sharp commentary on politics with a much lower risk of prosecution, given the transitory and oral nature of their songs. However, unlike British singers, French ballads were not often printed in broadside form, but usually in cheap *recueils*, collections of songs grouped by theme and sold in bulk to traveling musicians. One such themed *recueil* was titled: *Le recueil des chansons des batailles and guerres advenues au Royaume de France Durant les troubles*,⁴³ which described Catholic victories over Huguenots during the Wars of Religion. Street singers carried news of battles between the Catholics and Huguenots throughout Paris and other urban areas, like Lyon and Amiens. Much like their British counterparts, the existence of such ballads and street singers points to some rudimentary concept of early modern nationhood. Of course, the existence of popular culture national affiliations does not constitute nationalism ("with a capital N"), but it does point to some cultural continuity that the political manifestation of nationalism can use as a springboard. In other words, to those who

⁴² Angela McShane, "Political Street Songs and Singers in Seventeenth-Century England," *Renaissance Studies*, vol. 33, no. 1, (2019) 94-118.

⁴³ Una McIlvenna, "Chanteurs de Rue, or Street Singers in Early Modern France," *Renaissance Studies*, vol. 33, no. 1, (2019) 64-93.

assert that cultural continuity appears solely from eighteenth and nineteenth century “invention of tradition,” the existence of these street ballads and other manifestations of popular culture prove that such continuities did stand, to an extent, prior to the 1700s.

Classical Greek Influences

The reader may be struck wondering why, if the goal of these regions is to establish a distinct sense of national identity, the national rhetoricians would emphasize their likeness to an outside influence, like Greece. Of course, these nations had no use for contemporary Greece—they were only interested in ancient Greece as a concept, as a way of bolstering cultural superiority over nationalist rivals. These homages to ancient Greece take several different forms, one being boastful claims that attempt to elevate the nation past classical society rather than simply placing it on par. For example, during Catalonia’s “Golden Age,” in the late medieval period, the region conquered Athens, Greece, from 1311-1388. At this point, Catalonia had a degree of hegemony in the Mediterranean, but the taking of Athens was primarily a cultural victory rather than a strategic one.⁴⁴

Oratory records from a medieval Catalan Parliament demonstrate the strategic boasts, first separating Catalonia from the Iberian alignment with Rome, saying, “that same Catalonia that has won the vast Island of Italy, --Sicily and Sardinia, --which the Romans in their first conquests...took so long to conquer.”⁴⁵ Next, the orator consciously aligns Catalonia with a Mediterranean-centered Greek identity, “who has converted to the Catalan tongue that most ancient and famous Athens, fount of all the elegance, eloquence, and learning of the Greeks.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Kenneth M. Setton, *Catalan Domination of Athens: 1311-1388*, p. 34.

⁴⁵ William J. Entwistle, "The Rebirth of Catalonia." *Romanic Review* 18, (1927) p. 12.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

When the orator points the conversion of Athens to the Catalan tongue, he suggests that, not only are Catalans the cultural descendants of the ancient Greeks, but Catalans are taking Greek ideals and enhancing them. Interestingly, the marker of cultural dominance rests in “the Catalan tongue,” meaning that the language is the most important indicator of national sovereignty. As Catalans controlled Athens, the Athenians spoke their tongue; in parallel, as long as Catalans retained their language despite Castilian control, the Catalans are still sovereign.

The colonial administration of Athens printed laws and treatises in Catalan, one of the first governments in Europe to deviate from Latin and use the vernacular in important civic documents. Catalan became the official language of Athens, and, in the words of Kenneth M. Setton, “the smooth and liquid speech of French knights and noble ladies gave way to the harsher tones of the language one still hears in the streets and shops and mills of Barcelona.”⁴⁷ The widespread use of Catalan in an area so culturally historic as Athens gave Catalan writers the confidence to adapt literature into their own language. At that time, Catalan writers were on the cutting-edge; they would have felt as if their tiny Iberian region was on the cusp of becoming a Mediterranean empire. It is with this spirit that the Catalan Renaissance and “Golden Age” of literature began.

