**“A Mountain of Words”**

Children’s Literacy in Rural France, 1800−1950

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**Abstract:** This article presents an interdisciplinary approach to archival research on records produced by children that survive in family archives. It corresponds with the aims of education specialists who investigate patterns in language learning to understand how young minds absorb influences concurrently from familial, religious, and social circles across disparate cultural settings. Drawing upon the concept of syncretic literacy, the article interprets French archival evidence of children’s development of linguistic competency and sensitivity to language use in context. It argues for the need to advocate both the conservation of children’s archives and the design of educational programs that enable children to discover the role of archivists and the purposes of recordkeeping in society.

**Keywords**: archives, children, education, home, interdisciplinarity, languages, literacy, schools

Marguerite Barlier had feelings about her home. In November 1937, her schoolteacher asked the thirteen-year-old girl to express those feelings in words: “Describe the house that your family lives in and what memories you associate with it.”[1] Marguerite opened the lined notebook she used for essays with its black-and-white photograph of Montpellier’s theater hall, and the words “Belle France” on the green cover. She began by evoking the architecture and surroundings of a “quite large” house situated “at the back of the village” of Pébrac (Haute-Loire):

> The walls are unrendered and the façade is made only of grayish stones. At the entrance is a small stairway with three steps on each side. To the front of the house is the village square and behind it stand tall lime trees. The openings are large and sufficiently numerous so that the interior is filled with light. The lower windows are protected with iron rails. Only the openings at the back are fitted with shutters.[2]

Marguerite then wrote about the rooms, the objects found within them, and her emotional connection to these lived-in spaces:

> The house comprises a cellar, a kitchen, and two rooms as well as a spacious attic where there are many old things that are beautiful to see. I really love this house because I have always lived there. Under her old roof, she has sheltered me from the rain, the wind, the snow and all storms.[3]

As Marguerite penned this description, she knew her schoolteacher was already familiar with the house's external appearance. The Barliers' front door was about one hundred metres away from the building that served as both the mayor's office and, during the interwar years, as Pébrac's coeducational school (*l'école mixte*) for some twenty boys and girls of the village and surrounding hamlets.[4] Marguerite would also have chosen her words knowing that her parents, three younger brothers, and elder sister might read the pages of her notebook—if only to see what comments the schoolteacher attributed to the exercises there. She took care with her handwriting and for schoolwork normally received the feedback "AB" (shorthand for *assez bien*, "quite good") that the teacher recorded in the margins with corrections to grammar and spelling.

It is clear from the content of another of Marguerite's notebooks, for exercises in recitation, that as a pupil attending a rural French primary school in 1937 she had literary models for expressing emotions about houses. During lessons, the girls and boys encountered poetry and prose by French authors of the seventeenth to twentieth centuries. One of the poems Marguerite copied down was "La petite maison" by Charles Vildrac (1882−1971), which begins: "On the side of the mountain, half-way up, one catches sight of a little house all alone."[5] In this poem, Vildrac creates a dialogue with an interlocutor who is troubled by the view of the isolated, humble dwelling: "Ah! How can one live there? You exclaim with a shudder." But the poet expresses the attractions of living in such a place and pleasurably imagines the tranquility to be found in the little house protected by the mountain slope, "a secure and calm refuge."

In a similar way, Marguerite explained that she felt safe and protected from "all storms" beneath the "old roof" of her home in Pébrac.[6] Its façade of "grayish stones" blended with those of other peasant or artisan dwellings, barns, and stables in the village. The Barlier family were of modest socioeconomic standing. Marguerite's father, Félix Joseph Barlier (1889−1963), was a farmer (*cultivateur*) who raised five children with his wife Félicie Alphonsine (née Valeix 1897−1977). Near the Barliers' house grew the "tall lime trees" that were visible from the large windows letting light into the rooms. In mentioning these trees, Marguerite may have been inspired by the lines from Vildrac's poem that describe "a mulberry tree, almond trees, pines, oaks, a carpet of herbs and two young goats, behind the little house."[7] The girl is likely to have noticed some resemblance between the polycultural terrain around her home, in the forested valley of the Desges River, and the southerly environment depicted in "La petite maison." On the slope above the Barliers' house, farmers had cleared and terraced the smallholdings in order to practice viticulture as well as to graze livestock. Vildrac's poem evokes surroundings: "Where

people after their work, in the golden light of evening, drink the chilled wine made from their grapevines."[8]

By examining these few pages of Marguerite Barlier's notebooks, we begin to see that they have much to tell us about a child's reading and writing. As this article will demonstrate, the qualitative evidence that survives of children's learning in private family archives scattered across France is extremely valuable for researching "children's ability to pick and choose from their home, community and school languages and literacies to make sense of texts."[9] Scholars with interdisciplinary interests in cross-cultural education and multilingual communication have developed the concept of "syncretic literacy" to analyze children's ability to blend skills and approaches from different learning environments. At a subconscious level, an infant will synthesize forms of knowledge and psychological sensitivities to context while learning to read, write, and speak in more than one language.[10] By observing patterns in children's comprehension, academics seek to understand how young minds absorb influences concurrently from familial, religious, and social circles during development of linguistic competency.[11]

Specialists in early years education, sociology, languages, and linguistics privilege the child perspective over the adult perspective and apply qualitative and quantitative methods of investigation drawn from the social sciences. Indeed, children have been given the role of "researchers" in some studies, for example through conducting interviews with their peers.[12] This is quite different from the way that most historians, who rely on the surviving traces of the past, have pursued research on children in modern societies, including that of France.

Historians writing about French schooling in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have drawn upon published reports from ministries of public instruction as well as the materials produced by educational establishments.[13] They have analyzed the impacts of government

initiatives, such as the Guizot law of 1833 that required a primary school to be established in every commune and the Ferry Laws of 1880−1882 that introduced free, secular, and state-controlled primary education. Important works have been written about teachers based on the records of training colleges and religious orders.[14] Historians have also examined the roles that relatives played in a child's upbringing and the employment of governesses and male tutors (*précepteurs*) to give private lessons to children of wealthy families.[15] Among the poor, children's access to education was often compromised by problems such as the abandonment of newborns and the exploitation of child labor in industries.[16] Orphanages, domestic skills classes, and youth apprenticeships were set up by the state and private benefactors as part of French elites' aims for the "moralization of the masses."[17]

As a consequence of historians' research in the archives produced by successive governments and by institutions of all kinds, histories of child-related matters are mostly about what adults in France thought should be taught to children, how adults believed children should be cared for, and how adults went about designing and implementing educational and welfare programs. We know a lot, for instance, about the prescriptive messages in school textbooks that historians have used to unpack ideas about gender roles, civic responsibilities, and French patriotism.[18] But such evidence, based as it is on adults' pedagogical thinking and political biases, has its limitations. "What did boys and girls make of such texts?"[19]

Historians of childhood have scoured published autobiographies and memoirs. They have noted the problems of information provided retrospectively in such "ego-documents," especially concerning young people's sexuality.[20] Simultaneously, there has been regret about the "scarcity of reliable sources" produced by children themselves and acknowledgment of aspects "that we

can't know fully because of a lack of direct evidence."[21] In histories where childhood is presented from adult perspectives, "the voice of the child is more or less absent."[22]

While there are challenges in locating and accessing records, I believe that statements about a dearth of sources need to be revised. My intention is to deploy the caches of letters, drawings, diaries, school notebooks, photographs, and keepsakes of children that survive in family archives. Through better awareness of these types of sources, which exist in France and elsewhere, historians and scholars in other disciplines might collaborate to write new studies.[23] This article presents an interdisciplinary approach to using records produced by children in the past. It aims to promote scholarly discussion about childhood learning in different cultures and to highlight the vital contributions that professional archivists have to make to this discussion. It is through the educational programs developed by staff in public archival repositories that school pupils learn about what archives are and about the multiple purposes of keeping records.[24] Advocacy for such programs and for the conservation of children's archives is essential in order for fresh lines of inquiry to be developed by researchers in the future.

## Children Writing about Homes and Languages

Within the lined pages of Marguerite Barlier's notebooks, we find examples of a child's observation of her family's domestic environment, as well as her reflections upon how that environment connects with the world outside. My analysis of children's archival records adopts a broad definition of "education," one that encompasses learning that takes place in schools, homes, and local communities.[25] Of course, meanings of "childhood" and "home" change over time and vary from country to country.[26] Various studies have pointed out that, while research on homes, architecture, and material cultures of domesticity is flourishing within numerous

disciplines, “relatively little has been written on the place of children within the home, their position within the household and their lived experience of the home.”[27] Shelley Mallett notes the rarity of interdisciplinary work in this area, and argues that, because scholars feel more at ease operating within familiar methodologies and vocabularies, they end up “confining their discussion to interested researchers in their own discipline.”[28] As a historian, my approach to data-gathering and interpretation is different from the methods applied by social scientists and linguists, although from experience I find that the discipline of history combines with other disciplines in complementary ways. This article seeks to connect the empirical archival findings from nineteenth- and twentieth-century France with researchers’ creation of new knowledge and theoretical concepts in other academic fields.

