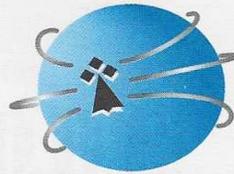


BRO NEVEZ

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE DEFENSE OF THE BRETON LANGUAGE
NEWSLETTER OF THE U.S. BRANCH



O.B.E.

Organisation des Bretons de l'Extérieur

EMVOD BREIZHIZ
AR BED

CONVENTION
MONDIALE
DES BRETONS

BRETONS WORLWIDE
CONVENTION

Brittany Mourns the Loss
of a Patriot – Jean Cevaër

KUZUL ETREVROADEL EVIT KENDALC'H AR BREZHONEG

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The U.S. Branch of the International Committee for the Defense of the Breton Language (U.S. ICDBL) was incorporated as a not-for-profit corporation on October 20, 1981. *Bro Nevez* ("new country" in the Breton language) is the newsletter produced by the U.S. ICDBL. It is published quarterly. Contributions, letters to the editor, corrections, and ideas are welcome from all readers and will be printed at the discretion of the Editor.

The U.S. ICDBL provides *Bro Nevez* on a complimentary basis to a number of language and cultural organizations in Brittany to show our support for their work. Your Membership/Subscription allows us to mail print copies. Membership (which includes subscription) for one year is \$20. Checks should be in U.S. dollars, made payable to "U.S. ICDBL" and mailed to Lois Kuter at the address above.

This newsletter can be sent as a PDF file attached to an e-mail instead of the print version. Just let the Editor know how you would like to receive it. The e-mail version is much more colorful than the photocopied print copy!

Back issues of *Bro Nevez* can be found on the U.S. ICDBL website

Ideas expressed within this newsletter are those of the individual authors, and do not necessarily represent ICDBL philosophy or policy. Unless otherwise noted Lois Kuter is the author of all articles in this issue. Contributions from others would be very welcome.!

Editor's Note

This February issue of *Bro Nevez* will probably not reach those who receive it by mail until March. Those who receive it by e-mail might get it before the end of February which is starting to run out as I complete drafting this issue.

My time and energy have been diverted by lots of snow shoveling (with the kind assistance of neighbors). In mid-January I received some 5 to 6 inches of snow and at the end of January there was another 6-inch snowfall capped by 3 to 4 inches of a crust of sleet. That was followed by very cold temperatures and the need for a very sturdy shovel to break through the icy crust on the snow. Once all that finally started to melt, February 22-23 brought another 8 to 9 inches of snow. With warming temperatures coming up, melting will go a little faster but I am looking forward to spring. I know weather challenges for some readers were probably much bigger, but after several warm and almost snowless winters, this year has been unusually scenic but labor intensive in my neighborhood.

Speaking of Weather – Some Breton words and phrases for you

The following information is drawn from Mark Kerrain's little booklet called *Brezhoneg Diouzhtu – Breton at Once* published by Sav-Heol and sent to me in 1996 by the author.

Mark Kerrain teaches Breton at the Université Rennes 2 and has taught evening classes for adults for many years. He has also taught English at the high school level. He has published numerous books for Breton learners – children as well as adults. Probably the most widely known of his works for learners is *Ni a gomz brezhoneg*, published by Ti embann ar skolioù in 1997 with a reedition in 2025. He founded Sav Heol for Breton language publications in 1991. He has also published dozens of transitions into Breton including two Harry Potter books.

Brezhoneg Diouzhtu is tri-lingual with word lists and phrases in Breton, English and French. Topics covered are basic conversation, but also food and drink, smoking and flirting and insults. Weather is always a good topic for conversation in Brittany. I have included the Breton words and phrases with just the English equivalents.

An Amzer

Amzer vrav
Amer gaer
Amzer fall
Amzer vreïn

The Weather

fine weather
splendid weather
bad weather
awful weather

Brav eo an amzer	the weather is fine
Kaer eo ...	it's splendid
Fall eo ...	it's bad
Brein eo ...	it's awful
Tomm eo	it's hot
Yen eo	it's cold
Fresk eo	it's cool
Klouar eo	it's warm
N'eo ket tomm	it isn't hot
N'eo ket sec'h	it isn't dry
Heol zo	it's sunny
Avel zo	it's windy
N'eus ket heol	it isn't sunny
N'eus ket kourmoul	it isn't cloudy
Glav a ra	it's raining
Amzer vrvav a ra	it's fine weather
Ne ra ket erc'h	it isn't snowing
Ne ra ket amzer fall	it isn't bad weather
Hiriv eo brav	it's fine today
Alies 'vez brav e Breizh	It's often fine in Brittany
Bemdez 'vez brav	it's fine every day
Alies 'vez fall e Paris	it's often bad in Paris
Kaozedenn	Conversation

- Penaos eo an amzer? /
What's the weather like?
- Brav eo. / It's fine.
- Ya, brav eo hiriv. / Yes, it's fine today.
- Hervez ar skingomz e ra glav e Breizh. /
According to the radio, it's raining in Brittany.
- Hervez skingomz Paris e ra glav e Breizh dalc'hmat. /
According to the Paris radio it's always raining
in Brittany.
- Ha penaos eo an amzer e Paris ? /
And what's the weather like in Paris?
- Fall eo hiriv. / It's bad today.
- Evel just. / Of course.

Breton Language Translations

The following is my translation of a text sent to me by Bernez Rouz. I will be the first to recognize that translation is a skill that requires a strong knowledge of the language from which and into which a translation is made. Translating prose is far different from translating literature or poetry. I make no claim to have the professional skills of a translator, and my knowledge of French is far from perfect. But, I believe this text will provide a good overview of progress and obstacles in the translation of Breton literature and other works in the lesser use languages of Europe. – Lois Kuter

Public Policies for Translation - Summary of a roundtable of October 25, 2025, at the Festival du Livre of Carhaix

Participants:

Kristian Braz, author and translator, Special Prize of the Premio Ostana 2025

Éamon Ó Ciosáin, translator, Prize for Translation of the Premio Ostana 2025

Fulup Travers, Public Office of the Breton Language (Ofis Publik ar Brezhoneg / Office public de la langue bretonne)

Two Breton speakers won awards at the Occitan Festival of Ostana in Italy in June 2025. They had in common being translators. Éamon Ó Ciosáin introduced us to Gaelic literature of Ireland through numerous translations into French and Breton. Kristian Braz, an author who won awards three times in the town of Carhaix's contest for short stories [in Breton] has translated numerous works of Anglo Saxon literature into Breton (Kerouac, Steinbeck, Mc Gahern, etc.). The Festival du livre de Carhaix served as a relay from this powerful exchange between creators in "mother languages" initiated by the Occitans of Italy in extending the debate on the necessity of translations for the visibility of lesser used languages.

Fulup Travers, director for the language section of the Public Office of the Breton Language, leads the Region of Brittany's literary program for translation of international languages into Breton. He brings his expertise from this program of the Region of Brittany.

1. The exemplary work of the Festival of Ostana

Kristian Braz and Éamon Ó Ciosáin briefly presented the spirit of Ostana, Occitan commune of Italy, which launched the Premio Ostana in 2008 to recognize writings in mother languages throughout the world. Winning awards this year were works in Breton, Irish, Kurdish, Croatian of Italy, Galician, Cerma, a language of Burkina Faso, Madagascan, and Occitan. The program listing gives visibility to all these languages, and the rich exchanges between participants allowed a better understanding of the difficulties for different languages – including those which have official recognition but which are not widely spoken – to make their own vision of the world understood through their literature.

2. Translation of large international languages into minority languages: the example of Breton

The literary movement Gwalarn launched a large program of translation 100 years ago to "fortify literature in the Breton language by widening its horizon in contact with foreign thought." This program was pursued by the review Al Liamm, successor to Gwalarn. But these translations, taken on voluntarily, essentially concerned

poetry, short stories and several theater pieces. Since 2012 the Region of Brittany has put into place an ambitious program for translation into Breton of great works of world literature, paying the translators. Objectives: reinforce the role of language in Breton communication and culture, enriching the offerings allowing Breton speakers to read great works of Breton literature directly in their language, paying for translation work (until 2012 only printing costs were supported - Kafka, Joyce, Le Clézio, Stevenson... 52 titles are available in Breton, almost four books per year, translated from eight different languages. Seven publishers and nineteen translators have taken part in the program so far. Entrusted to the Public Office of the Breton Language, this undertaking, modeled at first on a Basque initiative, seems perfectly operational.