England, a similarly sea-bound nation, also had a tendency to liken themselves to the ancient Greeks. For instance, in letters drafted to members of Parliament during the January session of 1689, “Amongst these, *England* was none of the earliest Reformers, but continued long after *Greece* and *Rome*, in that Natural state that the first Fathers of Families lest it.”⁴⁸ Situated in the context of the Glorious Revolution, these letters discuss several facets of the “new” monarchy and England’s place on the global stage. However, this line in particular

⁴⁷ Kenneth M. Setton, *Catalan Domination of Athens: 1311-1388*, p. 216.

⁴⁸ A.B., “Some remarks upon government...” 1689.

believe is proof that, even prior to the modern period, English statesmen had conceptualizations of nationalism, calling upon classical references to justify these conceptions. Furthermore, in this line, the statesman exhibits a pride for his land, that it has resisted conquerors and created a government that has outlasted the classical empires.

Bridging “High” and “Low”

In discussing elite and popular culture in early modern Europe, it is far too simple to imagine the two categories as two separate entities; often, literary works borrow from elements of both in order to be rhetorically successful. As Peter Burke writes, “the borderline between the different cultures of the people and the cultures of the elites is a fuzzy one, so the attention of students of the subject ought to be concentrated on the interaction rather than the division between the two.”⁴⁹ One must remember that, in the early modern period, the elites and the working classes functioned in the same general spheres—they attended the same sermons and the same festivals. The premodern authors who combined “high” and “low” culture in their work ultimately became remembered by nationalist rhetoricians in later centuries as figures that were emblematic of a nationalist, communal spirit.

A primary example of an early modern literary source bridging the gap between “high” and “low” culture is François Rabelais’ *Gargantua and Pantagruel* series, a series of five novels about regal giants. The work itself is famous for its extensive wordplay on sexual and scatological humor—the reader can surely imagine the rich trove that giants provide for juvenile jokes—however, Rabelais, as a scholar of ancient Greece, in addition to the farcical entertainment, includes extensive diatribes on humanist and Platonist theory. He also utilizes his

⁴⁹ Burke, p. xvi.

knowledge of Greek to make up punning half-words, some of which survive in the French language to this day. Compared to authors sponsored by Francis I in a top-down effort to sustain nationally-produced literature to compete with Italy's Renaissance, Rabelais does not enjoy quite the same prestige. In fact, the adjective "Rabelaisian" is still used to refer to over-the-top farcical and scatological humor. However, in his own way, Rabelais' work contains important instances of humanist thought, which became, to an extent, part of the cultural fabric of France.

For example, in *Tiers Livre*, the third installment in the *Gargantua and Pantagruel* series, Rabelais includes figures that each represent a strand of Western philosophy. What makes this rhetorical device revolutionary is that Christianity represents only one of those strands—furthermore, the advice that the principal character eventually takes has much more of a Neoplatonism influence than a Christian one. In other words, in this volume, Rabelais juxtaposes Christianity and the Church, which, in the sixteenth century, dominated public thought, with ancient philosophical ideas, and ultimately combines them. Rabelais' Neoplatonistic conclusion resonated throughout Renaissance French thought, as he combined the 'natural consequences' attitude with Christian doctrine, resulting in predestination theories which became key in both Protestant and Catholic sects throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁵⁰

Rabelais' staying power is attributed not only to his elite or classical Greek references, but to his popular appeal. His book series was printed and sold in multiple installments, hawked on the street and enjoyed by the middle and working classes. Francis I, who famously patronized the literary arts in France, did not actively patronize or encourage Rabelais, who many viewed as a borderline heretic; however, Francis I, shielded Rabelais from the persecution of the Church, which, in a way, was a politically safe method of supporting him.