The historical evidence analyzed here was produced by children of noble, bourgeois, and working-class backgrounds who lived the majority, or all, of the time in the countryside. While my dataset of archives from previous work on nobility provided a starting point, I have begun extending the research into the archives of middling and lower-class families in rural towns and villages.[29] The focus is on boys and girls in the age bracket from about five-years-old to mid-teens interacting with their siblings, peers, and people of older generations. Most of the children grew up in households where it was customary to have infants baptized in the Catholic Church; the article also features individuals of Protestant, Orthodox, and Jewish backgrounds, including children who were born and raised in France but whose parents and other relatives were not French. Experiences of learning typically connected with siblinghood are identified and, where possible, compared with experiences that were more typical of an only child.[30]

Drawing on archives from a population sample that is diverse, in terms of social class, religion, and geographic location, demonstrates the multiplicity of languages found in extant

documents about children's learning. The historiography on literacy and education in modern France has placed most emphasis on the embedding of the French language that accompanied the steady rise in the availability of primary schooling.[31] During the Renaissance, the monarchy had imposed French as the language of administration and law within the realm, and Cardinal de Richelieu's creation of the Académie française formalized royal support for a flourishing literature in French.[32] While urban populations, particularly in the north of France, had quite high levels of literacy by the late seventeenth century, illiteracy remained widespread in rural areas prior to the French Revolution. An edict of 14 January 1790 ordered the translation of revolutionary laws and decrees into regional dialects and local *patois*, but after France declared war on foreign powers, this accommodating policy on language soon changed. In October 1793, revolutionary leaders made it a requirement that primary education be given in French; they introduced the law of 2 Thermidor (20 July 1794) that all acts of a legal nature must be drawn up in French. These decrees were reversed a few months later, thereby avoiding a host of practical difficulties to their implementation. Abbé Grégoire estimated in a 1794 report to the Convention that 6 million Frenchmen could not understand French at all, while another 6 million had an imperfect command of spoken French because they principally spoke in other languages and dialects.[33]

The Ferry reforms of the 1880s again made French the obligatory language of instruction, building on efforts from five decades earlier to introduce children to written French via the textbook *L'Alphabet et premier livre de lecture* (1833): "School teachers and local elites who established schools had accepted the identity of the French language, national culture, and 'progress.'"[34] Between 1850 and 1877, the number of school pupils increased from 3.3 million to 4.7 million. Minimal literacy rates increased from 64 percent to 82 percent among young men,

and between 1872 and 1889 Larive and Fleury's textbook for learning formal French sold 12 million copies.[35]

That people learned to read, write, and speak in the French language was undoubtedly a central feature of the growth in literacy among the national population. This article, however, contributes to historical research that tells us how languages other than French—including various European languages, regional dialects, and local *patois*—were simultaneously being used for oral and written communication across France's rural territory.[36] Through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Bible and works of piety were read aloud at informal gatherings (*veillées*) in the home, just as novels, poetry, almanacs, and newspapers were read for personal or shared recreation in drawing rooms, libraries, clubs, cafés, workshops, and marketplaces. According to Peter McPhee, "reading aloud, translation into a local language, and public commentary became a characteristic of male leisure."[37] It is precisely such oral and aural experiences involving more than one language that are of interest to scholars whose research is focused upon children.

The period of analysis from 1800 to 1950 saw gradual evolution in the relationship between state policy and linguistic practices. It begins with the education law of 1 May 1802 and Napoleon's creation of an Imperial University (1808) that provided the institutional framework for education across France. It ends with the Deixonne Law (1951), which permitted schoolteachers to provide optional lessons of one to two hours per week in four minority languages: Breton, Basque, Catalan, and Occitan.[38]

## Communication with Parents, Grandparents, and Schoolteachers

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, respect for parents was inculcated in children, and this aspect of upbringing is mentioned in adult reflections about the nature of the parent–child bond across all social classes. Knowledge and sensitivity to language use—such as whether to address someone as *vous* or *tu* in French and to moments when silence was required—were essential for communicating a respectful attitude. In the homes of the rural working class, and among the well-to-do, children were supposed to remain silent during meals taken with adults: "As little ones, we did not have the right to speak at the table."[39] Clarisse Juranville's storybook for children, *Histoire de la bonne petite Nini* (1897), explained that because the heroine "is still very little her daddy and mummy allow her to say *toi*, but when she grows a bit older she will say *vous* to them, it is more respectful."[40] The comtesse Sophie de Ségur (1799−1874) insisted on the switch from *tutoiement* to *vousvoiement* with her daughter Olga, much to the girl's distress: "I cried hot tears when required to say the solemn *vous* rather than the affectionate *toi* so tenderly spoken."[41]

*Vousvoiement* also appears in children's letters to grandparents. When Corisande de Gramont (1920−1980) found a card in an English shop to post to her French grandfather, she informed him: "You [*vous*] are called Gran dad [*sic*] in English."[42] Together with the respect conveyed by the formal *vous*, children communicated deep affection for grandparents, and evidence that this love was reciprocated is found in terms such as "*petit amouret*."[43] The comtesse Isabelle de Paris's granddaughter Victoria initially did not like Isabelle, but around the age of ten Victoria's opinion of her grandmother changed and she declared in admiration: "Now I love you [*vous*] very very much."[44]

Parents were figures of authority, and they dispensed punishment for a child's misbehavior. In the nineteenth century, as in earlier times, opinions were divided on the

appropriateness of corporal beating, but adults of all social classes resorted to physical blows to "correct" willful, lazy, or naughty children. As one parenting advice manual of the 1880s put it: "A slap, a whipping, are in many cases the best and only method."[45] In the countryside, children were struck not only with the hands but also with sticks, branches, wet rags, and clumps of nettles. Words also served a disciplining purpose. One mother sollicited help from the policeman in a village, who scolded a youngster with the threat "you will eat the legs of flies and locusts."[46] Elaine Greffulhe (1882−1958) had to make amends for displeasing her mother and wrote out multiple times the line "I did not do what Mummy told me to do."[47] Marguerite de Vogüé, born in 1920, grew up in a household where her father was often away traveling. Her perception was that "Daddy and Mummy were not two people, but only one . . . '*Papamaman*' was the sovereign and infallible being who presided over the harmony of my universe."[48]

Compared with the "natural" authority of parents, which was rarely questioned, the authority of teachers in rural schools was open to scrutiny; they had a more complex task to maintain discipline.[49] During the nineteenth century, teaching roles were often held by peasants or artisans; many of these lay individuals fulfilled other roles concurrently, such as secretary to the mayor. There were also teachers who belonged to religious orders and pious single women known as *béates* who lived and taught in villages.[50] Although corporal punishment was eventually forbidden in state-run teaching establishments, its clandestine practice continued into the twentieth century. Teachers distributed beatings on the heads or on the fingers of pupils by means of a wooden ruler or another implement.[51]

From the 1880s, French was the required language of instruction in schools so what were the implications for children who spoke regional dialects and *patois*? Researchers stress that the maintenance of a minority language relies on the use of that language at home to encourage

intergenerational transmission. A study in 2002 suggested that bilingual children "find that whilst in school they are often required to keep the two cultures, home and school, and their corresponding literacies firmly apart."[52] Do records from France indicate a marked separation between the cultures of home and school?

This is a complex question to answer and one for which we might first consider the situation of the French language. Using a range of evidence from the nineteenth century, François Furet and Jacques Ozouf tested hypotheses about people's knowledge of French on the one hand and about "the spectacular educational backwardness in certain non-French-speaking regions" on the other.[53] Military records and marriage certificates made it possible to quantify and analyze statistically over time the numbers of people able to sign their name. School inspectors' reports provided insights to causes of illiteracy and resistance to learning formal French. In the department of Morbihan, for example, statistics revealed "the use of Breton in everday life in a canton went hand in hand with a low, or very low, rate of literacy."[54] An 1863 survey showed that on a national scale "many school teachers used both dialect and French to make themselves understood by their pupils."[55]

Jean François Chanet's study in 1985 investigated language use in classrooms of twentieth-century France. Based on the responses in one hundred questionnaires completed by teachers, it appeared that "the parents of pupils, far from reproaching teachers for inculcating the French language in children, most often encouraged it."[56] At the same time, the study found that plenty of teachers listened and replied to children in *patois*, for which they explained the pedagogical necessity and saw no reason to punish a child for using local idioms. Among the one hundred repondents, 86.6 percent of male teachers were bilingual while 54.1 percent of female teachers were bilingual—these were people who had been schooled before World War II.