3. Translation of one minority language into another

These initiatives depend a great deal on the language level of translators in two minority languages. Nevertheless, there are examples such as Joel Donarzh who published two Occitan novels in Breton for Al Liamm. Éamon Ó Ciosáin has just published a translation from Breton of Jakez Riou into Irish and an Irish work by Máirtín Ó Cadhain into Breton. Roparz Hemon has been translated into Galician, Jakez Riou into Welsh, Youenn Drezen into Gallo.

It is the multilingual publication of books for children that seems to have been fruitful. The Editions An Here published Catalan and Welsh authors, initiatives that remain limited by a lack of a wide European program to aid multilingual works for children.

4. Translation of Breton language literature into French

It must be admitted that the best known Breton language authors are those who have been translated into French. The *Barzhaz Breizh* of T. -H. de la Villemarqué from 1839, Anne de Mesmeur (1863), F. M. Luzel (1868), Yann-bêr Kalloc'h (1923), Youenn Drezen (1943), M. Glanndour (1946), Yann-ber Piriou (1973), Pêr-Jakez Hélias (1986), Youenn Gwernig (1975), Anjela Duval translated into English in 1990 and in French in 1995.

Only two works in French allow a concise view of contemporary Breton language literature: The anthology by F. Favereau (*Anthologie de la littérature bretonne au XXe siècle*, Skol Vreizh) and *La littérature en langue bretonne des origines à nos jours* (Edition Montagnes noires). Recently several titles from the Gwalarn literary movement have been translated: *Un breton redécouvrant la Bretagne* by Roparz Hemon (M. Treger), *Nenn Jani* by Roparz Hemon (K. Braz), *Le pèlerin de la toussaint* by Abeozen (M. Madeg), *L'eau autour des îles* (Y. Drezen). To be noted, in 2005 as part of the 100th anniversary of the journal Gwalarn, there was a bilingual publication of a collection of short stories *Danevellou-Nouvelles* by the

Association of Breton Writers / Skriv (Association des écrivains bretonnants). The participants underlined the interest in having a text in Breton next to a French text in view of advancing the study of the Breton language.

Today there is no support given for books translated from Breton into French. No contemporary author of the 21st century has been translated, which makes the production in one of their ancestral languages invisible for the large portion of Bretons

5. Translation of Breton language literature into other international languages

Several examples of translations into other international languages exist: The *Barzhaz Breizh* but also Jakez Riou into Welsh, Youenn Drezen into English and Spanish, Anjela Duval and Youenn Gwernig into English. Of note is the considerable work by Jan DeLoof who has made several books of Breton poetry known to Dutch speakers, and work by Jaklin Gibson who published an anthology of Breton literature in English (*The Turn of the Ermine*).* The editor Francis Boutle Publishers has published ten anthologies of lesser used languages of Europe <https://francisboutle.co.uk/books/language/lesser-used-languages-of-europe/>

This initiative should serve as a model for a French editor with a first priority for languages of France. Major problems remain in funding and especially in distribution. The Council of Europe / Conseil de l'Europe (Centre européen des langues vivantes) and the General Delegation for the French language and languages of France (Délégation générale à la langue française et aux langues de France) should be solicited on these points.

6. Shining the light on the languages of Brittany through translation

A given, among the three most translated authors of the world – Agatha Christie, Shakespeare and Jules Verne – there is a Breton. Because Jules Verne never hid being Breton and several studies attest to the Breton influence in his works.

Today among the one hundred most published authors of the world there are five Irish and six French, including Le Clézio who has distant Breton ancestry.

Whether in French, Gallo or Breton, no contemporary Breton author has been translated today into other large international languages. It is high time that the Region of Brittany finance a stand for Breton publishers at the book festivals of Paris, Brussels and Frankfurt as was the case in the 1990s. It is there that the Region can make itself known; it's there that rights for translation can be negotiated.

7. Public policies in support of translation

- The recent bilingual Breton-Irish book *Diskan / Agallamh* was published by Editions AL Liamm with support of Irish institutions.

- The Catalans have understood for a long time the interest in supporting the translation of Catalan literature into other languages.

<https://www.catalunyaexperience.fr/a-la-une/livres-catalogne>.

- In Austria a program focuses on countries in the southeast of Europe – <https://traduki.eu/home/>.

- In France the Centre national du livre supports translation of French books into foreign languages. No mention of regional languages. What about the regional languages?

- In Europe the program Circulation of European Literary Works proposes support for translation. Forty works will be selected. What place for lesser used languages?

https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/crea/wp-call/2026/call-fiche_crea-cult-2026-lit_en.pdf.

The international success of Scandinavian literature is due to an international policy summarized by AI as follows: “The Scandinavian countries finance and actively support the translation of their literary works. That includes the selection, counseling, revision and financing of translations as well as participation in international book fairs.”

IN CONCLUSION

What works: the translation of the works of world literature into Breton.

What has been abandoned: The presence of Breton publishers at the book fairs of Paris, Brussels and Frankfurt.

What can be done:

On the level of Brittany

- Finance stands for Breton publishers at international book fairs.
- Support the translation between Gallo and Breton.
- Support the translation of Breton or Gallo into French.
- Create a prize for translation.

On the level of France

- Support the translation of works in regional languages into other regional languages.
- Support the translation of works in regional languages into French.

- Support the translation of works in regional languages into other international languages.

- Take literature in regional languages into account in school programs.

On the level of Europe

- Open the Europe Creative program “Circulation of European Literary Works” to lesser used languages.

- Encourage the spread of works through a European literary prize for lesser used languages in supporting initiatives like Premio Ostrana in Italy.

- That the Council of Europe assist in the integration of texts in lesser used languages in European school manuals.

A few Additional Notes from the Editor

See *Bro Nevez* 98, May 2006, for a review of *The Turn of the Ermine – An Anthology of Breton Literature*, edited by Jacqueline Gibson and Gwyn Griffiths.

See *Bro Nevez* 160, December 2021, for a review of the translation of *The Hobbit* into Breton by Joshua Tyra and Alan Dipode. This article also includes a list of 28 other translations of world literature into Breton (16 English language works).

A translation from Breton into English which also deserves mention is the work edited by Thomas Rain Crowe, *Writing the Wind – A Celtic Resurgence* (New Native Press, 1997). This includes English language translations of eight Welsh poets, thirteen Irish poets, eleven Scottish Gaelic poets, and eight Cornish poets. Over fifty poems by eleven Breton poets are included: Anjela Duval, Per Denez, Naig Rozmor, Reun ar C’halan, Youenn Gwernig, Annaig Renault, Bernez Tangi, Mikael Madeg, Lan Tangi, Gwendal Denez and Alan Botrel who often are the ones providing the English translation. While having the original Celtic language poem with the translations would have been nice this 335 page book is a welcome introduction to poetry and to the poets as well. (See *Bro Nevez* 64, November 1997 for a review).

There is also the translation work of Lenora Timm (1943-2016), a long time member of the U.S. ICDBL, who published the book *A Modern Breton Political Poet: Anjela Duval, A Biography and An Anthology* in 1992. This included some one hundred poems translated into English. (See the review by Reun ar C’halan in *Bro Nevez* 43, August 1992).

A number of new translations have been published in the past few years. Some which I gleaned from the pages of *Ar Men Magazine* which includes in its book review section a page called “Al levrioù brezhonek” with short notes on Breton language publications. Here are a few titles to consider (by no means a complete list of recent translations):

From English to Breton:

Oscar Wilde. *Tasmant Canterville (The Canterville Ghost)*. Translated by Mari Elen Maze. Aber. 64 pages.

Tennessee Williams. *Tramgarr ar c'hoantoù (A Streetcar Named Desire)*. Translated by Serj Richard. Mouladurioù Hor Yezh. 202 pages.

From English and other languages:

Ar bandulenn ha pemp danevell faltzius all. Translations by Loïk Kampion of stories by Théophile Gautier, Edgar Allan Poe, Maupassant, André Maurois and Anna Kampion. Mouladurioù Hor Yezh.

From Occitan:

Robert Lafont. *An Ikon en enez (L'icona dins l'iscla)*. Translated by J. Donarzh. An Alarc'h. 148 pages.

From French:

Julien Gracq. *Ar c'hourenez. (La Presqu'île)*, Translated by Thomaz Loyer. Mouladurioù Hor Yezh. 190 pages.