⁵⁰ Timothy Haglund, "Political Implications of Ancient Platonism in Rabelais's *Tiers Livre*," *Polis: The Journal for Ancient Greek and Roman Political Thought*, vol. 35, issue 1 (2018), 186-208.

In Catalonia, one of the principle literary figures of the Renaissance “Golden Age,” was Ausias March, a poet which merged the popular medieval ballad tradition with humanist-inspired introspective works. One of the first and most celebrated authors to write entirely in the Catalan vernacular, March was a Valencian knight born around 1400, who exposed himself to the classical rebirth in Italy by participating in several military campaigns that took him to Corsica and Sicily.⁵¹ Stylistically, March used the vehicle of the Catalan language to break away from the Provençal ballad tradition and wrote more compact poems on a variety of subject matter, including ruminations on grief, God, and predestination, as well as physical longing and romantic love.

Modern Catalans cite March as groundbreaking and as proof of their literary superiority, as he not only was among the first major poets to use Catalan, he was instrumental in merging medieval courtly ballads with Renaissance humanism in a way that made the transition flow smoothly. For instance, his section of poems on love echo common medieval tropes—frustration, unrequited passion, and scant physical description of the actual woman (or man!) to whom the poem is addressed. Take, for instance, a selection from poem II, “If I have kept my feelings to myself, / it’s not, be sure, because I lack true love. / My ailing heart burns hotter than the sun in June, yet unrewarded it remains.”⁵² These lines begin to show a psychological complexity, but have not yet broken away from typical subject matter: unrequited love and intense frustration.

March’s literary genius truly begins to show itself when he branched off love poems to express feelings on other subjects. His poems on grief are intimate, raw, and imaginative. Biographically, March, who was previously a courtier and a bit of a dandy, went into a deep period of mourning following the death of his beloved second wife. The personal experience he

⁵¹ Robert Archer, *Ausiàs March: Verse translations of thirty poems*, p. 25.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 35.

drew upon to express grief makes his work evocative and multifaceted, true work of the Renaissance. For instance, in his poem “XCI,” March wrote, “If ever my pain I start to forget, / there’s one sure way that I can bring it back / I think of her deeds of love, and pain takes flight.”⁵³ These lines highlight the intimacy of his verses and connection to his personal life.

March’s expansion on subject matter frees him to express thoughts on a variety of contemporary ideas. For instance, in the same poem on grief, March voices lines which align with humanist thought of the day. He wrote, “So closely twined with body is the soul / that simple can be deemed no human act.”⁵⁴ In these simple lines, March moved away from medieval thought, which abhors the body and things of this world in favor of the ecclesiastical. Instead, March suggested that since body and God-given soul are, if not one, then closely related, therefore the body is something to be celebrated. Furthermore, individuals and their earthly achievements are noteworthy and important, a development of Renaissance humanist thought.

Catalans today consider Ausiàs March the first great figure of the “Golden Age.” Two full-size statues stand in Valencia of the poet, one in front of the Central Municipal Library, and a large stone monument with a portrait bust graces the entrance of a historic secondary school. His work of bringing literature into Catalan vernacular established a precedent for Catalans to consider themselves scions of high culture and sophistication. Also, his inspiration from the classics and the Mediterranean world echoes throughout Catalonia’s various literary periods and into the present day.

Conclusion

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

The sampling of cultures examined in this comparative study, France, England, and Catalonia, each employ a distinct literary tradition that precedes the advent of political nationalism in the nineteenth century in contemporary nationalist rhetoric. The inclusion of Catalonia within the scope of this paper proves that cultural nationalism is not always linked to political nationalism, as, while there is a thriving separatist movement, the region is still under the governance of Spain. By contrast, France and England are examples of successful political nationalism. Not only are they self-contained nation-states with a distinct culture and literary history, the proliferation of English and French nationalism has tipped the historical record into the perception that such states have always existed as entities. In other words, early modern studies are difficult for the contemporary scholar to envision, simply because it is difficult to imagine Western Europe without the borders of these distinct nation-states.