Acceptance of bilingual communication, which had been expressed by teachers combining French language and *patois* in the classroom around 1900, was sustained within the profession through subsequent decades. The reality of the practice was admitted by Édouard Daladier, Minister for Public Instruction in 1926, when he acknowledged the presence in French schools of a large number of "*patoisants*." A ministerial circular of October 1940 gave teachers flexibility to choose their linguistic approach.[57]

Ethnographic research on the relationship between rural homes and rural schools in twentieth-century France reveals plenty of overlapping activities; pupils spent some time tidying the classroom, filling inkwells, carrying in firewood, lighting the stove, and cleaning outhouses, just as they were expected to help with housework and farm labor. In Françoise Zonabend's view, "the school was in a real sense an extension of the home."[58] Deborah Reed-Danahay reached a contrasting conclusion, namely, that children had to "straddle two systems of behavior and meaning: those of the school and overall education system, and those of their families and community." While the former system prioritized the values of "competition and individual accomplishment," the latter gave weight to values of "co-operation and the quality of being simple."[59]

**Experiencing Modern European Languages**

People of all social backgrounds in the France of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries experienced, if not always comprehended, more than one language as listeners, speakers, writers, and readers—diversity rather than French monolingualism was the norm. Geographic location as well as class, age, profession, place of birth, and religion influenced *how* and *why* individuals participated in bilingual or multilingual contexts, as well as their discomfort or ease in doing

so.[60] An investigation of middle- and upper-class practices in homes provides a point of entry into attitudes with regard to modern European languages.

Middle-class commentators of the nineteenth century expressed anxiety about the potential for servants using dialects or foreign languages to exert a harmful influence on children's learning. A guide for bourgeois mothers published in 1883 warned:

> Foreign maids, like those native to France, have accents, vicious pronunciations and use vulgar, rude words as well as ungrammatical phrases. Imagine a child who would learn French from a woman of Provence or Alsace! Or from a woman of Auvergne, and who would subsequently repeat in the maid's manner—*Fouchtra! . . . j'avons ben faim à c'te heure!*[61]

Bourgeois mothers, however, did not necessarily fulfill the pedagogical role that proponents of the *mère-éducatrice* model laid out for them; the fact that mothers delegated the responsibility to impart first lesssons was harshly criticized.[62] There was a demand for governesses in middle-class homes, and from the end of the nineteenth century increasing numbers of young women, including those from humble rural backgrounds, studied for the *brevet de capacité*, a certificate for teaching at the primary level.[63] A Parisian bourgeoise, Madame Daudet, described the scene in a placement office for applicants seeking a position as governess, which was an alternative to becoming a school *institutrice*. Widows and unmarried daughters without dowry, some from poor families and others who had fallen on hard times, hoped to eke out a living from jobs for which they were patchily qualified or that had already

broken their morale through loneliness and fatigue. English, German, Swiss, and French workers shared a common refrain of rootlessness and low self-esteem.[64]

Concern from middle-class authors about the infiltration of “foreign” influences into the French language reflects certain assumptions about bourgeois superiority over the working class and about “national interest” resting on what Pierre Achard has dubbed the “monolingual ideal.”[65] The assumptions show the longstanding influence of rhetoric dating from 1793−1794, when Bertrand Barère de Vieuzac fulminated against foreign “enemy” tongues and referred to the “barbaric jargon” and “rude idioms” of regional dialects in his report to the Committee of Public Safety.[66] Such rhetoric was not confined to France, for in Germany some commentators remarked upon the dangers of having the German language “corrupted” by exposure to the French language.[67] But the economic and practical realities were such that linguistic heterogeneity was part of everyday life. Moreover, evidence from family archives tends to contradict the picture of French resistance to “foreign” influences.

Julian Pitt-Rivers observed of France that people involved in “the industry and commerce of the nineteenth century grew up speaking French, while agriculture remained the sphere of *patois*.”[68] This dichotomous portrayal is too simplistic. *Patois* as a word has etymological links with rurality, according to linguists, but as a form of speech was not strictly confined to the world of agriculture.[69] Moreover, plenty of bourgeois people in trade, manufacture, and professions such as law and medicine grew up speaking, reading, and writing not only in French but also in other European languages. Alsace is a region where the effects can be seen acutely because of its location on the Franco-German border and the religious mix in the Alsatian population. In late-eighteenth-century Alsace, there were some 450,000 Catholics, 220,000 Protestants (Anabaptists, Lutherans, and Calvinists), and 20,000 Jews. Although the upper

classes adopted French manners and speech in the 1700s, nearly all native Alsatians grew up speaking a Swabian German dialect, and in rural areas French was hardly known. This was a region in which teachers born in the first decade of the twentieth century and schooled in the 1920s had to learn French on their own, for they were taught German in school and spoke Alsatian with friends at school.[70]

The Beer family archive contains the papers produced by Guillaume Beer (1736−1809), a Lutheran bourgeois of German origin from Grünstadt near Mannheim, who was ennobled in 1774 by Christian IV, duc de Deux Ponts. The French particle "*de*" was added to the surname Beer at the point of ennoblement and appears in the names of Guillaume's two sons, Louis de Beer (1777−1823) and his brother Charles. Guillaume corresponded in the German language with his bourgeois parents. He married a bourgeoise, Louise-Philippine Chormann, who inherited the fortune of her aunt, Louise-Albertine Lieberich; the couple settled in the town of Ribeauvillé, Alsace. Guillaume's son Louis used the German language at home as well as during studies at boarding school in Colmar and then at the University of Heidelberg. But Louis's command of French as a second language was the reason his father Guillaume sent him to Paris in 1797 to attend to the family's business affairs in the mining industry. Louis quickly gained employment in the service of the ambassador Alquier, whom he accompanied to Madrid in 1800 then to Naples. During the Bourbon Restoration, Louis de Beer returned to Ribeauvillé, where he served on the municipal council until 1822.[71]

Owing to its mix of personal correspondence, business records, and legal documents, the Beer family archive shows usage of German and French languages by various relatives, as well as the particular contexts in which German or French was needed. For example, all of the marriage contracts and wills relating the Lieberich succession are in German, but Louis de Beer

grew up reading, writing, and speaking German and French, languages that he deployed throughout his career.

Researchers use the term "situated knowledge" to refer to such communication skills and abilities, including sensitivity to social context. According to Leena Robertson, "all children need to learn, negotiate and mediate school and class-specific rules, together with social roles, which are often very implicit."[72] A boy learning three languages concurrently "knows how these languages and literacies are all important to him, in their own very different ways, and that no one practice can replace another and fulfil its role in his life."[73] "Situated knowledge," usually studied in relation to reading, is a component of "syncretic literacy." It develops as a result of experiences when people encounter and grow familiar with communication in more than one language.

An example for the late nineteenth century comes from archival sources about a middle-class girl taught by a governess in the 1870s. Augustine Bulteau (1860−1922) was a bourgeoise from the department of Nord, whose family wealth was built on textile manufacturing. Augustine developed a close bond with her governess, Wilhelmina (Mina) Schwartz, whose father originated from the State of Württemberg in southwest Germany. Augustine expressed her love to Mina by using nicknames in French such as "my beloved angel" or "my old duck" and by signing her letters "your tender baby."[74] Mina reciprocated this love in a maternal way, referring to Augustine as "my *fifille*" and "my dear good little child."[75] Augustine learned German, French, and English from Mina Schwartz and Italian from the Greek-born poet Alexandre Parodi—all of these languages were useful to her in adulthood as a seasonal resident in Venice and for correspondence with friends.[76] Augustine became a successful novelist and journalist, whose works were mostly written in French and published in France. Her book *The English Soul*

was translated into English and published in London; it reads as a love letter to England and to the narrator's "thought-language" of childhood: "I quarrelled, I made up, I played with my dolls, in English. I sang English songs. The first book I remember to have read was an English book."[77]

The private education of the bourgeoise Augustine Bulteau occurred on the cusp of major reform by the French state with the opening of public secondary schools for girls in 1880. By 1886, there were sixteen *lycées*, nineteen *collèges,* and seventy-six courses catering in total to about ten thousand girls.[78] The multilingual experiences of Augustine Bulteau achieved learning outcomes that for centuries had been well embedded in aristocratic experience.[79]