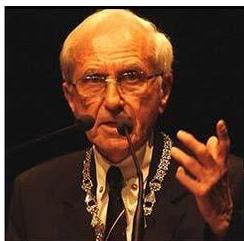
Andreï Makine. *Sonerezh ar vuhez (La musique d'une vie)*. Translated by Thomaz Loyer. Mouladurioù Hor Yezh. 110 pages.

From Italian:

Alessandro Baricco. *Seiz (Seta)*. Translated by Serj Richard. Al Liamm. 90 pages.

From German:

Joseph Roth. *Kofez ur muntre dezrevellet en un nozvezh (Geständnis eines Mörders in einer nacht enthüllt)*. Translated by Gérard Cornillet. An Alarc'h. 1867 pages.



A Loss for Brittany

Jean Cevaër (1931-2026)

Photo by P. Argouarch from the Cultural Institute of Brittany site

It was with sadness that I learned of the death of Jean Cevaër with whom I carried on a long and valuable correspondence since 1980. The following is my summarized translation of a succinct review of Jean Cevaër's career and lifelong action for Brittany written by Philippe Argouarch for Agence Bretagne Presse. Following this I have shared some more personal observations drawn from Jean Cevaër's letters which shed light on events and people of Brittany (and his particular view of them) during the past 50 years.

Loss of patriot Jean Cevaër, militant for the Breton cause and for Bretons of the world

Jean Cevaër, chemical engineer by training and former administrator in the petroleum industry died this 2026. Untiring militant he devoted over a half century to structuring and leading a Breton life outside of Brittany as well as in Brittany, notably at the heart of the Organisation des Bretons de l'Extérieur (OBE), the movement for the administrative reunification of Brittany, and in Skol Uhel ar Vro / Cultural Institute of Brittany.

His Breton heritage

Born in 1931 with his father's side of the family from Finistère, he was raised in Saint Nazaire where he showed determination and ability to speak out. An adolescent during the Second World War, he had to seek refuge far from his family in the countryside where he thus mastered a certain knowledge of the Gallo language.

An international professional path in service to a continued commitment

With a diploma in chemical engineering from the École de Chimie of Rennes and a degree in Science from the University of Rennes, Jean Cevaër followed a career in the petroleum industry, notably with Texaco with technical responsibilities and leadership on the European level, after experiences overseas (including Australia).

On return to Loire-Atlantique he also worked in Saint Nazaire where he notably took on administrative responsibilities with the Centre de formation supérieure de Gavy (1989-1996) and contributed to the building of tools for training and territorial management.

OBE, CUAB, ICB: first priority responsibilities

Very engaged in the Breton community of Belgium from the end of the 1960s, he participated in creating initiatives centered on language and Bretons outside of Brittany, including the Conseil International de Soutien à la Langue Bretonne (CISLB), then the Organisation des Bretons Émigrés (OBE) which then became Bretons du Monde-OBE. He held responsibilities over a long period (notably in promotional activity and as secretary-general) and remained a reference for the network.

In the 1980s, transferred to Paris, he engaged equally in the Comité pour l'Unité Administrative de la Bretagne (CUAB), the forerunner of Bretagne Réunie, of which he was a cofounder and served as one of its presidents, taking a leading role in organizing the large demonstration of 1982 in Paris.

As part of the Cultural Institute of Brittany (Institut Culturel de Bretagne) he was a voice for Breton emigration and for a number of years took on responsibilities in the Conseil Scientifique et d'Animation (CSA). In 2016 his course of action was recognized in the attribution of the Coller of the Ermine by the Cultural Institute of Brittany.

With his return to his fief of Pouliguen he was one of the founding members of the Festival Anne de Bretagne in 1994. He was very much attached to this festival which moved to different places in Loire-Atlantique since these events reaffirmed the place of Loire-Atlantique in the historical Brittany of five departments.

Writing, conferences, and local action

A man of organization and words, Jean Cevaër was also a man who wrote: he published in several periodicals including *Armor Magazine* and *l'Avenir de la Bretagne* which he directed for brief time, and he gave numerous presentations for Breton organizations. He also published a dozen chronicles and book reviews for Agence Bretagne Presse.

Reflections from Lois Kuter

My first contact with Jean Cevaër was a letter of July 21, 1980, in impeccable English (as were all his letters) he sent to me when I was a graduate student at Indiana University, Bloomington, finishing my thesis on Breton identity and music. He had been referred to me by Henri Lecuyer, a fellow resident in Belgium at that time, and was hoping for contact information for Bretons in the U.S. on behalf of the OBE. In August 1981 I sent Jean Cevaër the first issue of *Bro Nevez* (at that time just called newsletter of the U.S. Branch of the ICDBL which I had mobilized at the urging of contacts in Brittany.

Jean Cevaër's letters were always long and full of information about the OBE and his own personal take on issues of the day in Brittany. In a letter of September 5, 1981 he wrote:

... with the change of regime in France wonderful opportunities to advance our cause have arisen and we are working flat-out to exploit them. Two notable successes so far: the release of all our political prisoners and the degree in Celtic languages for the University of Haute-Bretagne. Now our next objective is to achieve the administrative unity of Brittany and do away with the miserable "Pay de Loire." We are working very hard at it and our efforts should culminate in a big march in Nantes on October 11.

Jean Cevaër would express disappointment at the turnouts for demonstrations and his letters would usually be more pessimistic as the French government continued to block progress for the Breton language and for reunification of Brittany. His letters to me would include

copies of the abundant correspondence he had with French officials, newspaper and magazine contributors, and fellow actors for the cause of Brittany expressing his views on politics, culture and economy. Sometimes his letters to me would include as many as 25 copies of his letters as well as brochures and flyers about events in Brittany.

Jean Cevaër was always extremely supportive of the work of the ICDBL – in the U.S. and elsewhere. He would receive all issues of *Bro Nevez* as well as special publications like the U.S. branch's "Fact-finding report," which he would share with others and get translated into French. His letters often included his thoughts on the content of *Bro Nevez*. Jean Cevaër believed firmly that the voice of non-Bretons would carry weight. He noted in a letter of April 1983 there was little hope to counter the resistance of the central government to support the Breton language *"except through international pressure, to which, as you know, governments, specially authoritarian ones, are extremely sensitive ..."*

The idea of creating different branches of the ICDBL throughout Europe and other places was indeed to show that it was not just Bretons who were concerned about the fate of their language and culture. I believe that the ICDBL's work probably did not have a big impact on French policy, but it did offer at least moral support to Bretons like Jean Cevaër who would be the ones to fight for change.

Certainly Jean Cevaër was a fighter and heroically took on the battle for Brittany. He would share news of his work in his letters and noted philosophically in 1984: *"I will not get into too many details regarding what I am doing, it would take books. There is so much to do it is not even funny! I spend on the average 10 to 15 hours per weekend typing letters and articles. I attend about 1 meeting out of 10 and I do not see half of the people that I should be seeing. But so goes life. What is really important is to follow the path that we have set for ourselves. We cannot stand still, we cannot do everything we ought to do, but at the end of the road will be our reward."*

Support for Diwan was long a part of Jean Cevaër's action. In March 1987 we would write: *"The current government is firmly engaged in clamping down on the 'provinces' and especially Brittany. It is driving Diwan to bankruptcy and drying all the funds intended for regional cultures. At the same time it still spends billions for 'art' in the Paris megalopolis! This is frankly sickening ..."*

In 1982 Jean Cevaër moved to the Paris area for his job, and in 1989 he would end work with Texaco and find employment and unpaid work in Nantes and Saint Nazaire. Once back in that area he would support Diwan schools in Nantes, Saint Nazaire and Guérande. In a letter of January 1990, Jean Cevaër notes his

engagement as General Secretary for an association establishing a new university center in Saint Nazaire and he would be active with the Saint Nazaire Chamber of Commerce and Industry. He was also nominated at that time to be General Secretary for the Cultural Insitute of Brittany in which he would remain active, and he was elected President of the Committee for the Administrative Reunification of Brittany.

Jean Cevaër would have a focus on Loire-Atlantique during the 1990s and beyond, writing in May 1994: *“Here in Loire-Atlantique we fight, inch by inch, against the most vicious cultural and historical ethnocide ever conducted against a population in this country.”* In 1994 he was a co-founder of the Anne de Bretagne Festival and regularly supported it throughout his years. In August of 1996 he noted that he had joined a fight against building a large nuclear power plant in the Loire estuary across from Saint Nazaire. He would be invested in exchanges between Brittany and Scotland and Wales for events and conferences related to their shared history of ship building in Saint Nazaire.

