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# 100 YEARS OF LITERATURE IN THE BRETON LANGUAGE (1920–2020)

*Mannaig Thomas*

## **Introduction**

Literature written in the Breton language in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries presents something of a paradox in that although the number of Breton speakers has continued to decrease throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and in the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Broudic 2009), the number of works published per year has remained at a relatively stable level (Thomas 2014) and even appears to be increasing. This can be seen in the diversity of audiences targeted and genres covered, and in the increased visibility that Breton language books have received in libraries, multimedia resource centres and at book fairs in the last twenty years (Rouxel 2021). The practice of translating treasures of world literature into Breton has also gained momentum.<sup>1</sup>

Prior to the twentieth century, Breton was spoken by the vast majority of the population in Western Brittany. The most widespread form of literary production in Breton was predominantly religious and was intended for an essentially rural and Catholic readership, a minority of whom were literate.

For this segment of the population, reading was a collective practice – religious texts were read aloud during evening gatherings, giving a significant portion of the population access to a literature designed for them. This was also true for religious plays written in Breton, whose staged performances were accessible to a fairly broad Breton-speaking audience.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century also saw the emergence of the “Bretonist movement” (Guiomard 1987). Influenced by Romanticism, it gave a new image of Brittany. This literature presented an idealised vision of Brittany and was essentially written in French or in bilingual versions. The *Barzaz Breiz*, for instance, was not intended for a Breton-speaking readership, to whom this literature was inaccessible (Blanchard 2006).

With the widespread diffusion of French, linguistic and reading practices evolved greatly over the years. The major economic and social changes that took

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1 The works concerned are featured in a list drawn up by The Public Office for the Breton Language and the Region of Brittany authorities (see [https://www.bretagne.bzh/app/uploads/liste2018t-raduc\\_litt\\_br.pdf](https://www.bretagne.bzh/app/uploads/liste2018t-raduc_litt_br.pdf), consulted on 15 December 2021).

place in Brittany between the 1920s and the 1950s<sup>2</sup> led to the decline of the Breton language,<sup>3</sup> even in the more rural areas, where the population could not read or write in Breton. According to the traditional diglossic distribution (Ferguson 2021), reading and writing for these speakers belonged to the “high” register, and were associated with standard French, learned in school. At the same time, with the democratisation of reading practices, which became “silent” and “visual” (Chartier 1985: 87), the content of literary production increasingly resembled what was written in French. This evolution affected both the literary genres in use (novels, short stories, etc.) and the themes addressed (with the dwindling of religious influence and diversification of themes). Finally, the development of Breton-language teaching in the 1980s and 1990s led to the emergence of a small group of speakers who were able to read and write the language. Nevertheless, this group was a minority compared to the rest of the Breton-speaking population, for whom reading, and even more so writing, remained unusual and difficult.

In order to understand the reasons for this apparent paradox, it is necessary to consider the way in which Breton-language literature is perceived in a more global context of language promotion.

In view of the sociolinguistic evolution, writing in Breton has not had the same significance in different periods and has not targeted the same audiences. Although the Breton language has had a literary tradition since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, very few authors are known to the general public. There are some exceptions, but most of these writers have published in more recent periods and, for various reasons, have also enjoyed a reputation beyond the strictly literary sphere.

For the 1920–2020 period, three writers come to mind.<sup>4</sup> The novelist and playwright Pierre-Jakez Hélias (1914–1995) and the poet Anjela Duval (1905–1981) are often referred to, by both Breton and non-Breton speakers; in more recent decades, the playwright Goulc’han Kervella (b. 1951) is frequently mentioned. The first of these, a bilingual writer, is known first and foremost for his national success in the French language with *Le Cheval d’orgueil* (“The Horse of Pride”) which was published in 1975. However, he was locally known before that for Breton language radio programmes broadcast after the Second World War (Calvez 2000).

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2 This is a simplified presentation of a process that can vary from place to place. For a comprehensive view see Fañch Broudic (1995).

3 For a more in-depth analysis of this phenomenon, see the work of Jean Le Dù and Yves Le Berre (2019).

4 The three people cited above are those mentioned spontaneously by different groups of students (Breton speaking or otherwise) whom I had asked about the key-figures of *literature in the Breton language* (The emphasis is mine M.T).