Nobles preferred to hire Italian wet-nurses and English or German nannies for their offspring, hence the native languages and dialects of these women were part of the linguistic mix to which babies and toddlers were exposed. The presence of French and foreign staff in aristocratic households gave rise to family jokes about slips of the tongue or innocent linguistic errors made among children and servants: "At a young age children use language as a resource for thinking about language itself," and for this reason "the language of children's jokes about language is particularly worth considering for what it reveals about children's interest in reflecting on language."[80]

Writing from Pau in April 1886, the princesse Cécile de Béarn rejoiced with her eldest son, Henri, about the approaching Easter holidays, when he was to return home from the college in which he was a boarder:

> You will no longer find Lucy or Mary here. A lot of things did not suit me and I had to dismiss them. They left last Monday, the two new ones who replace them come directly from Lourdes. The first is named Teresa, the second is named Kate but Odon [Henri's

> younger brother] finds it simpler and more convenient to call her *Cake*, which makes the others laugh.[81]

Jokes also circulated among adults about the errors made by foreign-born individuals learning French, such as American wives of French aristocrats who (like servants) were deemed not to possess the sophistication of the French upper class.[82] Nobles who possessed foreign patronymns and *titres étrangers*, however, tended to have a more nuanced perspective on linguistic mistakes than those who regarded themselves as "purely French." In the home of her Russian noble grandparents, the Rostopchine, Olga recalled:

> My grandfather's surname, being very difficult to pronounce by French mouths, never ceased to be cruelly mangled by the servants, who were stunned to have to announce it at receptions. It was thus that one evening the Russian general saw himself proclaimed "*Prince de la Chine*"! Another referred to him under the name "*Comte rosse ton chien*"! My grandfather was the first to laugh at these linguistic lapses (*lapsus linguae*).[83]

The existence of a variety of modern European languages in nobles' family archives reflects not only migration and demand in the French labor market for servants and governesses, but also marriages between upper-class spouses of different nationalities who communicated with their children and grandchildren in a language other than French. The country in which a family archive is located will not necessarily correspond to the nationality or nationalities of all family members, or even the country where they spent most of their lives.[84]

Prior to marriage, Joséphine Comarmond (1782−1840) lived with her parents and siblings in the department of Ardèche. She was the eldest of seven children (the youngest child was born in 1800). Owing to her mother's poor health, Joséphine had primary caring responsibilities for her four younger brothers and two younger sisters. She kept a personal diary for 1805−1809 and seems to have been learning Italian at the time because Italian words appear in some of the diary entries. Joséphine's diary contains dried flowers and herbs and leaves pasted onto the pages, and enclosed within the diary are pencil drawings and stencils, each of which is about the size of a postage stamp. It appears from Joséphine's writings that the little bouquets and associated creations were made by her with help from her siblings. The seven Comarmond children were constantly in each other's company for lessons and play.[85]

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

Figure 1: Diary with pressed dried flowers. © Archives départementales du Rhône et de la métropole de Lyon, AD69 11J/79.

In 1917, while holidaying in the department of Calvados, Jeannette d'Arenberg wrote letters in the English language to her French uncle from the Grand Hôtel in Houlgate:[86] "I had to leave Uriage because the food was so bad that it made me ill, so I have come here alone with my Miss. Here the food is good and I love being at the seaside." At the age of nine, Jeannette sent a photograph of herself building sandcastles: "I am very happy here playing on the sands with lots of little children. I had a party with twenty-two children on my birthday."[87]

Parents corresponded with other parents about governesses and tutors. In 1912, Frédéric de Metz Noblat received a letter from his wife, Madeleine, in the department of Meurthe-et-Moselle about a thirty-four-year-old Protestant governess, Maud Harris, who was qualified to

teach English, French, music, and drawing: "[She] seems quite remarkable to me. What do you think?"[88] Madeleine had written to Mrs. Marshall in Somerset, who employed Maud and provided a glowing reference in English: "[Miss Harris] is most conscientious and has been a very good influence upon my children."[89] Bills and receipts provide information on the costs of private tuition of children and purchases such as books and music scores. As a widowed single parent during World War I, the comtesse Dondel de Kergonano funded her son Alain's private lessons in English, French, piano, drawing, mathematics, and accounting.[90]

Governesses and tutors employed on a private basis strove to impose their authority, but sometimes fell victim to naughty pranks. Children observed and like to mimic these adults' unconscious tics and habits of speech. Such "linguistic play" among boys and girls was a way to create meaning in the "voice-filled landscape" of their everyday lives.[91] "Mademoiselle Moniot rolled her 'r's while singing which made [us] laugh"; "Monsieur Debierre had a chronic cold [and] every one of his phrases was punctuated with coughs and sneezes."[92] Of course, there were also tutors who inspired praise. Jean-Baptise de Montgrand, who was orphaned at the age of thirteen, wrote admiringly of the abbé Jourdan, whose "mind was so cultivated, his knowledge so extensive [that] in spite of my laziness, I benefited from his lessons."[93]

**Ancient Languages**

Latin and Greek formed a core part of boys' education in nineteenth-century France for those who attended *collèges* and *lycées*. Success in learning ancient languages, which was tested in the *baccalauréat* examination, was a prerequisite for tertiary study. The prestige in which Latin was held in France originated in the Middle Ages, when this language was essential training for

church service. Latin was the basis of the elementary school curriculum in the Middle Ages for children between the ages of seven and twelve. Then pupils moved on to grammar school, where "they began to study Latin seriously. The aim was to achieve written and oral fluency in this language, and reading and comprehension of classical and Christian texts."[94]

Up until 1829, secondary schools for boys had a "classical" curriculum founded on the teaching of the humanities through Latin and Greek texts. From the end of the Bourbon Restoration, a special curriculum stream based on sciences, modern languages, and the theory of commerce was introduced; by 1876, some 22,804 pupils followed this stream, which was reformed in 1890. In 1902, the "modern" secondary education program was launched that had four options, all of which were deemed to be of equivalent standing. Defenders of the "classical" curriculum fought a rearguard battle against promotion of the "modern" program, arguing that the abandonment of Latin would bring about "the irreversible decline of France."[95]

School and college notebooks and certificates provide evidence of boys' progress in ancient languages and other subjects.[96] Letters to family members show that entering *collèges* and *lycées* could be a difficult transition for boys, but parents were advised that for male offspring "instruction outside the home is indispensable."[97] Louis de Vogüé thrived as a boarder at the Collège Stanislas, "loved the Arts, took pleasure in composing Latin verses, and knew by heart whole pages of Virgil"[98] The purposes of learning Latin were no longer conceived as primarily for church service, as in the Middle Ages. But the place of the Latin language within the culture of the Christian Church remained significant in the nineteenth century, as we can see from two angles: first in relation to gender and second in relation to Christian denominations.[99]

France's schooling system did not provide Latin lessons for girls in the nineteenth century. As a result, extremely few women went to university; official figures in 1882 showed

that only 106 females had achieved the *baccalauréat*, *licence*, or doctoral degrees. From the first decade of the twentieth century, however, some Catholic private schools started to prepare girls for the classical *baccalauréat*, which was perceived by staff in the public schools as a competitive threat to the attractiveness of their programs. Firsthand accounts of French girls learning Latin through private tuition are scarce but not entirely absent for the nineteenth century. In the France of the Second Empire, sixteen-year-old Anne de Mortemart requested lessons in Latin that were provided by a retired teacher, Monsieur Chapuisy, a friend of her grandfathers. Julie-Victoire Daubié, granddaughter of a *maître-des-forges* in the Vosges, studied Latin and Greek at home with her elder brother, who was a priest. In 1924, the Ministry for Public Instruction decreed that girls studying in secondary schools would have the option of pursuing the program that included Latin and that led to the *baccalauréat* examination.[100]

In discreet instances, then, the Catholic Church was teaching some girls and young women Latin, even if it was not promoting the idea of females becoming experts in ancient languages. Within the Foresta family, there was a tradition of distinguished service to the Catholic Church, and these nobles' archives allow for comparison of records relating to the schooling of male and female children across several generations. Marie-Thérèse de Foresta, who was taught by nuns at Sacré Coeur in Marseille during the 1870s, received religious instruction plus lessons in reading, writing, arithmetic, French grammar, handwriting, history, geography, needlework, and piano (there is no mention of Latin). The schoolwork produced by Maxence de Foresta, who began boarding at the École Saint Joseph in Avignon in 1900, shows his progress in Greek and Latin, and he also took a course in astrology.[101]

Noble parents stressed the necessity of honing linguistic skills, especially to their sons for future career paths. Competitiveness among siblings and classmates was a perfect vehicle for

parents to motivate offspring. When children wrote about their progress, therefore, the effort to aquire the knowledge was emphasized and good results were discussed with pride.