In a letter to me of August 1996, Jean Cevaër spoke of his time-consuming work on a committee to help organize the visit of Pope Jean Paul II to Sainte-Anne-d’Auray. Even in this effort he showed a feistiness in making sure Brittany was given a place: *“We, concerned Christians, have been squeezed between the official Church which wanted to wipe out any Breton reference during the papal visit in favor of a ‘western’ culture, as murky as the brain of the people behind it.”*

Jean Cevaër often lamented the splits within the Breton movement – particularly between political groups – but his letters indicated that he could be loathe to build bridges. He often expressed a dislike (hatred?) of communists and did not have kind words for the UDB (Union Démocrtique de Bretagne) or leftist leanings in general.

Based on Jean Cevaër’s letters to me and those he attached in his mailings, he seemed to know everyone in any way attached to the cause of Brittany – even if he did not always agree with them. In a letter of December 2008 he would note the deaths of Yvonig Gicquel, Michel Phlipponneau and Robert Le Grand whom he knew well and worked with for many years. In March 2010 he noted the loss of Bernard Le Nail and in September 2011 of Per Denez. His long involvement with the Cultural Institute of Brittany meant that he would know and work closely with leaders in the Breton cultural world – historians, musicians, writers, economic leaders and language activists.

He was also well aware of the support for Brittany from other parts of the Celtic world. In August 2005 he wrote: *“The loss of Gwynfor Evans is sadly felt here in Brittany since we owe him so much and amongst the many things*

we owe him there is the impetus he gave to the visit of Cumbrian delegates to Brittany in April 1947, and their report on the shocking arrests of Breton patriots who had done nothing but fight for Breton language and culture led to their release shortly afterwards. It also led people like myself to begin their dislike of the French totalitarian system.” This delegation of eight from Wales would publish a 39-page report (Welsh with a French translation): *Cyngor Yr Eisteddfod Genedlaethol. Adroddiad Y Ddirprwyaeth O’r Cyngor A Ymwelodd Â Llydaw Yn Ebrill, 1947*, which would indeed state in their findings that Bretons were persecuted in the post-war period for no other reason than their actions in support of the Breton language and culture.

Letters from Jean Cevaër included a mix of optimism but also pessimism about the future of Brittany and the continued struggles for reunification and support for the Breton language and culture. Although I continued to receive short e-mails – especially in response to his receipt of *Bro Nevez* – up to the present, the last long letter to me is dated December 20, 2015. It includes criticism of the path being taken by France, but ends with the upbeat quote of William the Taciturn: “It is not necessary to have hope to undertake and success is not needed to persevere.”

Perseverance to the end of his life definitely characterizes Jean Cevaër’s fight for Brittany.

Perseverance Still Needed: A Note on the U.S. ICDBL Fact Finding Report on the Breton Language, January 1983

This 10-page photocopied booklet was prepared by four members of the U.S. ICDBL: myself, Lois Kuter, Lenora Timm (Professor of Linguistics at the University of California, Davis), Laurie O’Keefe Fadave (Lecturer in the Department of World and Comparative Literature at San Francisco State University) and Anne Hebermehl (Editorial Assistant for *Ninnau, the North America Welsh Newsletter*).

We noted the obstacles for Breton we found in 1982 in the schools and public presence and made recommendations for remedy these. Although Bretons have worked hard to overcome obstacles, sadly, our conclusions of some forty plus years earlier still ring true for the present:

Conclusion: We have presented the above report on the current situation of the Breton language to bring to your attention the critical situation of this ancient language. The French government has played a leading role in the elimination of Breton both in specific actions to exterminate this language in past centuries and in its current lack of action to redress a history of destruction. We have been favorably impressed by French government attitudes and statements in the past few

years in favor of “regional” languages and cultures of France, but we are alarmed by the lack of action to follow up these expressions of good will.

Bretons themselves have long been active in non-violently petitioning for an end to French government policies and administrative blocks which hasten the elimination of the Breton language. The loss of Breton is a loss to the world. Thus, we bring this report to you as persons concerned with the rights of all peoples. We have presented recommendations for French government actions to show that remedies are available to aid in preventing the extinction of Breton. Bretons have presented similar suggestions for governmental action, but requests have gone unheeded. The French government seems unable to hear the voices of Bretons who request only that barriers to the Breton language be taken down.



Stalled Support for Breton

This February the federation Rouedad ar Brezhoneg spoke out in protest of the Region of Brittany’s budget plans for 2026 regarding support for the Breton language. Some fifty organizations noted in an open letter to the Region’s President Loïg Chesnais-Girard that the Plan 301 for languages of Brittany which was adopted unanimously in 2023 by the Regional Council included annual increases in support. This was respected for 2024 and 2025 but the budget for 2026 remains flat without an estimated 60,000 euros for the growth of the Breton language.

After three days of discussion and debate the Regional Council of Brittany adopted its proposed budget on February 12. While the budget for the language project was not cut it was not increased. Putting the brakes on support is a problem in a time when acceleration is much needed – as critics of the plan noted.

Work to encourage and support the use of Breton in the home is much needed to supplement school learning. Students are discouraged from entering bilingual secondary programs since the Blanquer reform made changes in the baccalaureate exams that no longer allow exams taken in regional languages for subjects like history-geography or math. Diwan continues to face financial crisis in part due to a lack of enforcement of the “fortait scolaire” – a fee paid by communities to immersive schools such as Diwan for students from their commune who do not have an option for bilingual education. The transfer of these fees was part of the Molac law of 2021 but many communities refuse or fail to pay them. This has impacted, in one case, the school of Bourbriac (17 children) which is forced to close in the coming September 2026 school year due to financial issues but also more importantly the lack of a building to

host the school in the town. The current site will no longer be available and no other suitable building has been identified by the town for Diwan’s use. Diwan has 48 pre/primary schools, 7 middle schools and 2 high schools with some 3,700 students.

The organizations signing the Rouedad ar Brezhoneg letter of protest include many who publish in the Breton language or about Breton culture and history, organizations to support Breton in the schools, groups who offer Breton language classes for adults, radios in Breton, Breton language theater, group to promote Breton song and the arts, as well as a number of “Ti ar Vro” – cultural centers of various regions of Brittany which host a range of activities including Breton classes. Some of these date back decades (even close to 100 years) while many have been established more recently.



Ar Redadeg

Ar-redadeg.bzh

As reported in past issues of Bro Nevez, Ar Redadeg is a relay run to raise funds for Breton language projects and the Diwan schools. It is held every two years and the course snakes through all five departments of Brittany. Similar events are found in various parts of Europe inspired by the Korrika created in 1980 in the Basque country for its language. You also have the Rith in Ireland, Correllengua in Catalonia, Corsa d’Aran in the Val d’Aran (Catalonia), and the Correllengua in Corsica.

These events are not relay races but there is a relay in Brittany of a baton which carries a message to be revealed at the end of the run. This is symbolic of a relay of language from generation to generation.

Funds are raised by the purchase of kilometers by companies, organizations, towns and cities and individuals. The race continues day and night for nine days and eight nights. Anyone can participate and runners and walkers come in all ages with a big participation by children. The atmosphere is festive with onlookers cheering participants on, and fun events – music, songs, dancing, flags – along the route. Participants include Breton speakers and learners as well as people who know just a few words (or none) of Breton who want to support its transmission.

The Redadeg is not just a demonstration of moral support for the Breton language, but an event with a financial impact for Diwan schools and various projects selected by the organizers. In 2024 some 140,000 euros were raised with half going to Diwan and the other half to eight organizations and projects – see *Bro Nevez* 170, June 2024, for a few details.

You can find an excellent presentation of the 2026 Redadeg by Rémy Penneg on the Ni Hon Unan website (NHU.bzh) along with a wealth of articles about all aspects of Brittany. Here are some interesting numbers from the NHU article about the 2026 Redadeg which celebrates the 10th anniversary of this event:

- Departure from Lannion /Lannuon (Côtes d'Armor) on May 8
- Arrival in Nantes / Naoned (Loire-Atlantique) on May 16.
- Duration of the run – 9 days and 8 nights without pause.
- Total distance – about 2,226 kilometers (1,838 miles) through all five Breton departments.
- Participants – thousands of runners, walkers, volunteers and supporters

Five initiatives for the Breton language have been chosen for support from the 2026 Redadeg. The choice was guided by the theme Bevañ – Bodan - Bezañ (Vivre - réunir - être / To live - to gather - to be).