Anjela Duval's poetry was almost exclusively written in Breton. For the past twenty years there has been an active campaign to promote her work.<sup>5</sup> The third author is noted for the number of works he has published and for his theatrical activities, in both languages, over a career spanning forty years. The next section will be devoted to a discussion of all three authors. In each case, it is clear that the recognition these writers have gained comes in part from their writing in Breton but also from other publications or activities (such as works in French, a media profile, or various paraliterary activities in connection with the Breton language). This explains why today, they have come to represent Breton language authors, including for non-Breton speakers.

In each period, Breton writing has been conditioned by different contexts and sociolinguistic issues. Literary output from 1920 to 2020 can therefore be analysed in light of the rapid sociolinguistic evolution of Brittany. Indeed, as in other cases, literature in the Breton language has never been detached from its historical, political, and social context. However, in view of its status, the forces acting on it have not been the same as those which may, for instance, have influenced literature in the French language. To take up the words of Pierre Bourdieu (1991), this is just one manifestation of the absence of autonomy in this field compared to the activists involved in the defence of Brittany and the Breton language.

Le degré d'autonomie du champ [...] est à la mesure du capital symbolique qui a été accumulé au cours du temps par l'action des générations successives [...] et qui fait que les producteurs culturels se sentent en droit et en devoir d'ignorer les demandes ou les exigences des pouvoirs temporels, voire de combattre ces pouvoirs au nom de principes et de normes qui leur sont propres.

(Bourdieu 1991: 8)

The degree of autonomy of the field [...] is commensurate with the symbolic capital that has been accumulated over time through the action of successive generations [...] and which makes cultural producers feel entitled and obliged to ignore the demands or requirements of temporal powers, or even to fight these powers in the name of their own principles and standards.

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5 The campaign, organised by the association *Mignoned Anjela* ('Anjela's friends'), led to several achievements, including the publication of her complete works in 2000, the erection of a statue to her effigy in her native village of Vieux-Marché (22) in 2011, the publication of a graphic novel about her in 2018 or the online publication of her archives ([https://www.anjela.org/oberenn/dornskridou\\_barzhonegou/?lang=bz](https://www.anjela.org/oberenn/dornskridou_barzhonegou/?lang=bz), page consulted on December 15, 2021). Finally, on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of her death, Anjela Duval was honoured during the Festival of the Book in Brittany at Carhaix in October 2021.

The forces acting on this literary space may have changed over time, but they have continued to act on it for the past 100 years, forcing it to take new directions. Here, I will set out three principles which could help us to understand what it means to write in Breton and how this has changed.

### 1. A rupture: *Gwalarn* (1925)

Although religion-inspired literature and paraliterature, of the kind produced before the First World War, was still dominant, this period was characterised by the appearance of a new journal linked to a political movement. *Gwalarn* ('North-west') first appeared as a literary supplement<sup>6</sup> to the journal *Breiz Atao* ('Brittany Forever'), and from its first issue, in the form of a manifesto declaring a political programme (Calvez 2006: 51–65), it campaigned for an in-depth reform of literature in the Breton language. Roparz Hemon (1901–1978) and Olivier Mordrel (1901–1985) clarified the new review's objectives in the *Premier et dernier manifeste de Gwalarn en langue française* ('The First and the Last *Gwalarn* Manifesto in the French Language') which was released on 1 March 1925. The two writers set the Breton language and its literature on the road to nationalism and called for a linguistic, orthographic<sup>7</sup> and thematic reform to establish a truly "national literature" ('littérature nationale') for an elite, namely an audience capable of reading and appreciating high-level texts far removed from "dull tales and poetry for illiterates" ('*des contes et poésies pousives à l'usage d'illettrés*') (Hemon & Mordrel 1925: 524).