However, even though the political entities were not born until the late eighteenth century, the cultural foundations that nationalist rhetoricians draw upon existed for centuries prior. In each of the cultural regions existed a distinct literary history, with a handful of authors who later became canon for nationalists. In breaking apart the literary histories, each of the regions display a mixing of “high” and “low” elements, of popular and elite culture, in order to maximize the rhetorical efficiency and create a sense of community and camaraderie among the people of that nation/region.

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“La Veuve de Nicolas Oudot:” Early Modern French Popular Culture, *Bibliothèques Bleues*, and
Women in Publishing

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Although the historical record of early modern era was unquestionably dominated by men, by breaking cultural history into case studies or microhistories, scholars can reconstruct the roles that women played and decode how they navigated their world. One such case study is that of Marie Promé, better known as “la veuve de Nicolas Oudot,” (the widow of Nicolas Oudot). The daughter of a Parisian bookseller, Marie married Nicolas Oudot III, scion of the prominent Oudot publishing family, in 1665. After Nicolas’s death in 1672, Marie continued to publish prolifically and maintain their bookshop in central Paris for nearly fifty years! The Oudot family printing operation was foremost in producing cheaply bound, brief pamphlets or chapbooks meant for popular consumption. In an era where women had little agency, especially in the realm of business, Marie Promé not only occupied the nexus of the public, masculine sphere and the feminine sphere, but also of the dichotomy of popular culture and elite culture.

It seems, at times, that the goal of scholarship is to complicate the narrative. In that instance, what exactly does “popular culture” mean, and what separates popular culture from elite culture? Working from Burke’s definition of popular versus elite culture, elite or “great” culture refers to the classical tradition, including the study of Latin and Greek, medieval scholastic philosophy, and intellectual movements like the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. “Popular culture” usually refers to more informal, often orally transmitted cultural materials of those who are illiterate or marginally literate. Elite and popular culture seems to be a dichotomy; much like urban versus rural, upper, landowning class versus working, peasant class, masculine versus feminine, powerful versus not powerful. However, these spheres did not exist in different planes; rather, popular and elite culture functioned as a two-way street, influencing one another. In the words of the social anthropologist Robert Redfield, “Great epics have arisen out of

elements of traditional tale-telling by many people, and epics have returned again to the peasantry for modification and incorporation in local cultures.”⁵⁵ In other words, popular and elite culture cannot be separated into two neat, distinct categories except from the distant eye of a scholar, because, in practice, they are completely intertwined.

Fortunately, during the past thirty or so years, led by historians like Peter Burke and Robert Darnton, historiography has shifted to include reflections of the lives of people who the historical record has traditionally failed to represent, like women and the working class. Burke, Darnton, and others have reconstructed narratives of people who lived beyond the margins of traditional means of historiography. Historians of popular culture study folktales, street singers, printed ballads and broadsides, chapbooks, political cartoons, travel narratives and transcribed oral stories. Though the majority of the population was illiterate and could not leave tangible footprints in the historical record, by unearthing these resources, historians can, to an extent, reconstruct how early modern peoples conceptualized themselves.

Of course, such conceptions were not homogenous, and the sources contained many varying interpretations based upon that moment in time. It is tempting to think of these sources as reflective of the indistinct “masses,” but a more appropriate definition would de-clump this “mass” into cohesive social milieus. For example, rather than thinking generally of “the people,” scholars must break this nebulous mass into varying demographics, like urban apprentices or peasant farmers. In other words, unfortunately, the idea of “popular culture” is rather nebulous, but by breaking popular culture into pieces or microhistories, scholars can still explore early modern culture of the average person. The publishing imprint of Marie Promé, the widow of Nicolas Oudot, stands at the intersection of these social milieus and helps to illuminate what kind

⁵⁵ Burke, p. 23-24.

of culture people consumed, how it was disseminated, and what role women served in the industry of popular culture.