Budañ ha Skignan – a project to increase an audio Breton presence on the airwaves and via ones telephone. This is produced by five member radios of Radio Breizh: Radio

Bro Gwened, Radio Kreiz Breizh, Arvorig FM, Radio Kerne, and Radio Naoned).



KLT- Kerne Leon Treger – organization of regular events to gather elementary, middle school and high school students learning Breton, including theater

workshops and other activities for various ages.



Patati – A center in Nantes for children where activities are conducted through the Breton language, as well as support for families

using Breton in the home.



Training for those working on Breton activities with administrative support and analysis of activities to better coordinate work

in schools and other organizations.



C'hoariva – Training for those who want to develop Breton language theater with a project to create a theater piece to be performed during the Redadeg.



Fundraiser for Diwan from Yes Breizh

www.yes.bzh

A new event from Yes Breizh to raise funds for Diwan was held February 6 and 7. With the title “De Capitale (Rennes) à Capitale (Paris), la Bretagne se déchaîne” the event raised 5,000 euros with an auction of art

including a dress created by Pascal Jaouen and concert tickets to a Gwennyn concert.

A Year of Action by Breizh Amerika in 2025 with More Promised for 2026

The Breizh Amerika website and blog contains a wealth of news on the work of this organization as well as Breton history and culture. <https://www.breizh-amerika.com/blog> Spearheaded by Charles Kergaravat, in their recap of 2025, Breizh Amerika cited a number of accomplishments.



First on their list was the fact that Breizh Amerika IP won the Silver Medal at the Concours Général Agricole (Salon International de l'Agriculture, Paris). IPA can stand for the International Phonetic Alphabet as well as India Pale Ale, a beer that has grown in popularity. In this case we are talking about beer, and Brittany has a number of breweries of note.

Breizh Amerika has also played a key role in encouraging new innovative businesses. They held an Interceltic Business Forum in Lorient during the Interceltic Festival of Lorient which included the Interceltic Startup Challenge with entries from Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Cornwall, Brittany, and the Isle of Man

Also at the Lorient festival Breizh Amerika had 10 days for 10 years to mark their anniversary with concerts, films, displays and conferences. The anniversary was celebrated at the Tavern Roi Morvan with a debut tasting of their new beer Breizh Amerika Session IPA.

The 10th anniversary was also celebrated in Louisiana with a Breton stand at the Festival Acadien et Creole in Lafayette as well as events in New Orleans. A number of Brittany-Louisiana links were forged with music and cuisine during the year.

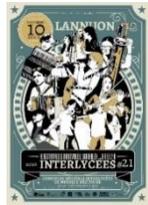
The group produced a film “Breizh in the USA” about a Breizh Amerika linked musical road trip.

Members of Breizh Amerika also visited the American Memorial at Gouesnou (honoring 229 U.S. soldiers from 1944)

Bagad Musicians Create More Musical Ties Between Brittany and Louisiana

This February the exchange organization NoLazz based in Quimper organized a trip to New Orleans by thirteen members of the bagads Cap Caval, Bagad Kemper, Moulin Vert and Karaez. The organization Aprèm'Jazz worked with Sonerion Penn Ar Bed to select ten youth and three teachers of bombarde, bagpipes, and

percussion to put together a program of Breton dancers and melodies. They are slated to perform at various sites in New Orleans. The project was enabled by a partnership with the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Foundation which hosts the Jazz and Heritage School of Music.



21st Inter-High School Contest for Traditional Breton Music

Students of the Félix Le Dantec high school of Lannion will organize the 21st contest for Breton music on April 10. This has served as a springboard for up-and-coming young musicians who often go on to be major actors at festoù-noz and concert productions. Included here are groups such as Karma, War-Sav, Spontus, Hamon-Martin, Digabestr, Llym, les Américains du Désert and Enneade.

This festive event has the support of the Regional Council of Brittany, Gouelioù Breizh and its member festivals, Ti ar Vro-Treger-Goueloù, the city of Lannion, the Lannion Trégor Communauté, Tamm-Kreiz, and Kan ar Bobl Breizh.

New Music from Brittany

Information for these short notes was drawn from Ar Men 270 (Jan-Feb 2026) as well as a number of websites.



Typhaine Corre & Tangi Le Gall-Carré. *Goulou Mil Steredenn.* Paker Prod 045.

This is the duo of Tangi Le Gall-Carré on accordion with vocalist Typhaine Corre who present Breton language texts drawn from the poetry of Naig Rozmor and novelist Hervé Le Gall on themes of love and loss, and social issues. Le Gall-Carré, of the group Startijenn composed the music drawing on traditional Breton melodies and rhythms. He and singer Typhaine Corre, an actress with the Strollad ar Vro Bagan, are joined by guests Jack Titley on mandolin, Julien Stévenin on bass fiddle, Simon Latouche on trombone, Jérôme Kerihuel on percussions and vocalists Gwenn an Dreo, Perynn Bleunven and Justine Morvan.



Duo Karavän. Balafenn.

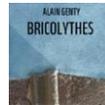
This is a duo of Ewen Baker on soprano saxophone and Thomas Le Gallic on accordion. This CD of twelve selections is made up of dances, mostly of their own composition, drawing on other traditions of France as well as Brittany. Dances include waltz, scottish, mazurka and gavotte.



#Fest 4 – Scène actuelle du Fest-Noz.

This CD provides a wide selection of Breton dances by fifteen different performers: Startijenn, Litha, Heson, Enneade, Krenadenn, Le Mézanj, Olmaro Duo, Kaolila, War-Sav Septet, Spontus, Tobie-

Bourgault, Zord Quartet, Diskar, Tribé Brass Band, and Le Bour-Bodros.



Alain Genty. Bricolythes.

This is a brand new digital album with 13 compositions by Alain Genty with five with Nicolas Giraud. Alain Genty plays fretless and electric bass, electric guitar, piano, keyboards, electronics and percussions. He is joined by Nicolas Giraud on trumpet, Jacky Molard on violin, Xavier Rosselle on saxophone, Thierry Garcia on electric guitar, Christophe Saunière on harp with voices and laughter included of Joanne McIver, Tony Mc Manus, and Soïg Siberil.



Brid Harper, Libby McCrohan, Sylvain Baron. *The Fog is Lifting.* CD Trio Harper/McCrohan/Baron.

Breton musicians have long been fans of and masters of Irish traditional music and the wooden flute definitely begs a trip into Irish tunes and melodies. Breton flute player Sylvain Baron here forms a trio with Irish women Brid Harper on fiddle and Libby McCrohan on bouzouki with arrangements of melodies and dances which take them beyond the usual Irish session repertoire.



Juliañ. Santec. Julabel 86841. (julian.bzh)

Julien Jaffres (Juliañ) lives in Belgium but is firmly rooted in Brittany. The electric guitar is center stage with support from other musicians on bombard, percussions, violin, mandolin, keyboard ... The album includes 13 selections of arrangements of some classics of Brittany in a style described as progressive rock. Titles include Gwir Vretoned, Esprit Celte, God Save the Plinn, An Alarc'h, the Bro Gozh Ma Zadou, and the title Santec.



Kanerion Pleuigner. A Galon Vat – Chants Bretons Vannetais. Arfolk.

This is a double CD of twenty-six selections by this mens choir of Pluvigner, directed by Andre Le Meut. These are cantiques and secular songs in Breton from the Vannetais area.



Erwan Keravec. Whitewater. CD Ici d'ailleurs MT 023.

Following albums exploring the music of Philip Glass and Terry Riley, bagpiper Erwan Keravec here performs solo with his own compositions. This is not your old march-strathspey-reel or traditional Breton dance repertoire but a highly innovative use of the bagpipe taking it in very new directions.



Kreiz Breizh Akademi #10 – Mémé K7.

The "Central Brittany Academy" has served as a laboratory for young musicians to explore modal music and the subtleties of traditional music of Brittany and other parts of the world. Musicians work together to create new music rooted in tradition but widely experimental. This CD is based on earlier work with the

Akademi by violinist Pierre Droual, with performances by singers Sterenn Toscer and Anna Suignard-Bouliou as well as acoustic and electric voices of strings and wind instruments of the rest of the group: Eliaz Le Bot (sax, bombarde, biniou), Elise Rens (viola), Iwan Audran (drums), Klervi Piel (bassoon, bombarde), Léo Fuster (viola, machines), Mathias Le Gall (bass fiddle), and Raphaël Dubert (electric guitar, Turkish lute lavta).