This blatant contempt for what constituted much of the body of literature in the Breton language from earlier centuries illustrates the discrepancy that originally existed between this new literary movement, with its aspirations of modernity, and what most Breton speakers were reading at that time. From this point onwards, literature was assigned a clear role as a tool for educating a Breton intellectual elite. As well as Roparz Hemon, other writers are associated with *Gwalarn* for works which have marked the literary history of the Breton language, "*klasikou*" *brezhoneg hon 20<sup>vet</sup> kantved* ('Breton "classics" for our 20<sup>th</sup> century', Favereau 2003: 240), such as *Geotenn ar Werc'hez* ('The Virgin's Grass'), a collection of short stories by Jakez Riou (1899–1937) and the novel *Itron Varia Garmez* ('Our Lady of the Carmelites') by Youenn Drezen (1899–1972) in 1941 with illustrations by René-Yves Creston. Publication of the journal ceased in 1944 and because of his activities during the Second World War, Roparz Hemon was sentenced to 10 years of national demotion and left the country for Ireland where he died in 1978.

6 The review *Gwalarn* became independent of *Breiz Atao* after 18 months.

7 The orthographic reform led to the creation, in 1941, of *peurunvan* ('super-unified'), a so-called wholly unified orthography which was established following an agreement between writers under the impetus of the linguist Johann (Leo) Weisgerber.

Despite the low number of readers, *Gwalarn* was a pivotal moment in literary history as the review would have considerable influence on literary output in subsequent decades and would serve as a guiding principle and a model for linguistic and cultural activists, even after publication ceased in 1944. This experiment made it possible, if not legitimate, to uncouple literary writing in Breton from the potential readership in this language. Writing for an elite was asserted and perceived as the only way to develop and establish high-level literature, meaning literature with a nationalist focus, because in the words of Roparz Hermon “the fate of our literature, and so the fate of our nationality, is in the hands of the elite” (*‘le sort de notre littérature, et par suite, celui de notre nationalité, est entre les mains de l’élite’*) (ibid.). By contradicting the literary and cultural practices of Breton speakers at that time, *Gwalarn* illustrates a desire to transform literature in the Breton language.

However, this would only seem to be possible by adopting the French literary model. Breton-language literature is not an exception. As it was analysed by Pascale Casanova, Paris became the “world’s capital of literature during the 19<sup>th</sup> century” and a model for many national literatures (Casanova 1999: 134).

This had been the underlying model for a significant proportion of literary works in previous centuries; not least, because no-one writing in the Breton language in the past was a monolingual Breton speaker. From here onwards however, the French literary field would be implicitly elevated as the model to follow, both to establish a unified language across the territory, “a language with a classical form and rigorously unique orthography” (*‘une langue de forme classique et une orthographe rigoureusement unique’*) (Hemon & Mordrel, op. cit.), and to create two distinct poles of thought, separating literature for the elite from popular literature. The purpose was to strictly avoid any mixing between the two, which Roparz Hemon (1924) considered as the reason for the poverty of Breton-language literature. As an outcome, Breton literature became “writing for writers” (*‘production pour producteurs’*) (Bourdieu 1991, op. cit.), that is, literature mainly read by people who were authors themselves or at least took part in the literary and language activism.

## 2. Towards a highly committed literature

Very soon after the Second World War, new literary journals were established as a continuation of *Gwalarn*. *Tír na n-óg* [*sic*] (*‘Land of Youth’*) appeared in January 1945, *Al Liamm* (*‘The Link’*) in spring 1946 and *Kened* (*‘Beauty’*) in June 1946. These publications were then merged into *Al Liamm-Tír n’a n’og* (Hupel 2010: 379–80). This journal took up *Gwalarn*’s literary legacy, applied its principles and literary choices and adopted a perspective which can still be described as nationalist. Roparz Hemon

himself contributed to the journal from Dublin<sup>8</sup> while also publishing his own journal in Breton *Ar bed keltiek* ('The Celtic World'). From its first editions, *Al Liamm* expressed its desire to present Brittany as a Celtic nation in its own right and to build bridges with other Celtic countries. This primarily meant Ireland and Wales which featured broadly in the first few editions,<sup>9</sup> including in the form of articles written in Welsh.