As the paper will later discuss, consumers of popular culture spanned social classes, genders, and urban or rural environments. Just because a material is “popular culture” does not mean that it was created or exclusively consumed by the working class. The widow Oudot helps to melt these dichotomies into a more cohesive and intertwined relationship; though her shop is urban, centered in Paris, she sold chapbooks in bulk to traveling merchants, or *colporteurs*, who would carry the merchandise around the countryside. Though she printed inexpensive materials aimed at the working class, they often contained other works distilled from classical or elite sources, and her shop also stocked a few quality bound copies of books for those who could afford it.

When conceptualizing the spheres of popular and elite culture, it is tempting to envision elite culture as existing in bound print or exquisite manuscripts, residing in the spheres of business and scholarship and perpetuated by men. By contrast, popular culture brings about a vision of informal tales passed along from mother to child, from women congregating in the marketplace. In other words, popular culture, which encompasses folktales, ballads, and stories passed by word-of-mouth, seems much less formal and, ergo, much more feminine than elite culture. However, in the early modern world, contrary to these conceptualizations, the intersections of culture were much more complicated.

While women and the domestic sphere played an integral role in the dissemination of popular culture, there were a few women who occupied the bridge between masculine, elite, business-oriented culture and feminine, domestic, popular culture. “La veuve de Nicolas Oudot,” or the widow of Nicholas Oudot, continued to challenge these assumptions by occupying both

the feminine sphere or popular or transmitted culture and the masculine sphere of business and literacy. Marié Promé was a remarkable woman who continued her husband's publishing and bookselling operation under his name for almost fifty years after his death. She printed many works using the byline, "la veuve de Nicolas Oudot;" although she is printing under her late husband's name, she lays claim to a certain amount of agency, clarifying that, although she is working in her husband's imprint, she is the one making business decisions and controlling their Parisian press and bookstore.

It is no coincidence that Marie Promé, "la veuve," was a *widow* continuing the business under the imprint of her deceased husband. Married and single women held very little power on paper, which translated to holding little prominence in the historical record. In the early modern world, widows were the only milieu of women who held any semblance of power, so long as they were not forced to remarry. It is also no coincidence the widow Oudot was the daughter of a bookseller and printer. Many women, especially living in an urban environment, would have been reasonably well-versed in their family's trade, possibly keeping the books, running the shop, or even helping with the physical aspect of printing. Unfortunately, to find these women, historians must often employ the eye of a detective, looking to the margins of the historical record and sometimes gleaning more information from what is too obvious to be written.

Uncovering Marie Promé and her popular culture inventory helps scholars to understand just what seventeenth and eighteenth century French were interesting in reading, but it is difficult to determine just how many women were actually purchasing these materials. It is unclear how widespread female literacy was in the early modern world, but as R.A Houston writes, scholars must think of "literacies" rather than literacy.⁵⁶ In other words, today's world judges literacy by a

⁵⁶ R.A. Houston, *Literacy in Early Modern Europe: Culture and Education 1500-1800*, New York: Longman Press, 1988, p. 168.

set of broad skills that encompass reading, writing, and arithmetic. In the early modern world, an individual may have been “literate” enough to be proficient with sums, but unable to sign their name besides marking the page with the ubiquitous “X.” Conversely, someone may have had the ability to form enough letters to sign their name, but unable to read seemingly basic passages. Female literacy is even more difficult to track down than male literacy, as female performances of literacy tend to occupy the margins of the historical record. Despite the proliferation of print culture in the early modern world, most information and entertainment traveled orally.