Jeanne Lemoine & Cyril Couchoux.
Souvenir de la Kermesse.

This CD includes fourteen selections of dances primarily from eastern Brittany, including ridée, scottish, avant-duex, rond de Saint-Vincent,

hanter dro, bal paludier and others. Jeanne Lemoine plays accordion and Cyril Couchoux is on banjo.



Klara Ninn. *An Ankoun.*

First album by Klara Ninn with nine selections drawn from the Breton song tradition and newly composed with an electro-pop sound. Klara

Ninn sings in Breton and also plays violin, mandolin and electronic “machines.” She is joined on this album (in concert?) by Maxime Kermagoret on drums, Cheun Guichen on vocals, with electronic work by DjiBril (Gabrel N’Dombi).

Languages in the U.S.

There are an estimated 350 to 430 different languages spoken in the U.S. (depending on the inclusion of dialects or particular definition of a distinct language). Of these there are 199 living Indigenous languages according to ethnologue.com – 195 of which are endangered.

The U.S. Census collects information about language use and this shows that in 2019 of a population of 308,834,688 people over the age of 5, those speaking only English at home numbered 241,032,343 (78%). Those speaking a language other than English at home numbered 67,802,345 (22%). While the statistics are based on sampling and do not reflect exact numbers, they give a good idea of the health of languages in the U.S. The numbers do not reflect the number of people who speak a particular language outside of the home (for business use, social interactions, cultural events ...), nor do they mean that those not speaking English at home do not know or use English. There are statistics that do measure command of the English language.

The listing below breaks things down by language (or language area) showing the estimated number of speakers and the change in the number of speakers from 1980 to 2019. This should not be interpreted too literally since different censuses collected information differently. A rise in speakers since 1980 may mean an increase in immigrants speaking those languages in more recent years. Or it might mean that language communities are choosing to raise children in their language and are

retaining languages in homes (even if they are using English otherwise).

The following numbers are from the U.S. census (census.gov) but other information can be found on the websites ethnologue.com and translatorswithoutborders.org.

Languages other than English spoken at home (ages 5 and up)

<u>Language</u>	<u>2019 numbers / and change from 1980 to 2019</u>
Spanish / Spanish Creole	41,757,391 / + 30,641,197
Chinese	3,494,544 / + 2,863,738
French (including Patois, Cajun, Creole, Haitian)	2,096,592 / + 545,841
Tagalog	1,763,585 / + 1,289,435
Vietnamese	1,570,526 / + 1,372,938
African language (including Amharic, Somali, Yoruba, Twi, Igbo, Swahili ...)	1,477,342 / NA. not available
Arabic	1,260,437 / + 1,043,437
Korean	1,075,247 / + 808,967
Russian	941,454 / + 768,228
German	895,309 / - 691,284
Hindi	892,596 / NA
Portuguese or Portuguese Creole	845,801 / + 495,926
Other languages – Asia (not including Telugu or Tamil)	675,991 / NA
Other Indo European languages	576,240 / NA
Italian	539,546 / - 1,078,798
Urdu	519,883 / NA
Polish	510,430 / - 310,217
Other Pacific Island langs.	485,925 / NA
Persian	457,102 / + 350,110
Gujarati	455,292 / + 418,427
Japanese	455,003 / + 118,685
Telugu	419,768 / + 410,265
Other Indic langs.	417,486 / NA

(not including Punjabi or Bengali)

Other West Germanic languages (not including Yiddish)	377,460 / NA
Bengali	369,115 / + 355,935
Punjabi	322,446 / + 303,148
Other Slavic langs.	321,876 / NA
Tamil	293,907 / + 283,310
Other unspecified langs.	288,554 / NA
Greek	264,066 / - 137,377
Serbo-Croatian	243,232 / + 92,977
Armenian	236,949 / + 136,315
Hmong (with Lao)	230,270 / + 214,081
Hebrew	210,824 / + 111,658
Other North American Native langs (not including Navajo)	197,550 / NA
Khmer (including Cambodian)	193,070 / + 176,653
Yiddish	182,756 / - 133,197
Navajo	171,299 / + 48,130

A note on Native American languages: Increases in speakers here would not be explained by immigration into the U.S. but perhaps by population growth and sheer effort to sustain languages. Comparisons in numbers for “other North American Native languages” cannot be made for 1980 to 2019, but there was an increase here of 23,841 from the 2000 census. Navajo had an increase of 48,130 who speak it at home. According to the ethnologue website there are 37 Native language families with 199 living languages – of which 195 are considered endangered.

Should Americans be concerned that English will be overwhelmed by other languages? Although a concentration of specific language speakers in a particular community may make that language dominant in public spaces it is clear that mastering the English language is important to economic advancement. As the above numbers show, the diminishing use of non-English languages in the home by immigrants of earlier generations – German, Italian, Greek, Polish, and Yiddish – is likely to be a pattern for other languages unless speakers make a concerted effort to pass the language along to younger generations born in America. And the retention of non-English languages also depends on the recognition that bilingualism and trilingualism are assets, and that cultural and linguistic diversity is to be valued.

Nevertheless, the U.S. President has decided that in the interest of unity (uniformity?) making English the only official language of the country is necessary. Here is the wording from the March 1, 2025, Executive Order:

Designating English as the official language of the United States

Purpose and Policy. From the founding of our Republic, English has been used as our national language. Our Nation’s historic governing documents, including the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, have all been written in English. It is therefore long past time that English is declared as the official language of the United States. A nationally designated language is at the core of a unified and cohesive society, and the United States is strengthened by a citizenry that can freely exchange ideas in one shared language.

In welcoming new Americans, a policy of encouraging the learning and adoption of our national language will make the United States a shared home and empower new citizens to achieve the American dream. Speaking English not only opens doors economically, but it helps newcomers engage in their communities, participate in national traditions, and give back to our society. This order recognizes and celebrates the long tradition of multilingual American citizens who have learned English and passed it to their children for generations to come.

To promote unity, cultivate a shared American culture for all citizens, ensure consistency in government operations, and create a pathway to civic engagement, it is in America’s best interest for the Federal Government to designate one — and only one — official language. Establishing English as the official language will not only streamline communication but also reinforce shared national values, and create a more cohesive and efficient society.



A Travel Account from 1925

Map modified from *Détours Bretagne* 1992 (Editions Ouest France)

Editor’s Note: As with many travel accounts by American or British writers, history can be romanticized with druids popping

up everywhere! And depictions of people can be stereotypic and negative. Here the men are heroic and

the women are harpies. The fact that this is written for *The Catholic World* explains the author's negative slant on the manner in which Bretons revere their own local saints and pardons. His disparagement of beggars at Pardons shows little Christian empathy for the poor.

"Stormy Seas and Stormy Women" by Hugh Allen
The Catholic World, Vol. 121, no. 726, September 1925

I've seen your stormy seas and stormy women,
And I rather pity lovers more than seamen.
- Byron

The ragged north coast of Brittany is scalloped into innumerable bays and little capes, with small islands, jutting up here and there near the shore like defensive outposts. The shore line of the wedge-like piece of land lying between the Bay of Douarnenez on the north and the Bay of Audierne on the south, is marked by wilder asperities and a more sublime desolation than that of any other part of France. From the Pointe du Raz nearly to Douarnenez, the rocks are so precipitous as to form an almost impassible barrier between land and sea.

Just overnight from Paris, here where the final marches of the land rush out to reach the ocean and narrow strips of the ocean have cut deep, rough valleys through the granite bulwarks of the coast, civilization, with its mechanical noise and its dizzy speed and most of its creature comforts, has been slow to penetrate. This is the country of the Bigoudens, descendants of a strange race that antedates the Celts in the land of Armor and Argoat, the sea and the mountain.

The people who spend their lives in these straggling little coast towns, forever under the menace of a cruel sea that is perpetually robbing them of their loved ones, are folk quite apart from the rest of the world, dreamers living in a romantic past. Unchanged by the electric surge of modernity about them, they cling to their own traditions, and every stone in their beloved countryside is invested by them with poetic and heroic associations. Their environment, their amazing speech, their sea-soaked religion, their dark and somber legends, arrest the attention and inspire the sympathy of the most casual visitor.