Ten years later, the journal *Brud* ('Renowned') was started, presenting itself as an alternative to *Al Liamm* by giving a voice to linguistic activists from the Left and the clergy who denounced nationalism and the Breton movement's collaboration during the war. While *Al Liamm* promoted links with other Celtic countries, *Brud's* objective was to maintain contact with the majority of Breton speakers, many of whom still lived in rural areas. To this end, it adopted a new form of spelling. This was intended to resemble the pronunciation of some variants of Breton more closely but also provided its advocates with an opportunity to mark a clear break with the direction chosen by the Breton movement under the German Occupation, symbolised by the use of *peurunvan* spelling. The first edition of *Brud* illustrates the review's dual direction of demonstrating a genuine literary ambition<sup>10</sup> in language that strives to remain relatively close to the vernacular.

This post-war period was characterised, in discourse at least, by a separation between the cultural and literary field on the one side and the political field on the other. While these journals, various new pro-Brittany interest groups, movements and political parties were established, the language and its literature were not central to their concerns, as they focused primarily on the question of regional economic development. Nevertheless, in 1964, the Democratic Breton Union (*Union Démocratique Bretonne*, UDB) was created and some of its Breton speaking founders had connections with *Al Liamm*.

Several members of this party – who were also poets – thus helped shape a new direction for literary writing which they considered to have a duty to reflect the UDB's left-wing and pro-autonomy ambitions. While the previous generation, no doubt more affected by the Second World War, sought to distance itself from political engagement, the generation which founded the UDB made its commitment to political causes clear and this was consolidated over the years within the political

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8 The *Al Liamm* database includes 174 articles, from the first *Lizher eus Iwerzhon* ('Letter from Ireland') published from volume 5 onwards (1947) to *Un dro e Kembre* ('A tour of Wales') published in 2018 in volume 429 of the review, in the issue fully devoted to Wales.

9 See, for example, the titles of articles published in the first issue of *Al Liamm* (Spring, 1946): 'Ar c'hembraeg hag ar saozneg' ('Welsh and English'), 'Eur sell war lennegez Kembre' ('A look at Wales literature'), 'Iwerzon 1921–1929: ar politikerezh hag an emgann evit ar yez' ('Ireland 1921–1929: Politics and struggle for the language'), 'An arz iwezhoneg' ('The Irish arts').

10 The first edition comprised a series of four plays by Pierre-Jakez Hélias, a short story by Per Trepos, and texts authored by Yeun ar Gow and Charlez Ar Gall.

and social context at that time, namely, the events of May 1968 and the many social movements in Brittany and elsewhere in France which thrived until the early 1980s.

In 1969, *Le poème du pays qui a faim* ('The Poem of the Famished Country') was printed, bringing Paul Keineg, a young poet and UBD member at that time, to the fore. This work is in French, but it can be seen as the manifesto for one segment of Breton activist youth in the 1970s which, as both a witness to and protagonist in the evolving sociolinguistic landscape, expressed itself in two languages and formed a literary, cultural and political movement to support social movements but could not capitalise on through votes in political ballots.

Four years after Keineg's poem, Yann-Bêr Piriou published an anthology of poetry with the explicit title, *Défense de cracher par terre et de parler breton* ('No spitting or speaking Breton'). In his foreword to a collection of poems by Erwan Evenou '*Benn goulou deiz*, he also stated the necessity, in his view, of political engagement in literature:

*Ne saver ket ul lennegezh er-maez eus ar vuhez, er-maez eus stourm pen-deziek ar labourerien p'eo anat d'an holl n'eo ken nag ar yezh, nag ar vroadelezh a zo en arvar, pobl Vreizh en he fezh ne lavaran ket. Echu eo ar mareoù ma oa tu da grediñ e c'helle ar varzed bevañ en o bed o-unan, gant ar Gened da breder nemetañ... Dazont ar brezhoneg n'emañ ket er palezioù savet dezhañ gant e azeulerien. Emañ gant ar re a stourm bemdeiz evit o bara hag hini o bugale... Eno emañ he gwirionez, ha muioc'h ez eus da zeskiñ er parkeier, en uzinoù hag er sindikadoù eget el levraougegoù blot.*

(Piriou 1972: 5–6)

We cannot create literature separate from life and the daily struggle of workers when it is clear that it isn't just the language and nation in danger, but the Breton population as a whole. Gone are the times when we could believe that the bards lived in their world, with Beauty their only consideration. The future of Breton isn't in the palaces built for it by its admirers. It is alongside those struggling every day to feed themselves and their children. This is where its truth lies and there is more to be learned in the fields, factories, and trade unions than in comfortable libraries.