Early modern France is a rich source of popular culture; traveling *colporteurs* roamed the cities and countryside loaded with packs of goods to sell, which included printed broadsides and pamphlets, or chapbooks, bound in cheaply produced blue paper. In addition to the *colporteurs*, street singers, or *chanteurs de rue*, dominated the dissemination of news and political commentary. These ballad-singers, often poised on Parisian street corners or crowded bridges, could provide sharp commentary on politics with a much lower risk of prosecution, given the transitory and oral nature of their songs. French ballads were not often printed in broadside form, but usually in cheap *recueils*, collections of songs grouped by theme and sold in bulk to traveling musicians. One such themed *recueil* was titled: *Le recueil des chansons des batailles and guerres advenues au Royaume de France Durant les troubles*,⁵⁷ which described Catholic victories over Huguenots during the Wars of Religion. Street singers carried news of battles between the Catholics and Huguenots throughout Paris and other urban areas, like Lyon and Amiens.

Though most early modern people consumed entertainment and news aurally, print culture was still incredibly prolific. In France, the most popular print sales were small quarto

⁵⁷ Una McIlvanna, “Chanteurs de Rue, or Street Singers in Early Modern France,” *Renaissance Studies*, vol. 33, no. 1, (2019) 64-93.

pamphlets bound in cheap, blue paper. Because of the distinctive blue paper, the collective of these pamphlets earned the name *bibliothèques bleues*, or “Blue Library.” Much like English chapbooks or German *volksbuch*, *bibliothèques bleues* included woodcut illustrations on a number of political or religious subjects, as well as condensed tales of morality, psalms, lives of saints, or bestselling novels. In addition to literary content, some of the most popular content for *bibliothèques bleues* was also almanac material, with practical advice concerning agriculture or phenomena of the natural world. These mass-produced chapbooks embodied the intertwining of popular and elite culture, as biblical commentary and condensed Greek myths sat on shelves right beside agricultural guides, the antithesis of an elite, humanist education!

Robert Mandrou, in his work *De la Culture Populaire aux 17^e et 18^e Siècles*, references a 1722 inventory of Jacques II Oudot in Troyes, which included a massive amount of materials that gives historians an idea of the kind of materials that early modern people consumed. Examples include 52 dozen copies of Psalms, 214 dozen copies of “Songs of St. Jacques,” and 2,200 “petit livres” of *Saint Sacrement*.⁵⁸ The quantities of the materials listed are important for understanding the business aspect of popular print culture, but the numbers do not necessarily reflect the amount of people who consumed the content. Most of the pamphlets would be read aloud to others on the street, in the tavern, or in the home, which multiplies the anticipated audience in a manner that is difficult for historians to track.

Many of the *bibliothèques bleues* were filled with miscellaneous content in various installments, much like modern magazines. One example in the inventory of the diversity of content in these printed materials is a listing of a print run of 198, with the content described as: “*Entretien des bonnes companies, Belle Heleine, Conférence de deux paysans. Quatrains de*

⁵⁸ Robert Mandrou, *De la Culture Populaire aux 17^e et 18^e Siècles*, IMAGO : Paris, 1985, p. 199.

Bibrac, Pierre de Provence, Jean de Paris, Jeu de picquet, Alphabet, Miroir d'astrologie, Richard sans peur, L'Espiègle"⁵⁹ ("Maintenance of good companies, Beautiful Helen, Conference of two farmers, Quatrains of Bibrac, Pierre of Provence, Jean of Paris, Picquet Game, Alphabet, Mirror of Astrology, Richard Without Fear, The Mischievous"). The inventory only includes titles, so unfortunately the full content of these materials is unknown; however, judging by the titles, there is a charming amount of miscellany, with seemingly sophisticated poetry like "Quatrains de Bibrac" nestled alongside the blue-collared "Conference of two farmers."

Provincial cities in France, like Troyes, were the capitals of *bibliothèques bleues* publishing, and the Oudot's printing operation was at the center of Troyes' publishing industry. During the mid-seventeenth century, Nicolas Oudot and his brother, Jean, began printing *recueils*, bound in cheap, thick blue paper, and selling them for as little as one *sou*. *Colportages*, or traveling peddlers, would carry and distribute these pamphlets throughout the cities and countryside, where people often read or sung them aloud to audiences. Over three generations, the Oudot family continued to dominate the *bibliothèques bleues* publishing industry in Troyes, until the grandson of Nicolas Oudot, Nicolas III, moved the printing and bookselling operation in Paris, on the rue de la Harpe near Notre Dame cathedral. Soon after, he married Marie Promé, who took hold of her in-laws' male-dominated publishing operation and continued the business.