In the spring of 1879, from the department of Seine-Maritime, Arsieu de Galard, comte de Béarn, described to his elder brother Gaston how his day was filled with lessons in German, Latin, history, geography, and mathematics. He ached for recognition of his efforts from Gaston, addressing him as "Sire Your Majesty" to whom he owed homage as "a very obedient servant": "I follow all your advice and hope one day to prove myself worthy of my father and of you . . . I am studying seriously."[102] The comte de Béarn, like many European male nobles, went on to have a career in diplomacy. Arsieu's example of fluency in languages across various contexts was useful to his sister-in-law, the princesse Cécile de Béarn (Gaston's wife), when she was urging her eldest son, Henri, to work hard at mastering Latin in the late 1880s. Cécile gave news to Henri of a lunch with Arsieu, who in one week had traveled from Berlin to Vienna then to Saint Petersburg, Paris, and Lourdes, before returning home to his estate in Normandy: "[Arsieu] was very happy in all these travels to know English and German which he used often, and you will see for yourself later on how useful it is to know many languages."[103] The mother's prediction to her son proved correct, for Henri, like his uncle, became a member of the French diplomatic service.

Cécile, who was a devout Catholic, also had a religious setting in mind when she wrote to Henri about learning Latin: "You will be able to understand the responses you give at Mass instead of simply repeating words like a parrot."[104] From the Middle Ages, Latin had occupied an elevated position in the traditions of Christian faith among Catholics, notably as a language that was read, written, and spoken by priests and found in printed missels for the sacrament of the Eucharist. In France, the impetus for the translation of Christian texts from Latin to French

was partly driven by the growth of the Reformed Church and the centrality of the Bible in Protestant worship. The word "Protestant," derived from Latin, was coined in 1529; together with cognate terms, it appeared widely in French-language texts from the seventeenth century. The word "Huguenot," of Germanic origin (*Eidgenossen*), was applied from 1560 to describe the Reformed movement as a political force.[105]

According to Joan-Lluís Marfany, "French was from the beginning the language of Protestantism in Languedoc as in Gascony, Bearn and Lower Navarre."[106] In the southwest of France, the catechisms used by Catholics and Protestants were published in French but also in Occitan to assist priests and pastors to impart knowledge about the sacraments to locals. Translations of other Christian texts into a regional dialect were evident from the sixteenth century, for example Protestants published editions of the Psalms in Occitan and Gascon.[107]

In the department of Pyrénées-Atlantiques, the Protestant Forcade family from Orthez included men who exercised the professions of merchant tanners and commercial middlemen during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This was a region where various dialects (Gascon, Béarnais, and Basque) were used in oral communication as well as French—for example, Gascon was used in some churches for prayers and hymns and the priest delivered the sermon in *patois*.[108] Henry Forcade (1821–1894) married Louise Pourchin, daughter of a landowner in the department of Landes. Louise's grandfather Jean Larrouy (1763–1852) had served as a tax inspector and married Mélanie Richaud Préville (1784–1868). Henry Forcade and his wife Louise had two daughters, Suzanne and Hélène, and a son Louis, with whom they communicated in French. From 1830, the Forcade family lived at the château d'Arance and socialized within a largely Protestant network of well-to-do families in the Pyrénées-Atlantiques and neighboring departments.[109]

The transmission of Protestant traditions to children was helped by sociability and endogamous marriage among Protestants. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, interfaith marriages between Protestants and Catholics were becoming more common. In the department of Côtes-d'Armor, the American woman Helen Seton, wife of Auguste de Goyon, duc de Feltre, received kind letters in French from the Catholic priest in the parish of Noyal in 1935. The priest wrote in French to Helen, and he published the news of her son's birth in French in the parish bulletin. But in speaking with his parishioners, in a "more intimate manner" after Mass, it is possible that the priest used some Breton dialect or *patois* to chat about Helen's baby, heir to the ducal title that Napoleon had originally bestowed upon the son of an Irishman.[110]

Judaic traditions were also protected by sociability and endogamous marriage among Jews—although marital unions of Jews and Catholics were not uncommon within the upper class by the late 1800s.[111] The Camondo family, whose members were Sephardic Jews, provides classic examples of assimilation to French culture on the one hand and the protection of Judaic customs on the other. In 1891, the comte Moïse de Camondo (1860−1935) wed Irène Cahen d'Anvers (1872−1963) in a ceremony conducted by the grand rabbi, Dreyfuss. Moïse's father Nissim de Camondo (1830−1889) had been a cofounder of the Société des études juives and council member for the Consistoire and Alliance israélite universelle. Moïse and his cousin Isaac both learned Hebrew from the rabbi Élie-Aristide Astruc and celebrated their religious maturity in the Jewish tradition of *bar mitzvah*. Moïse and his wife Irène had two children, Nissim (1892−1917) and Béatrice (1894−1944), who received their religious instruction from the rabbi Debré.[112]

For the Camondo cousins, Moïse and Isaac, learning Hebrew was vital to their identity and practice of faith as Jews. "Part of the process of learning to read . . . includes learning to

belong to the 'reading club' . . . In becoming competent readers all young learners require socio-cultural knowledge which enables them to join the 'club', learn its explicit and implicit rules and mediate its values."[113] Moïse's commitment to the intergenerational transmission of Judaic traditions can be seen not only in his decisions as a father about the private tuition of his own children who were educated by a rabbi, but also in his charitable support of schools. Moïse helped Jewish migrant families from Istanbul settle in Europe and personally signed letters of recommendation for impoverished Jewish children to be admitted to the school run by the Alliance israélite universelle.[114]

Catholic children preparing for First Communion were given reading matter to encourage Christian piety; Père Lacordaire advised that a good book is for the virtuous man a living being with whom he converses.[115] Elaine Greffulhe received on the occasion of her First Communion a five-volume set of *Prières*, a white leather-bound copy of *Journée du chrétien*, a brown leather-bound copy of *La Vie des saints*, and a blue leather-bound copy of *Pensées morales et chrétiennes*.[116] The genre of advice manuals directed at girls was already well established prior to the early nineteenth century, when books appeared written by Madame Campan, Madame de Rémusat, and Madame Necker de Saussure.[117] In the Third Republic, one of the most successful authors in this genre was Clarisse Juranville, who made reading and writing one of her favorite themes. Juranville's *Manuel d'éducation morale et d'instruction* (1883) included essay topics suitable for girls to help *institutrices* in need of inspiration.[118]

**Creative Writing and Drawing**

Creative writing and drawing not only formed part of children's schoolwork, but were also sources of distraction and enterprise in playtime. Mechtilde Reverchon gave an exquisite red

pencil drawing of a tree to her aunt Marie-Joséphine de Vornberg on 19 March 1820.[119] Twenty-five poems written by Elaine Greffulhe between the ages of five and seven in the 1880s were brought together to form a collection, *Le Livre d'ambre*, printed on Japanese paper.[120] In January 1919, Louise de L'Aigle received a child's typewriter as a New Year's gift from her uncle that provided her "enormous fun." Louise's sister, Henriette, received "a pretty glass-fronted bookcase" as an Easter present from the same uncle.[121] In the early 1930s, the Vogüé sisters edited a monthly publication entitled *Journal de Malouhen.* It featured a cartoon on the cover and a serialized "novel" both by Marguerite, a science article by Louise, who was good at math, and "funny stories" by Henriette.[122]

Although some youth were able to experiment with typewriters in the early 1900s, there remained a strong emphasis in children's education on "perfecting" the formation of alphabetic letters written by hand. "Art d'Écrire," conserved among the papers of the marquis Marie-Augustin René de Sarcus, shows an elegant woman seated at her writing table with a quill pen in the fashion of an eighteenth-century aristocrat.[123] It is conceivable that the marquis de Sarcus or his wife Louis-Mélanie-Marie de Rioult de Neuville showed this image to their daughter, Jeanne-Marie-Joséphe-Germaine de Sarcus, who was born in 1881. Children attending rural schools practiced forming words in different sizes to achieve neat, legible handwriting, as is apparent in the Barlier children's notebooks from the 1930s and 1940s. Using a steel-tipped pen with purple ink, René Barlier tried many times with "Dantzig" but his efforts at the letter "z" were judged harshly by the teacher.

INSERT FIGURES 2 AND 3 HERE

Figure 2: Art d'Écrire. © Archives départementales de la Seine-Maritime AD76 116J/39.