In 1975, a work with a very different tone appeared, achieving considerable success in French. This was the book *Le Cheval d'orgueil* by Pierre-Jakez Hélias (1975). At the time it was published, its author already enjoyed a level of renown as until 1958 he had presented radio broadcasts in Breton which were very successful. The following year, he began publishing a weekly bilingual column in the regional daily newspaper *Ouest-France*. The tone of this novel and his other works in Breton and French differed considerably from the tone of the politically engaged literature produced by the activist youth of the same period.



There is no revolt combining class struggle and the fight for national liberation in *Le Cheval d'orgueil*. Instead, this work is a collective childhood memoir, an acknowledgement of the progress brought by modernisation and, above all, an acceptance of the changing linguistic situation. Coming from a different generation, and without renouncing his attachment to the Breton language, Hélias took a measured line and his harmonious description of the world of his childhood appealed to a very broad audience well beyond the borders of Brittany. It experienced great success with many readers throughout France and sold more than one million copies.

As the style of writing evocative of the home country – illustrated by *Le Cheval d'orgueil* – returned to favour (Thomas & Dupouy 2021), another author, Anjela Duval, appeared on the scene to significant regional acclaim. Unlike Hélias and the young activist poets mentioned above, Marie-Angèle Duval was a farmer from Trégor who wrote poetry in Breton after her day's work on the farm. These poems were published in *Ar bed keltiek* and in *Al Liamm* from 1962 onwards and nine years later she became known to the general public through the television programme *Les conteurs* ('Storytellers') by André Voisin.<sup>11</sup>

Despite, or because of, the difference in her age and social class,<sup>12</sup> Anjela Duval gradually became an icon for many young activists, but she also stood out among her farming contemporaries. At a time when these people were buying tractors and levelling off embankments, many young people were leaving the countryside to find work in the towns and mothers were speaking French to their children, Anjela Duval advocated a return to traditional small-scale farming, criticised the rural exodus and lamented the trend for mothers to "break the link" (Duval 2000: 322) by speaking "the language of the oppressor with their children" (*ibid.*). The lack of understanding between the poet and her fellow countryfolk was no doubt reciprocal. So rather than becoming "the voice of farmers from Trégor" (*ibid.*), she came to represent proponents of the Breton language. The "Duval" phenomenon is all the more interesting to observe because about twenty years ago, her name ceased to be confined to activist circles and she became known to the general, non-Breton-speaking public for her poetry.

The dynamism of the militant movement of the 1970s led, in 1977, to the signing of the Breton Cultural Charter, which formalised central and regional government support by means of grants awarded to the cultural movement working within the Brittany Cultural Council. The first schools teaching Breton through immersion and then through a bilingual education were also set up between 1978 and

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11 This programme can be viewed online: <https://www.anjela.org/oberenn/documents-video/> (consulted on 15/12/2021).

12 By way of example, on the social trajectory of some Breton writers and activists (Yann-Ber Piriou, Paol Keineg, etc.) who she was close to in the 1970s (Thomas 2014: 187–202).

the early 1980s. These achievements would have various consequences within the literary field.

### 3. The institutionalisation of literature in the Breton language

The most recent sociolinguistic phenomenon has been the emergence of a new Breton speaking audience. This is an outcome of the development of bilingual and immersive teaching, first at primary level and then at secondary level, justifying, from the 1980s onwards, the publication of literary works for young people. Albums, cartoons, and magazines for children have therefore made an appearance.

The not-for-profit publishing house *An Here* ('Planting'), for example, was established in 1983 to publish books, magazines and educational texts for young people. In 1994, under the authority of the French Education Ministry, the Centre for Educational Documentation set up *Ti Embann ar Skolioù* (*TES*, 'Publishing house for schools') which supplies educational resources and works to teachers of Breton. More generally, due to the wider availability of central government and local authority grants to support publication of Breton language works, literary output has both increased and diversified.