Along those barren cliffs, you can walk for hours without hearing a sound save the melancholy cries of the sea birds and the crash of the waves breaking steadily upon the rocks below. Here and there rises an austere bulk of some ancient church, giving the effect of a medieval stronghold. Many of these edifices have passed through the hands of the restorer and emerged hybrids. Silhouetted against the skyline, perhaps, you will see the dark figures of some fisherman's widow and his orphans kneeling supplicant at some wayside *calvaire*.

Catholicism is a particularly precious thing to a people whose happiness is a constant prey to Channel storms and Biscayan gales. In many of the churches, day and night, there stands a bier, waiting for the sea to take its toll, and hovering in the gloom are the kneeling figures of women, burning candles, watching, praying, waiting with tense faces to see which of their loved ones will be stretched across its sable draperies next.

The harvest of the sea is the main support of Brittany. The small boats rake the waters along the coast for sardines, the larger ones go after bigger fish on the banks of Newfoundland, and even as far as Iceland. Three-fourths of the sailors in the French Navy are Bretons who have earned their living at this dangerous business. The toil of the sea is the very reason for being every man, woman, and child in that bleak littoral between the Bay of Audierne and the Bay of Douarnenez, for the piscatorial plunder of the deep must pass through various processes of cleaning and drying before it is ready for market, and in these, women and children have their appointed tasks.

Sardines are conservative creatures and invariably take the same route in their migrations year after year. In March and April they are caught along the coasts of the Adriatic and the Mediterranean; they pass through the Straits of Gibraltar, visiting the coasts of Spain and Portugal. In May they arrive in French waters. In June the dweller in the Morbihan cast their nets, and Concarneau, too, catches the succulent little fish in abundance. In August they attain the Bay of Douarnenez, and it is here that the largest shoals are to be found. Such as escape the vigilance of the patient Bigoudens drift off to the Ile de Batz in September and so on to the shores of England and Scotland. The gray, malodorous town of Douarnenez is, therefore, the headquarters of the sardine fisheries, and all of the ten thousand odd inhabitants give their waking hours in one way or another to this flourishing industry. It is in August, then, that one should visit Douarnenez. When the waters of the Bay, cornflower blue in color, are crowded with little brown double-winged boats racing in as though for a wager, the spectacle is worth going far to behold. All Douarnenez is agog when the fishing fleet comes home. You can do no better than follow the furious clatter of flying sabots through the steep, torturous, badly-paved streets to the quay.

The doors of the huddled, white-faced houses you will pass are always open in the daytime and never locked at night. Glance in one as you pass by, and what you see will be repeated with few variations all the way down the street – a vista of glistening metal, polished oak, blue and white china, and a redly burning fire. There will be a small window or two, framed with gingham curtains, a couple of tables, a few rush-bottomed chairs, two great beds, and the family chest. The chest is sometimes an elaborate, carved affair, and always contains whatever the family may be able to boast of in the way of *fête* costumes, a

supply of bread, and the Sunday shoes, if any. The beds are nothing but closets, really, just big enough to crawl into by stepping on the chest. Once inside, you slide the wooden panels together and suffocate until morning.

The main feature of the dwelling, however, is always a huge fireplace, set straight ahead of the doorway and festooned with a bewildering array of pots and cranes. On the mantel there may be plates in the native ware of Quimper, the statue of some favorite saint, and a few books of devotion. To all Bretons the hearth has a very touching and solemn significance. There it is that the spirits of the dear departed, *les revenants*, are wont to foregather. More than once I have seen the granite face of some old vixen grow soft as she removed from the dying embers the little three-legged stool on which her principal cooking vessel rests when preparations for a meal are in progress, before retiring for the night. It has to be cooled off, you see, since, for all you know, her great-great-grandfather might want to sit on that very stool in his silent vigil over the household before the dawn, and it would never do to give the good old gentleman too warm a reception!

If you were to enter the poorest of these cottages, you would be received with stately, old-world courtesy and thanked for honoring the humble dwelling with your presence. The best in the house would be set before you. Maybe it would only be black bread and cider, but no duchess could bid you to her board with a more regal wave of the hand than that which summons you to partake of it.

As you descend a hill, the haven toward which all these scurrying feet are hastening lies before you. It is the quay of a large bay with a breakwater, and already it is dark with the figures of women in short skirts, *sabots*, bright shawls, and white coifs, all gossiping and keeping their eyes peeled for a glimpse of their respective males. Hanging over the stone parapet are groups of young girls in coifs and filet lace, some playing with needlework, others munching their *goûter*, a crust of bread and a bit of chocolate, and all covertly watching to catch sight of their best beaux on the entrance of the fishing fleet. The people on the pier and the boats on the water form notes of luscious color. A couple of American artists, all arms, legs, and shell-rimmed spectacles, are busily transferring their impressions of the scene to canvas. Fishing boats are constantly entering by the dozen to range themselves in orderly rows along the quay. Men are squirming amidst the sails and cordage; others are swaggering up the quay laden with round brown baskets filled with shining fish; others are taking the nets home to be dried.

Big and bronzed, their hair tawny from exposure, their blue eyes dark with speculation and a tragic fatalism, their nondescript working clothes faded by the salt air into rich shades of gold orange and red, these toilers of the sea will amaze you with their nobility of feature and fine

bearing. Natural-born leaders, they have nothing to command but a few old worm-eaten, unseaworthy fishing boats, yet they hold themselves as proudly as kings.

I have spent a day out in one of these flimsy boats, watching the fishermen at their labors and listening to their stories, some droll and some horrible, of the sea and its ways. The moral of these tales seemed to be that Death never really got you until you were dead anyway. The adventures of Jonah seemed trifling, indeed, compared to some of the hairbreadth escapes I heard recounted.

Each sardine boat is manned by from four to six sturdy Bretons; each man, in turn, is supplied with a number of nets, the meshes of which vary in fineness. The intestines of a certain kind of fish furnish the bait. The men adjust their nets strategically and throw this loathsome mixture in handfuls on the water – not a particularly enviable job. Presently the water on either side of the smack is gray with sardines. Great excitement on the little vessel. Much talk. Many gestures. But these fellows are experts in their line for all that. The nets are drawn, two men pulling horizontally through the water, while the others untangle the fish caught in the meshes of the nets. The catch is dumped into the bottom of the boat and sprinkled with salt. The sardines die in the air after a few seconds of exposure, squealing like mice as they do so. I trust this will not interfere with your taste for *hors-d'oeuvres*! Once the first haul in each shoal is made, the fishermen, of course, are able to estimate the size of future spoil and regulate the meshes of their nets accordingly. So it goes, until the boat seems top-heavy with sardines and the skipper gives the signal to knock off and call it a day.

Not until the last item of their cargo has been accounted for, do the stalwart fishermen deign to notice their womenfolk, or the young lads show interest in the primitive coquetry of the girls on the parapet. Then there is much rough and ready badinage. The farther away from the quay the men wander, the greater their insignificance becomes. By the time they are up in the *grande rue*, they are like so many Samsons shorn of their locks, with their Delilahs sticking to the finish. Husbands and wives resume old quarrels, the women shrieking at the top of their voices and thumping their men with their fists, but the latter rarely hit back. They shuffle along uncertainly, as if every muscle in their bodies, so supple at sea, had become paralyzed the minute they set their tired feet on land. Finally, the weary men fly as by some preconcerted signal to the nearest *café*, where they will drink and drink until sometimes their better halves come and route them homeward with blows and later route them seaward with blows, when the time comes for the boats to lift anchor again. For the forest of masts keeps ever on the go. When they are absent from the harbor, all the color and romance and life and gayety of the town seem to have vanished with them. There is left – the smell of sardines. ...

The great safety valve of the Bigoudens, the time when they let off the most steam, is during the Pardon of the Sea, at La Palude. To observe them, all sporting their bravest costumes, as they troop in vast crowds over the pilgrim way through the woods of Ploumarc'h, is to have an interesting psychical adventure. All the curious atavistic kinks that make a Breton different from all other humans seem to rise to the surface, as they wander beneath those beeches, the same, you would swear, that shaded their druidic ancestors.