Figure 3: René Barlier, notebook, 1947. © Elizabeth C. Macknight.

During the first decades of the twentieth century, schoolteachers were encouraged to integrate exercises about locality and regions into lessons. A ministerial circular of 1911 suggested creating space in the curriculum for local history and local geography. To stimulate regional consciousness in children, the school inspector Étienne Joucla coauthored with Professor Raymond Cortat the manual *Lectures d'Auvergne* (1929). Pierre de Nolhac's preface praised the idea of bringing together "the study of the national language with texts that can simultaneously connect youth with the province of their birth."[124] Manuals for other regions followed to make up the series *Collection des Lectures régionales*. In a school notebook for 1945−1946, René Barlier drew detailed colorful maps in learning about rivers and regions in France.[125]

Schoolwork produced by children reflects the way, as one teacher put it, "everything commenced with the local milieu."[126] We can see this in Marguerite Barlier's essays from the 1930s, which provide glimpses of the child's familiarity with the speech and gestures of villagers. On 8 February 1938, Marguerite described women washing clothes and linen on the banks of the Desges River: "They chat among themselves while working vigourously." On 8 March 1938, she recounted a trip to the market with her father (a farmer) and bargaining for the purchase of "a beautiful russet cow." On 15 March 1938, when invited to describe the work of a local artisan whose work interested her, she chose a blacksmith laboring over a red-hot iron bar: "He struck it with hammer blows that resonated and made sparks fly."[127]

Marguerite's essays are written in the French language for grading by her schoolteacher, but the rural activities that feature within them would most likely have been conducted through

oral communication in *patois* before World War II (especially interactions in the marketplace or fairground).[128] The older generation of villagers spoke *patois*, which children and grandchildren could understand. Artisans in the middle of the twentieth century spoke either in French or in *patois*, depending on the client. Similarly for bilingual farmers, there were "fairly clearly defined contexts" for speaking one language or the other, but "the language for the matters which they value and the contexts where they amuse themselves, is *patois*."[129]

**Pictures in Books and Picturing Life**

Geoff Williams argues that "the texts children speak, write and read are not just expressions of engagement with immediate experiences. Frequently, these texts are also linguistic reflections on that experience."[130] Through linguistic and semiotic work on the content of picture books, Williams and others explore "relations between language and image" to better understand the impact of texts on children "beyond the obvious advantages of entertainment and reading pleasure." Textual analyses "provide a basis for rethinking the kinds of activity around a text which young children are required to complete."[131]

Between the world wars, a typical reading manual was *Le Livre unique de français* by Lucien Dumas (1928), which included extracts from well-known authors. Much modern French fiction and poetry featured a child at the center of the story, as authors experimented with different ways of portraying youthful heroes or victims.[132] *Jeux d'Enfants* (1909) has sections about playing with a doll, a ball, a kite, a butterfly net, and a rocking horse, plus a conversation between two little boys planning to sling stones at glass bottles![133] *Les bons petits enfants* (1862) contains a moral tale about distinguishing between good and evil games. It begins with the

"terrible song" about a June bug: "If you don't fly away, we will cut off your arms with the big knife of the old father Nicolas." Readers were advised not to kill garden insects or to torture birds because "good games bring harm to nobody."[134]

In the 1930s, Raymond Barlier's observation of a June bug's lifecycle appears as a pencil-and-ink sketch in his "Sciences" notebook with his sketches of plant roots and tree leaves. Simone Barlier made color pencil drawings to accompany the poems she copied down in her "Recitations" notebook. For example, on 1 December 1936, Simone illustrated the poem "La basse-cour" by Philéas Lebesgue (1869−1958) with drawings of a pigeon, a turkey, a rooster, and a duck.[135]

INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE

Figure 4: Simone Barlier, "Recitations" notebook, 1936. © Elizabeth C. Macknight.

Hunting and shooting feature as "adventure" in children's books, where the fictional character of the hunter is usually a man.[136] Girls and boys from all social classes who lived in the countryside had direct experience of hunting, as their letters and creative writings attest. Along the corridors of châteaux "glass-fronted cabinets contained stuffed birds and animals. From the vestibule, a very particular perfume of tobacco and camphor, guns, saddlebags revealed the foremost tastes of the inhabitants."[137] Children of the grooms, valets, cooks and stablehands employed by châteaux owners saw, smelled, and heard the world of the hunt, as did the children of poachers who killed game illegally on and around country estates.[138]

Girls and boys loaded guns and were taught how to fire accurately. "There were no cartridges then [in the 1860s]; one carried cornets of lead shot (*poires à poudre du plomb*) and old paper. It was necessary to wad the charge with a ramrod . . . If one made a mistake by

overloading a charge, the gun would go off."[139] In 1937, twelve-year-old Raymond Barlier described more modern equipment in a composition for vocabulary practice: "The hunter carries his gun in a shoulder strap, he has a haversack for transporting the kill, a cartridge belt with ammunition, a hunting permit. . . . He hides, he lies in wait, he comes back empty-handed. The dog picks up the scent, starts a hare, falls to a stop, comes back exhausted, panting."[140] Béatrice de Camondo hunted with her father Moïse on their country estate in the department of Oise. Béatrice's passion for the hunt informed her creative writings and even mathematics exercises: "An amateur huntsman has two guards who are each paid 1,200 francs, he makes an annual payment of 5,000 francs to local residents for damage caused by his game . . . a round of one hundred catridges cost 20 francs, how much will each item shot during the hunting season be worth?[141]

Hunting was one of many types of occasions for interactions between châteaux inhabitants and villagers, as had been the case since the Middle Ages.[142] Annual religious festivals, secular events like Carnival, church ceremonies, and market days brought people of different backgrounds together. On Sunday mornings, at the estate of Bois-Boudran during the 1860s, servants attended a first Mass with the Greffulhe family in a private chapel, then there was a second Mass in the parish church with the local community, and after lunch the Greffulhe children played with girls from the village.[143] According to Iona Opie and Peter Opie, "the scraps of lore which children learn from each other are at once more real, more immediately serviceable, and more vastly entertaining to them than anything which they learn from grown-ups." Passwords, sayings, verses, lucky keepsakes, charms and omens that influence children's decisions and behaviors indicate that "ancient apprehensions, even if only half believed in, continue to infiltrate their minds." Such beliefs "children absorb through going about with each

other, and consequently mostly involve happenings out-of-doors."[144] Archival evidence confirms this sharing of "scraps of lore" and the inventive elements of make-believe games. All kinds of objects were accorded "life stories," pets and farm animals were given names, and mythical characters became "real" when children played with siblings and friends or in solitary fashion.[145] Not all products of children's imaginations found expression in words, but youthful impulses to communicate a "human interiority" mean that some were recorded.[146]

Picturing the play of youngsters is possible from the photographic evidence, including that which has survived from the scout movement, *colonies de vacances*, and myriad civic associations and clubs.[147] The Montgrand photograph albums feature Madeleine Gravier as a young girl playing with a hoop in 1893, as well as the children, grandchildren, nieces, and nephews of Charles de Montgrand and Berthe de Bernis, who lived on the estates of Saint-Menet (Bouches-du-Rhône) and Chaix (Ardèche) during the 1940s and 1950s.[148] The Gilbert photograph albums record the family life and holidays of a bourgeois couple, André Gilbert and Marie-Louise Le Pin, with their three daughters Raymonde (b. 1904), Simonne (b. 1905), and Nicole (b. 1909), who lived in the department of Loir-et-Cher.[149]

INSERT FIGURE 5 HERE

Figure 5: Children outdoors, château de Villelouët, Chailles. © Archives départementales de Loir-et-Cher AD41 213 Fi 35.