Moreover, the Breton publishing world has gradually become more established, and numerous new publishing houses have been created, although these tend to be run by very few employees and rely on the support of volunteers. In 2004, and then in 2012 (*Région Bretagne* 2012), the Region of Brittany authorities decided to strengthen the Breton language publishing sector, in parallel to developing the use of Breton in public life and promoting teaching for children and adults. This concerted regional policy has had some effect on the number of works in Breton published each year (Thomas 2014) and is one of the indicators of how literature in the Breton language has become embedded institutionally in terms of both securing its output and its reliance on local authorities and regional institutions. Through the grants they receive, publishing houses have had the opportunity to increase and diversify their publications at a reduced financial risk, as few works reach the profitability threshold despite an editorial system based primarily on voluntary input, especially from writers.

Goulc'han Kervella on his own, by merit of his varied activities, exemplifies the diverse nature of this output in terms of both literary genre and — with respect to himself specifically — target audiences. His published theatrical works, which are also staged, short stories and novels are written both for experienced readers who may appreciate works like his short story collections, *Lara* (first published in 1989) or *Dre ar prenestr* ('Through the Window', published in 2006) on the theme of mental illness, and *Boned glas ar pagan* ('The Pagan's Blue Woollen Cap'), for young adults and new learners of the Breton language. The recent release of the *Aes da lenn* ('Easy to Read') collection from *Keit vimp bev* ('As Long as We Live') shows that

there is a willingness to consider the gap between an audience's linguistic abilities and its expectations as readers. The publisher introduces the collection as follows: "*Aes da lenn*: a collection created for learners of the Breton language. Short stories with vocabulary and underlined mutations to facilitate reading".

This new collection, featuring writing by Goulc'han Kervella and Yann-Fanch Jacq, is intended, as the publisher's website indicates, for readers over 16 years of age and shows how some publishers are addressing the issue of linguistic competence to reach a wider audience. In addition to his diverse literary works, Goulc'han Kervella is known for his theatre-based activities. His plays are, of course, published, but they are also performed. This provides an opportunity to make literature in the Breton language accessible to very different circles such as the mostly non-Breton speaking general public, through major summertime events and festivals, such as *sons et lumières* shows; Breton speakers who may not read the language, through performances of his often humorous works such as *Ti ar medisin* ('The Doctor's Office'), which was staged a few years ago, and school groups, through stage plays for children like *Enez al legumaj* ('The Island of the Vegetables') and Breton language theatre workshops for children during school holidays. In the case of this author, the range of activities, that include different media and target audiences, demonstrates his desire to take into account all the ways Breton is currently used and the profiles and expectations of the different categories of speakers.

As the teaching of Breton in schools and at adult classes has developed, the potential readership has therefore changed not just in numbers but in its profile (age, social demographic, reader aspirations). As various polls conducted since the 1990s show, most Breton speakers do not read works in the language. For many of these speakers, reading Breton is an impossibility or relatively difficult. A survey on the languages of Brittany (*Les langues de Bretagne* 2018) included a question about the reading habits of Breton speakers. Responses<sup>13</sup> to the question "can you read in Breton?" spoke for themselves. Instead of replying with a simple "yes" or "no", people would provide more nuanced answers<sup>14</sup> ranging from "not at all" (39%), to "a little" (33%), "fairly well" (14%) or "very well" (14%).

These replies clearly demonstrate that outside the context of formal learning, the practice of reading remains a challenge for Breton speakers. We can also assume that formal learning is what enables speakers to see themselves as legitimate readers. Thus, 98% of 15 to 25-year-old Breton speakers, most of whom learned Breton in school, replied that they could read and write in the language. Beyond the reality of

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13 People replying to this question stated in the poll that they spoke Breton "fairly well" or "very well".

14 Responses to the question "can you write in Breton?" revealed that the practice is even less widespread: 64% of respondents said they could not write in Breton "at all".

practical and genuine competence, the profile of the potential readership is therefore clearly different from the profile of most speakers; and although this first group is smaller in size, this is where the publishing houses are focusing their efforts.