Because of the cheapness of *bibliothèques bleues*, only a fraction of survive in present day in a condition that is readable. Much information that cultural historians can glean from *bibliothèques bleues* comes from surviving inventories of bookshops and printing operations. An inventory dated from 1722 catalogues the books sold in the shop of the bookseller "la veuve de

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 201.

Nicolas Oudot,” which reveals the bustling business that Marie continued as well as the type of materials that popular audiences typically purchased. The inventory categorizes a large quantity of the merchandise as “recreational books,” without further information, which means that the materials probably were either sufficiently bawdy as to excuse further inquiry, or they could have been subversive and satirical or critical of the government. As with street singers, laws existed to regulate the content and dissemination of *bibliothèques bleues*, but given their transitory and portable nature, it was nearly impossible to put those laws in practice. The trade in *bibliothèque bleues*, in reality, ran almost unregulated until 1740, when the French government enacted stringent laws that enabled them more control over the content printed by booksellers such as the Oudot family.

Since these pamphlets are not easy to track down, the most valuable indicators of their content are shop inventories, which give scholars a glimpse into what consumers purchased and enjoyed. Other items listed on the inventory included religious materials, with printed hymns, condensed versions of the gospels, and morality tales. One item of note that appeared on the inventory of “la veuve de Nicolas Oudot” was a bound copy of Aesop’s Fables, which demonstrates the early modern interest in classical sources.⁶⁰ As Marie’s shop sold not only cheap pamphlets, but also bound books of quality, her customers must have been diverse. In other words, it is tempting to imagine the sole audience of *bibliothèques bleues* as the working class, but the existence of bound books in addition to cheaply printed editions demonstrates that customers with means must have also patronized her shop. Therefore, it is entirely conceivable

⁶⁰ BnF Data « Catalogue des livres qui se vendent en la boutique de la veuve de Nicolas Oudot, libraire, ruë de la Harpe, vis-à-vis la ruë du Foin, à côté de la ruë des Deux Portes, à l’Image de Notre-Dame, à Paris. » 1722.

that wealthy merchants or upper-class citizens could have purchased and perused *bibliothèques bleues*, in addition to more “sophisticated” works.

“La veuve de Nicolas Oudot” published a volume not long after her husband’s death in 1672, titled “Les tracas de la ville de Paris en vers burlesques” (“The hassle of the city of Paris in burlesque verse”) by François Colletet. Interestingly, the volume opens with classical references, calling upon Apollo and Phoebus: “Voici le plus beau temps du monde, / Phoebus à la perruque blond, / Qu’Appollon l’on appelle en Vers, / Ou plutôt, l’oeil de l’Univers” (“Here is the most beautiful time in the world, / Phoebus with a blond wig, / That Apollo is called in verse, / Or rather, the eye of the Universe.”).⁶¹ Though the references are playful and tongue-in-cheek, the author knows that at least a portion of his audience will be familiar with these figures, and at least educated enough to catch the references and gain enjoyment from them. Of course, not all the audiences would have necessarily caught the references, but the fact that they exist means that at least some number would have; therefore, logically, some percentage of the audience must have been educated and not necessarily part of the undefined “masses.”

Natalie Zemon Davis seconds this inference in “Printing and the People,” where she writes, “Popular books are not necessarily written by *petites gens*...Nor are popular books bought and read only by *petites gens*.”⁶² Davis goes on to posit that the most prolific consumers of *bibliothèques bleues* and similar printed materials were most likely urban artisan journeymen and apprentices, provided with a cursory education and the means to purchase such goods. Rural and peasant consumption of popular culture is harder to track, but there is evidence that *colporteurs*

⁶¹ François Colletet, *Le Tracas de Paris*, 1672, Veuve Nicolas Oudot : Troyes, p. 9.