**Conclusion**

This article, which is based on evidence in family archives from across France, has sought to show how records produced by children provide insights into syncretic literacy operating in

practice. The realities of daily life between 1800 and 1950, including migration and the economics of household service, meant that people were speaking, listening, reading, and writing in a variety of languages, regional dialects, and *patois*. Knowledge and sensitivity to context, especially as it was developed during childhood in homes and in schools, meant that people adjusted their use of language according to social expectations—and also, on occasion, in resistance to social prejudice. Syncretic literacy was not restricted to privileged elites. It was a cognitive experience apparent across all social classes, and some people from the poorest backgrounds who knew monolingualism to be a handicap were among the most motivated language learners.[150]

In the 1930s, Guy Courtin de Neufbourg, a French nobleman married to a Polish noblewoman, instigated the colossal project of editing the medieval charters of Forez at the Château de Beauvoir in the commune of Arthun (Loire). In 1933, he met Marguerite Gonon, the newly arrived village *institutrice* in Arthun, who was then responsible for a single class of forty-five pupils. Marguerite had no prior knowledge of Latin, but the nineteen-year-old studied the ancient language in order to work with Courtin de Neufbourg. She later recounted how the team editing the charters benefited from her knowledge of *patois*:

> The [medieval] scribes no longer knew how to use Latin when it was a case of describing the "*reallia*," that is to say, the things of everyday life; how are you going to say in Latin a little saucepan? . . . As for me, I understood what was meant . . . because [the scribes] had put the *patois* word instead.[151]

After World War II, village schools of the kind that Marguerite Gonon taught in were gradually disappearing as a result of rural depopulation. Anna Philippon, a retired school inspector in Haute-Loire, recalls that a ministerial circular of 16 December 1977 recommended that consideration be given as to whether schools with fewer than nine pupils might close; in Haute-Loire, there were then thirty-four schools with fewer than six pupils. Former school buildings sometimes found a buyer or simply stood empty. "But what became of the furniture, the materials and school documents? . . . I regret that there was not more careful oversight on the part of the education officials or from the prefecture for the deposit of these archives when a school was closed."[152]

Philippon's message about the need to ensure conservation of school records can be broadened to children's archives more generally. The notion of "value" is never static in relation to archives. Drawings and writings produced by children are often destroyed, either by their authors as these individuals grow older and do not want to pass their papers on to heirs, or by family members who do not see a point in conserving their relatives' childish "scribbles." In France, the nation-wide effort to collect archival sources for the centennial commemorations of 1914−1918 focused public attention on papers in private ownership. Through archivists' work on such projects, more family archives are likely to enrich the state's holdings of donated, purchased, or deposited *fonds privés*. In 2019, for the village of Vergongheon, the classification of photographs of the *majorettes* (1960s−1980s) is a collective effort by inhabitants; as a record of girlhood for sisters, mothers, cousins, and neighbours, it concerns "everybody."[153]

Professional archivists undertake appraisal of documents as they classify collections, and those who work on school records or sound archives, including for the preservation of *patois* and regional dialect recordings, bring important perspectives to scholarship about children's learning.

Between 1897 and 1901, efforts were made to compile the “linguistic atlas” of France, a project initially based on 638 communes. It evolved over subsequent decades in recognition of the need to preserve information about words and pronunciations, owing to the risk of their disappearance.[154] Through educational outreach programs in the twenty-first century, professional archivists encourage school pupils to reflect upon decision-making about which documents, recordings, or artifacts are kept, which are destroyed, and why.[155] There are opportunities to build into such programs pupils’ discussions of linguistic policies at the national and European levels, and how those policies are relevant to archivists’ work in France and other countries.[156] The policy of French diplomacy has always refused the homogenization of communication across the European Union; accordingly, the English language should not be adopted as the standard because Europe’s culture and practices are based on “*a bouquet of languages*.”[157]

Researching children’s perspectives remains “underdeveloped,” and “the challenges to obtaining children’s views are considerable.” Archival materials are by nature fragmentary and may be dispersed and difficult to locate, but they are deserving of study “that optimizes the opportunity for children’s perspectives to be listened to—and heard.”[158] In 2002, author Philip Pullman advised schoolteachers that the best way to foster literacy is to let children “read like butterflies and write like bees,” for only then will they be able to “make honey.”[159] Robert Sabatier, the French novelist, provided a fictional portrait of a little boy named Olivier absorbing multifarious languages in the isolated rural setting of Saugues (Haute-Loire):

> The child’s eyes closed . . . words, words, words of all kinds came together in his head, words that he wanted to write, to marry as though to provoke dances, jubilation,

> festivities. Some were in French, some in *patois*, some even in slang (*argot*) [and] a bit of Latin . . . It came from all that surrounded him, not only people of the blacksmith's forge and countryside, but also trades, animals or plants, a forest, a mountain of words.[160]

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**Notes**

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1. Marguerite Barlier, "Rédactions" [Essays], notebook 1937, Fonds Barlier (collection in private ownership). Scholars in Languages and Literature provided encouraging comments on this article: I am grateful to Professor Hazel Hutchison and Professor Alison Saunders for opportunities to discuss my research. I particularly wish to thank Anna Philippon for a conversation about twentieth-century schools in Haute-Loire, P. Pierre Badon for sharing thoughts about Latin and French, and Michel Fournier for his guidance on *patois* in the territory of Saugues.

2. Barlier, "Rédactions."

3. Ibid.

4. By the 1950s, most village schools in Haute-Loire comprised a single coeducational class in which children of different ages were taught together. Anna Philippon, "Mes petits écoles de campagne" [My little country schools], *Histoire sociale Haute Loire* 5 (2014): 185−214. The commune of Pébrac had 478 inhabitants in 1936 according to census figures.

5. Charles Vildrac, "La petite maison" [The little house] copied in Marguerite Barlier, "Récitations," [Recitations] notebook 1937, Fonds Barlier. Charles Vildrac was the pseudonymn of Charles Messager, a Parisian-born poet, playwright, and essayist. Throughout his life, he defended humanitarian causes; some of his works were written specifically for children. See the entry on Vildrac in the *Maitron Dictionary*: http://maitron-en-ligne.univ-paris1.fr/spip.php?article134641

6. The notion of home as a safe and secure haven is developed in Barrington Moore, *Privacy: Studies in Social and Cultural History* (New York: Sharpe, 1984); and Kimberly Dovey, "Homes and Homelessness," in *Home Environments*, ed. Irwin Altman and Carol M. Werner (New York: Plenum Press, 1985), 33–64. For critiques, see Julia Wardhaugh, "The Unaccommodated Woman: Home, Homelessness and Identity," *Sociological Review* 47, no. 1 (1999): 91−109, doi:10.1111/1467-954X.00164; and Gwendolyn Wright, "Prescribing the Model Home," *Social Research* 58, no. 1 (1991): 213−225, www.jstor.org/stable/i40043654.

7. Vildrac, "La petite maison."

8. Ibid. The poet may have had in mind a Mediterranean setting, for he served as a soldier in Italy, traveled in Spain, and owned a house in Saint-Tropez. In Haute-Loire, viticulture dates back to the early twelfth century, when the planting of *pineau* grapevines provided revenue for the abbots and monks of the abbey of Pébrac.

9. Eve Gregory, Susi Long, and Dinah Volk, *Many Pathways to Literacy: Young Children Learning with Siblings, Grandparents, Peers and Communities* (London: Routledge, 2004), 2.

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106. Marfany, "Religion," 162.

107. Myra D. Orth, "Radical Beauty: Marguerite de Navarre's Protestant Catechism and Confession," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 24, no. 2 (1993): 383−427, doi:10.2307/2541955; Guy Astoul, "L'Instruction des enfants protestants et catholiques en pays aquitains du milieu du

XVI siècle à la révocation de l'Edit de Nantes" [The instruction of Protestant and Catholic children in Aquitaine from the mid-sixteenth century to the revocation of the Edict of Nantes], *Histoire de l'Education* 69 (1996): 37−61 www.persee.fr/doc/hedu_0221-6280_1996_num_69_1_2807; Hamon, *Les Renaissances*, 466−467; Le Roux, *Les Guerres*, 16−17. On catechisms in Catalan, see Marfany, "Religion," 158.

108. Grillet, "The Patois Situation," 198; Dauzet, *Le Village*, 173.

109. Family correspondence of Louise Pourchin in AD Pyrénées-Atlantiques 43J/33−35 Don Touaille de Larabrie.

110. 1 March 1935 and parish bulletin 10 March 1935 in AD Côtes-d'Armor 127J Fonds Goyon de Feltre (*fonds* not classified at time of consultation). Age and sex are relevant with regard to use of Breton; see Dauzet, *Le Village*, 175, 181. On clergy and Breton, see Marfany, "Religion," 158−159, 172−173.

111. Elizabeth C. Macknight, "Faiths, Fortunes, and Feminine Duty: Charity in Parisian High Society, 1880–1914," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 58, no. 3 (2007): 482–506, doi:10.1017/S0022046906008967.

112. Pierre Assouline, *Le Dernier des Camondo* [The last of the Camondo] (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), 153−156, 162, 180−181.

113. Robertson, "Parallel Literacy Classes," 122.

114. Assouline, *Le Dernier*, 237. On the work of Moïse's uncle Abraham in favor of schools in Istanbul, see 97−99.

115. *Conseils à ma fille pour son première communion—son entrée dans le monde et le choix de son état de vie* [Advice to my daughter for her First Communion—her entry into society and choice of status in life] (Paris: G. Téqui, 1880), 88; *Conseils à ma fille: lecture pratique pour*

*chaque jour de l'année* [Advice to my daughter: Practical reading for every day of the year] (Paris: Chez tous les libraires, 1869); *Le précepteur de l'enfance chrétienne* [The tutor of Christian childhood] (Limoges: Barbou Frères, 1874).