Of old, old time, Ahès, also known as Dahut, used to come to this identical spot with the lovely maidens of Kers, to wash her linen in the woodland pools. Sometimes, if you are a true Breton, you can still see her image in these pools and smell the bland aroma of her fragrant hair in the mosses on their banks. This hair, which she tossed in long undulant waves, was sometimes the color of the sun, sometimes of the moon. I am afraid that Ahès was a vamp. She lived in a great palace with windows that sparkled like emeralds. Greedy for love, she preferred fishermen to all others, and was wont to lie in wait for them, beckoning them to her chamber. Hapless the matelots who obeyed the siren's call. Her kiss was fatal. Once her arms were twined around them, they fell into a delicious slumber and never woke again. Ahès, goddess of the druids, and living personification of the sea, was loved, yet hated. Ahès is gone now, and so are the druids, but the sea remains, loved, yet hated. Something of the sea's capriciousness, something of her alluring mystery and intangible charm, has been bred for untold generations into the character of these, her children.

The ancient festival of Ahès and the feast of St. Anne, on which the Pardon of the Sea occurs, coincide. Instead of druidic incantations, you hear the beautiful prayers of the Rosary, but you do not have to be very clairvoyant to surmise what that other August celebration on these same heights, with its paeons in praise of the sea and elaborate pagan rites, must have been like. Observing the antics of these highly emotional beings, as their piety runs amuck at a pardon, one concludes it is just as well that the Church, in her immemorial wisdom, has for long subtly sought to weld their faith more closely with the immense international deposit we all share, substituting on occasion, pilgrimages to Lourdes instead of pardons, and statues of the saints of the Missal in place of the obscure saints of the country, who date back almost to the menhirs, and at some of whom the good Bollandists are constrained to look askance.

The religious exercise over, the people rush to their merrymaking with brutal impetuosity, flinging themselves on mirth with ferocious zeal. They yell. They wave their arms. They indulge in horseplay of all kinds. They call each other cows and camels. They shout, "Name of a pipe!" They know not restraint. Still, anyone who knows

the incredible hardships of their daily lives can scarcely fail to agree with Anatole Le Braz, a man who knows well all their whims, when he says: "As for myself, I have seen them at work in their fishing-boats during stormy nights at sea, and when I remember that life of the damned which they lead, ever the prey of a toil whose ingratitude has no equal, save their patience, I am tempted rather to think that these short intervals, during which God snatches them from hell, are but too short." (Land of Pardons, p. 274).

The most extortionate beggars are everywhere. They have the privilege of exacting "the right of the poor" for this great day. The *gendarmes* cannot stop their cries, and well the ragged legion knows it. None hazards a guess whence they came. Presently, they will vanish with a considerable haul, to reappear at the next pardon with the same old wheeze.

Another side issue of the Pardon of the Sea is a marriage mart. Should you go to La Palude, do not lean against the fence of the churchyard, as little innocence did, unless you are contemplating matrimony, for that is a vantage point sacred on this occasion to the fair daughters of the province who wish to find husbands in the restive crowd of sunburned seamen at the pardon. In a solemn line they stand against the fence, demurely waiting to be inspected by whatever young man whose fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love. Here they are, all dressed up – and for some there will be no place to go. Their hair, all made nice and greasy for the event, is caught up tightly under a spotless white lace coif. These coifs, worn in all weathers by the women, are cleverly adapted to climatic conditions. No gale out of Biscay could blow off the coif of a Bigouden woman. The Pont-Aven girls revel in coifs replete with fluttering ribbons and laces, secure in their tranquil valleys.

At the marriage mart these devout clients of St. Joseph have ransacked their family chests for everything likely to enhance their pulchritude or to distract attention from their lack of it. If there is jewelry, it is plastered on, regardless. Small, beguiling aprons, covered with rich embroidery, hang over heavy black skirts flaunting broad bands of velvet, each band advertising so many hundred francs of dowry. In those cumbersome garments with multitudinous petticoats beneath, these girls will presently foot the gavotte for hours and hours with brusque young Bretons eager to relax in the dance from the eternal vigilance they must keep over their muscles while out on the sea in their little craft, where the least misstep, the merest sudden swerve of a careless body even, may precipitate them into the watery grave they dread so much.

Hovering on the side lines, and strangely quiet now, are the worried-looking mothers and the toothless old grandmothers, their eyes aching with anxiety as they listen to the comments that are freely passed about the

waiting girls. The inspection, while it lasts, is very thorough, to say the least. Whatever else they are, these swains are not bashful. Up and down the line they strut, running their piercing blue eyes over the “stock.” It is a big moment for them. Each is looking for a woman with the constitution of a dray horse, a little money, if possible, and sufficient good looks to make falling in love easy and agreeable. Their observations on the good and bad points of palpitant maidens are very frank. They realize their momentary importance and enjoy it to the full, grasping, perhaps, that once they are married, they will never be able to get a word in edgewise. The government of the average Breton household is that of a more or less benevolent matriarchate.

Granting that some of these expectant damsels pass the Board of Censors at the pardon, the wedding later will be the scene of further spontaneous expressions of rustic gayety. Above all, there will be a dance, where guests, young and old, will clasp hands with the bride and groom and with one another, as if intent on playing ring-around-a-rosy. Any other miscellaneous group of people of varying ages would look rather absurd in the process, but these Bretons do not. The Breton is the only person I know who can chase a pig without losing his self-respect, or count the teeth in a cow’s mouth and look dignified at the same time. This dance is a folk dance, druidic in origin, symbolic of connubial joy and tripped to the music of bagpipes. It breathes the haunting, pervasive spirit of the past, a past that can never come again, though it never seems to be very far away in this land of ancient enchantment.

After the dance comes the great clink of glasses and clatter of plates of the marriage feast. The fifth of the Seven Deadlies is the Breton’s favorite; though, God knows, he does not often have an opportunity to commit it. What splendid, extravagant toasts are proposed to the beaming bride, who looks, in the midst of her white draperies, like a cranberry in a pan of milk! White draperies – if she has been very good, she may wear white; if she has been very bad, and rarely does this happen in stanch old Brittany, she will have to wear black. At Douarnenez I heard the story of a girl who had loved not wisely, but too well. When her wedding day came, however, she could not resist the poignant feminine temptation to be married in white, and so arrayed herself. She was covered with mud from head to foot, and the clothes were ripped off her back before she had gone a block by watchful viragoes jealous of their conventions. It is hard to keep a secret in Brittany!

It is perhaps on the Isle of Bréhat that the psychology of these Breton women may be studied to the best advantage. This interesting little dab of the world lies about five miles north of Paimpol and a couple of miles off the coast. In fair weather it may be reached in a sailboat from the tiny port of Ploubazlanec. There the air is so soft, the sea so blue, and the sunlight so mellow,

that you would fancy yourself wafted in some magic way to a sequestered nook along the Mediterranean. This is the place that lured Pierre Loti.

The island itself is “cradled and hung in clear tranquility” – but, oh, those women! Great, strapping creatures they are, with handsome faces and deft fingers. Besides attending to their ordinary household duties, they perform all the work of the small farms and gardens. No men are to be seen – the men are all away at the Great Fishing off the Newfoundland Banks. And how these women fight! Their leisure, it would seem, is mainly spent in bickering like furies over the virtues, real or suppositions, of their absent menfolk. He was no fool who said, “Wise is the serpent and cunning the asp, but woman has the malice of both.” They reminded me of that other French possession, the Island of Rapa in the South Seas, where the deadlier sex preponderates over the masculine gender in the proportion of twenty-five to one, where, indeed, a mere man does not even have to lift the food to his mouth unless he so inclines, but has at his beck and call a retinue of doting damsels eager to obey his slightest wish.

Nothing but their religion keeps these women from being absolutely grotesque. When death strikes some smashing blow in their midst, they are all, for a time, one in sympathy and understanding. ... If you were about when the news was read that some brave fellow had been lost off the Banks, you would see a nervous fluttering of big, red hands, a trembling of dry, parched lips, and eyes fixed and tortured in a tragic mask – but no tears. And presently, as she turned to resume her unending tasks, you would hear the wife, mother, or sweetheart say in a tone of noble resignation: “It is the will of the good God!” Stout, high hearts!

After all, suffering, *cheerfully* borne, is the ultimate test of artist, lover, and saint.

Editor’s Note: Bréhat is off the north coast of Brittany, far from the Bigouden area where the author starts his narrative. The description of the climate of this island is very similar to that found in George Wharton Edwards, (*Brittany and the Bretons*, 1910) description of Paimpol and its area printed in *Bro Nevez* 176 (December 2025). But, Wharton’s description of the women of Bréhat lacks the negative slant of Hugh Allen. It would take some careful reading but I would guess both authors were inspired by (drew directly from?) Pierre Loti’s 1886 novel *An Iceland Fisherman (Pêcheur d’Islande)*.

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