⁶² Natalie Zemon Davis, “Printing and the People,” *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*. Stanford University Press, 1975, p. 191.

made their routes through the countryside; most likely, someone would read aloud the contents of the chapbooks to a gathered audience.⁶³

Although the “widow Oudot” was an especially significant case due to her longevity and prolific publishing record, widows in the French printing and bookselling industry were not unheard of during this time. Victoire Élisbeth Behourt, daughter of Parisian bookseller and printer Jean-François Behourt, married her second cousin, Pierre-Louis Behourt, and after his death in 1805, continued publishing under the name, “la veuve de Pierre-Louis Behourt.” She published under her own imprint until merging with her father-in-law’s operation in 1808, then her son-in-law’s operation in 1809. After the death of her son-in-law, Jean-Baptiste-Pierre Trenchard in 1812, she continued publishing with his widow, and the team published under the imprint of “la veuve Trenchard-Behourt.”⁶⁴

In Alfred Morin’s compilation of *bibliothèque bleues* printed in Troyes, he includes an Oudot family tree, along with shorter trees of less prominent printing families. The tree folds follows a timeline stretching from 1600-1850, with notations where, after the death of their husband, a widow continued publishing under the imprint; although Marie Promé was most prolific and occupied the largest time span, Morin makes note of eight other Oudot widows who carried the business! Among these are “la veuve de Jacques Oudot” (Anne Harvard), “la veuve de Nicolas II Oudot” (Marie Moreau), “la veuve de Jean IV Oudot” (Jeanne Royer), “la veuve de Pierre Garnier” (Elisabeth Guilleminot), and others.⁶⁵ Anne Harvard, the widow of Jacques Oudot, published under her husband’s imprint for nearly thirty years until she eventually combined the business with her younger male relative. In other words, though Marie Promé’s

⁶³ Ibid., p. 196.

⁶⁴ BnF Data, “Veuve de Pierre-Louis Behourt (1759-1834).”

⁶⁵ Alfred Morin, “Tableau Chronologique des Principaux Imprimeurs de la Bibliothèque Bleue de Troyes,” *Catalogue Descriptif de la Bibliothèque Bleue de Troyes*, Librairie Droz : Geneva, 1974.

publishing record was remarkable, she was not an isolated phenomenon; there were many active women in the publishing industry.

From Morin's record and from the proliferation of materials produced with the byline "la veuve de...", it appears that these women were not only prominent behind the scenes of the industry, but they were well-respected agents in their own right. In other words, for example, Marie Promé is not publishing under "Nicolas Oudot" or "Nicolas Oudot, deceased," but "*la veuve de Nicolas Oudot*." She could have ceded the imprint to a male relative, printing under "le frère de Nicolas Oudot" or "le fils de Nicolas Oudot" or even "la famille de Nicolas Oudot"—but she did not. Modern audiences may take that small claim to agency for granted, since she is continuing her husband's business under his name, but she is acknowledging that it is she who is pulling the strings behind the scenes. That simple byline "*the widow of Nicolas Oudot*" is actually a powerful claim to agency. Of course, this paper does not mean to supplant modern viewpoints upon early modern people; Marie Promé was, in all likelihood, not consciously usurping the status quo by asserting this imprint upon her materials. However, that she even left a historical record for us to follow, 350 years later, proves that, on some level, she did assert agency beyond that of a humble wife and widow.

Rather than being a passive bearer of popular culture, "la veuve de Nicolas Oudot" managed the business of its print dissemination from the most prominent city in France. In an era where women occupied the margins of business and literacy, this woman, along with her fellow publishing widows, occupied the nexus of the public and private sphere, of popular and elite culture. Through her own business acumen and claim to agency, "la veuve de Nicolas Oudot" produced materials that reached early modern peoples across the spectrum of socioeconomic standing, rural or urban residency, and gender.

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