116. AP Gramont 101 (II)/36.

117. Madame Campan, *De l'éducation, conseils aux jeunes filles* [On education, advice to young girls] 2 vols. (Paris: Mongie, 1824); Madame de Rémusat, *Essai sur l'éducation des femmes* [Essay on women's education] (Paris: Ladvocat, 1824); Madame Necker de Saussure, *L'Éducation progressive ou Étude du cours de la vie* [Progressive education or study of life course] 3 vols. (Paris: Sautelet, 1828−1838).

118. Clarisse Juranville's works include *Le bagage littéraire de la jeune fille, livre de lecture* [The young girl's literary baggage, book of reading] (Paris: Larousse, 1902 and six re-editions to 1921); *Le bagage scientifique de la jeune fille* [The young girl's scientific baggage] (Paris: Larousse, 1899 and three re-editions to 1910); and *Manuel d'éducation morale et d'instruction civique à la usage de la jeune fille* [Manual of moral education and civic instruction for the young girl's use] (Paris: Boyer, 1883 and fifteen re-editions to 1911).

119. Drawing of a tree (red pencil on paper) in AD Vosges 41J/51 Fonds de la famille de Rozières.

120. Elaine Greffulhe, *Le Livre d'ambre* [The book of amber] (Nangis: L. Ratel Imprimeur, 1889) in AP Gramont 101 (II)/35.

121. 27 December 1918 and 18 January 1919 letters from Louise de L'Aigle and undated letter from Henriette de L'Aigle in AP Gramont 101 (I)/31.

122. Vogüé, *La Fontaine*, 82−83.

123. AD Seine-Maritime 116J/39 Chartrier de Maulévrier. See 116J/100 for the inventory of books in the Sarcus family's library.

124. Chanet, "Maîtres d'école," 252.

125. René Barlier, "Année scolaire 1945–1946," notebook, Fonds Barlier.

126. Chanet, "Maîtres d'école," 252.

127. Marguerite Barlier, "Rédactions," notebook 1938, Fonds Barlier.

128. Grillet, "The Patois Situation," 199; Dauzet, *Le Village*, 178–179; Marfany, "Religion," 172–174.

129. Pitt-Rivers, "Social Class," 4, 9–10.

130. Williams, "Children," 21.

131. Ibid., 19, 31.

132. Marina Bethlenfalvay, *Les Visages de l'enfant dans la littérature française du XIXe siècle: Esquisse d'une typologie* [Faces of the child in French literature of the nineteenth century: sketch of a typology] (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1979); Rosemary Lloyd, *The Land of Lost Content: Children and Childhood in Nineteenth-Century French Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Chanet, "Maîtres d'école," note 24.

133. Marie de Grand'Maison, *Jeux d'enfants* [Children's games] (Paris: Gaillard, 1909), 1, 6, 7, 9, 16, 20.

134. Ferdinand de Gramont, *Les bons petits enfants* [Good little children], vignettes by Ludwig Richter (Paris: Hetzel, 1862), 23–24.

135. Raymond Barlier, "Sciences" notebook c. 1937 and Simone Barlier, "Recitations" notebook 1936, Fonds Barlier. Philéas Lebesgue was born in the Oise and came from an agricultural milieu; he taught himself numerous languages and became a translator, playwright, and critic.

136. See, for example, Ferdinand de Gramont, *Les bébés* [The babies], vignettes by Oscar Pletsch (Paris: Hetzel, 1861), 61–63.

137. "Histoire vraie" in AP Gramont 101 (I)/ 55. For photographs, see Pascal Liévaux and William Curtis Rolf, *Les Écuries des châteaux français* [The stables of French châteaux] (Paris: Éditions du patrimoine, 2005).

138. Macknight, *Aristocratic Families*, 92–116.

139. "Histoire vraie" in AP Gramont 101 (I)/ 55. Rich people had cornets made of copper, while poor people used cow horns. Paper could be substituted with old rags.

140. Raymond Barlier, "Vocabulaire: La chasse" [Vocabulary: The hunt], 5 November 1937, Fonds Barlier.

141. Some of Béatrice's papers were on display at the Musée de Camondo in Paris when I visited in 2000. Excerpts are cited in Assouline, *Le Dernier*, 218–223, here 241–242.

142. Alexandre-Bidon and Lett, *Children in the Middle Ages*, Chapter 9.

143. "Histoire vraie" in AP Gramont 101 (I)/ 55.

144. In Waksler, *Studying the Social Worlds*, 123, 133–134.

145. For example, "Histoire vraie" in AP Gramont 101 (I)/ 55; "Récit du voyage," in AD Bouches-du-Rhône 197J/38 Papiers de la famille de Montgrand; Poems and drawings in AP Gramont 101 (II)/35; children's letters 1865, 1866, 1868 in AP Gramont 101 (II)/38; BNF NAF 18273 Poems notebook; BNF NAF 17202 Variétés sur l'enfance; Essays by Marguerite Barlier in Fonds Barlier.

146. Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780–1930* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 15.

147. Christian Guérin, *L'Utopie: Scouts de France* [Utopia: Scouts of France] (Paris: Fayard, 1997); Laura Lee Downs, *Childhood in the Promised Land: Working-Class Movements and the Colonies de Vacances in France, 1880–1960* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

148. AD Bouches-du-Rhône 197J/67, 69 and digital record 2NUM592L Papiers de la famille de Montgrand.

149. AD Loir-et-Cher 111J/69−97 and 213Fi 1, 29, 35, 112−130, 335−348, Fonds de la famille Gilbert-Beauregard.

150. Marfany, "Religion," 172−174.

151. Antoine Cuisinier, "Marguerite Gonon parle. . ." [Marguerite Gonon speaks . . .] *Cahiers de Village de Forez* 81−82 supplement (2000): 1−67, here 10; Claude Latta, "Marguerite Gonon (1914−1996)" and "Guy, comte de Neufbourg (1887−1986)," *Cahiers de Village de Forez* 62 (2009): 80−83. On the relationship between Latin and *patois*, see Dauzet, *Le Village*, 171−172, 183.

152. Philippon, "Mes petits écoles," 185−214, here 210−211.

153. https://www.lamontagne.fr/vergongheon-43360/actualites/lhistoire-des-majorettes-de-vergongheon-en-photographies_13681349/.

154. Dauzet, *Le Village*, 181−186; Nicolas Verdure, "Les Archives de l'enregistrement sonore à la Bibliothèque nationale de France" [Archives of sound recording at the Bibliothèque nationale de France], *Vingtième Siècle: Revue d'histoire* 92 (2006): 61−66, doi:10.3917/ving.092.0061.

155. Grard and Zamant, "La Médiation," 27−36; Gasly, "Oubliés de l'Histoire?" 181−193; Esther Robinson, "Archives in the Classroom," *Archives & Manuscripts* 30, no. 1 (2002): 18−29, https://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=200205539;res=IELAPA; Gabrielle Wolski, "The Introduction of Youth to the Archival Profession," *Archives & Manuscripts* 32,

no. 2 (2004): 162−177, https://publications.archivists.org.au/index.php/asa/article/view/9737; Julie Gleaves and Sarah O'Neill, "Preserving the Old School Tie—Why School Archivists Find It Hard Saying 'No Thank You' to the Fifth Donation of a Rowing Oar," *Archives & Manuscripts* 31, no. 1 (2003): 51−62, https://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=200310164;res=IELAPA.

156. The legal text on institutions in France (25 June 1992) states: "French is the language of the Republic." Cerquiglini, "Du monolinguisme français," 977. On France's paradoxical position in debates about the 2003 European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, see Gaquin, "Une France plurilingue?" 278−294, especially 284.

157. Cerquiglini, "Du monolinguisme français," 980; Claude Hadège, *Halte à la mort des langues* [Stop the death of languages] (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2000).

158. Ann Lewis and Geoff Lindsay, "Emerging Issues," in *Researching Children's Perspectives*, ed. Ann Lewis and Geoff Lindsay (Buckingham, UK: Open University Press, 2002), 189–198, here 197.

159. Philip Pullman, "Give Them the Taste of Honey," *Times Educational Supplement*, 8 February 2002, cited in Robertson, "Parallel Literacy Classes," 125.

160. Robert Sabatier, *Les Noisettes sauvages* [Wild hazelnuts] (Paris: Albin Michel, 1974), 304−305.