When it comes to this audience of potential readers, works in Breton are in direct competition with works in French. In the world of literature in Breton, there has therefore been a drive to produce Breton versions of what is being written in French or other languages — albeit on a different timescale — to reach these readers more easily. Breton translations of the first two books in the Harry Potter series by J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter ha maen ar furien*<sup>15</sup> and *Harry Potter ha kambr ar sekredoù*,<sup>16</sup> published in 2012 and 2017, are examples of this phenomenon.

Another is the introduction of a regional programme to translate literary classics from around the world. The Public Office for the Breton Language has distributed a list of books for translation into Breton and publishers and translators can apply to this body for grants to fund publication of these works. For example, through this programme, *Der Prozeß* by Kafka, *The Catcher in the Rye* by Sallinger and *Se questo è un uomo* by Primo Levi have been translated and published in Breton, as have *L'Étranger* by Camus, *Le Misanthrope* by Molière and *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi. It might be surprising to see French language works included in this list, but this reinforces the programme's objectives of raising literature in the Breton language to the same status as "all other" literary works, meeting the interests of a young audience that is literate in Breton, and creating a linguistic tool to overcome the diglossic situation still facing the majority of Breton speakers.

### Conclusion

This non-exhaustive overview of the Breton language socio-literary landscape between 1920 and 2020 shows that the link between literary output and sociolinguistic context should be analysed not just in quantitative terms but also by considering the profile of the readership in each period. The initial paradox can be explained in part as follows: if the volume of literary output in the Breton language is not correlated to changes in the size of its readership, it is because the readership in question is far from homogenous and, moreover, because literary output needs to be placed in a context of language promotion. For the current period, which is seeing a significant drive to institutionalise literature in Breton, students and learners need to be provided with works that match their level of linguistic competence but that also correspond to accessible literary standards in French.

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15 Mark Kerrain's translation of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* which was first published in English in 1997.

16 Mark Kerrain's translation of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* which was first published in English in 1998.

By considering the sociolinguistic aspect of this literary output, we can better understand how publishers and everyone else in the Breton publishing chain (Rouxel 2019) perceives a readership which is literate, or becoming literate, in Breton and can be encouraged to read works in this language.

Different means have been used to this aim. Even though some of them failed and ended up being abandoned, such as the publication of the online platform *Lenn*,<sup>17</sup> the purpose of which was to list all the books written in Breton, other projects have emerged, such as the organization of meetings between writers and their public or book clubs.

Numerous literary events such as book fairs are organised for adult (Thomas 2017) and young readers (Rouxel 2021), where they can find books written in Breton or meet Breton-speaking authors. Book clubs in Breton are organized in libraries, and juries of adult, teenage and child readers are set up to award literary prizes. Beyond these attempts to establish a form of sociability around literature in Breton, these different initiatives confirm the importance of literature as a central element in a more global project around the preservation and promotion of the Breton language.

Finally, one has to bear in mind that this socio-literary situation is not specific to the Breton language. Despite some historical, territorial and sociolinguistic specificities, the case of Breton-language literature is similar to that of the other regional languages in France, which are all experiencing a decline in their number of speakers. In the early 1980s, total-immersion and bilingual schools were established by militant movements who had comparable demands all over France and whose members occasionally joined together to increase the leverage at the national and regional levels. From a linguistic and literary perspective, it is undeniable that they have gone through similar phases.<sup>18</sup>

Despite some local differences, this is a national phenomenon, as shown by several factors (increased visibility for these languages, diversity in literary genres, including translations and literature aimed at a younger audience). The increased official recognition of regional literature, with the local authorities providing financial support for it, further confirms this trend.

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17 Launched by *Etablissement Public de Coopération Culturelle (EPCC) Livre et lecture en Bretagne* (see <https://www.livrelecturebretagne.fr/> [accessed 10 November 2022]).

18 For a comparison with the Basque linguistic situation, see Itçaina (2017).

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### Online resources

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**PRELIB** — *Projet de recherche en littérature de langue bretonne* [*The Database of Breton Language Literary Writers*] (<https://mshb.huma-num.fr/prelib/> [accessed 15/12/2021]).

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