THE POETRY OF PLACE: LYRIC, LANDSCAPE, AND IDEOLOGY IN RENAISSANCE FRANCE

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The Poetry of Place: Lyric, Landscape, and Ideology in Renaissance France

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pour Florence, *in memoriam*

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THE POETRY OF PLACE: LYRIC, LANDSCAPE, AND IDEOLOGY IN RENAISSANCE FRANCE

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Introduction

A traveller looking for a weekend getaway in the Vendômois region of France might come across this enticing description: 'En route pour une balade au pays de Ronsard. Mignonne, allons voir la rose du côté de Vendôme […] on écoute le Loir murmurer dans le parc, on remonte le temps dans un lieu rempli de poésie, au milieu des marronniers roses centenaires' [Let's go for a walk in Ronsard's country. *Sweet one, let's go and see the rose* in Vendôme … we can hear the Loir murmuring in the park as we turn back time in a place filled with poetry, among the ancient red horse chestnuts.] The detailed itinerary proposes a walk 'to the manor of la Possonnière, the birthplace of Ronsard,' then on to a botanical park in the 'valley of the Cendrine, dear to Ronsard.'[1] The poetry of the sixteenth-century French poet Pierre de Ronsard shapes the visitor's experience of the landscape, down to the paraphrase of the first line of the sonnet 'Mignonne, allons voir si la rose.' Whether or not we have read Ronsard's descriptions of the vineyards, the Loir river and valley, and the forest of the Gâtine, poetry not only captures and describes a certain affect towards this landscape but is also one of the filters we bring to our experience in the first place. We expect the landscape to be beautiful in a lyric way – and perhaps we experience it as poetic because Ronsard described it as such.

Ronsard is not the only Renaissance[2] poet cited today to express an affective relationship with French place. Joachim Du Bellay's descriptions of France, and in particular of his native Anjou, are widely cited today by French and non-French alike to describe place-based nationalist and regionalist sentiment. The work of preference is Du Bellay's *Les Regrets*, one of the most sustained poetic expressions of homesickness in French, written while the poet was unhappy in Italy and longing for

his country and 'petite maison' in Anjou. A modern-day Angevin cardinal residing in Rome, for example, publically adopts Du Bellay's pose of homesickness in a published address.[3] In an otherwise scientific discussion of the mild climate of Anjou, an environmental historian cites Du Bellay's 'la douceur Angevine' to describe what makes the region particularly propitious for wine production.[4] And a recent candidate to the French presidency, François Bayrou, cited the lines known to most French schoolchildren, 'France mère des arts, des armes et des lois,' during a 2006 interview on *Le Franc-parler*.[5]

This book starts from the observation that Renaissance lyric landscapes constitute a foundational moment in the cultural history of the French *paysage*. Certain landscapes have perennially been invested with what the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan has called 'topophilia' or 'the affective bond between people and place.'[6] When seeking to express a topophilic relation to their country or a region therein, as the above examples show, the French often have recourse to Renaissance poetry. I believe that the third quarter of the sixteenth century in France marks a turning point after which poetry became an indelible mode of expressing and experiencing a local and national sense of place. Vernacular poetry written at this time produced a sustained series of descriptions of named French regions, mapping out the spaces of the kingdom in a way that has become an enduring part of national and regional sentiment. I do not take this for granted, but rather ask in this study why this distant and relatively brief moment of literary history should have provided such a durable sense of place. I also ask why this ideological work was taken up by poetry rather than any other cultural discourse.[7]

To answer these questions, I will situate lyric landscapes in the conditions of their production, analysing their relations to various historical and interrelated contexts: cartographic, political, social, environmental, and literary- and art-historical. Ronsard's Vendômois, Du Bellay's Anjou, and the places of other poets of their generation, will be shown to be freighted with some of the most pressing social, political, and cultural questions of the moment. During this brief but formative period, poetic landscapes *do* something, in the Aristotelean, dramatic, sense.[8] They describe and produce the emerging cultural, political, and environmental space of France, with all its complications, contestations, and ambiguities. They are, variously, aristocratic, royalist, anti-royalist, Catholic, traditionalist, nationalist, regionalist, literary, philosophical, cartographic, or gendered. All of these engagements intersect and compete with each other to create dynamic imagined geographies of France, 'spaces of hope'[9] in a time of turmoil.

Poetry and the Nightmare of History

Intellectually, socially, and environmentally, the Renaissance landscape was changing. Change was often unwelcome, often truly devastating. It is perhaps paradoxical that Renaissance lyric, produced during a time of increasing social and political upheavals which culminated in the horror of the Wars of Religion (1562–94), should have provided some of the most irenic and abiding descriptions of France ever written. In the 1550s, France seemed poised to put itself on the map culturally, politically, cartographically, and linguistically. But by the 1580s, all coherence was gone; the kingdom and its regions were sundered by civil war between Protestants and Catholics. With the horror of the 1572 St Bartholomew massacres fresh in the collective memory, attempts to describe France poetically were abandoned. It is precisely during the period of calm before the storm, roughly corresponding to the third quarter of the sixteenth century, that poets started to name the landscapes of their lyrics as specifically French, and to present them as refuges from which to hold the awfulness of history, however momentarily, at bay.

The history with which these spaces of hope engage is not limited to the wars of religion. Tumult and change were everywhere, if one was a nobleman, humanist, and poet. The feudal system was breaking down and the social status of aristocratic landowners changing.[10] Faced with an increasingly bureaucratized and centralized royal administration, the *noblesse d'épée* did not seem as relevant to the kingdom.[11] Unable to live from their rents, men of letters had to work for a living, a frustration wonderfully expressed by Du Bellay in *Les Regrets*: 'veoir Dubellay se mesler du mesnage' [to see Du Bellay getting involved in household affairs.][12] The crown had annexed region after region, but local identities and loyalties remained strong and challenged the hegemony of political nationhood.[13] Even a sense of native cultural coherence was complicated by the ongoing importance of Italian and classical exemplars. The literary landscape, despite the emergence of a self-conscious vernacular, was a palimpsest of foreign influence. The physical landscape was likewise transformed: population growth, water pollution, deforestation, and contention over use of forestry resources, the shift from feudal farming to sharecropping, all left visible effects on the real places of Renaissance France. These social, cultural, and physical changes will be revisited in detail in individual chapters.

Such changes in the lay of the land – literal and figurative – meant that representing France was a complex undertaking indeed. How to provide images of French landscape when the reality was so fractured

and complex? But the power of these spaces of hope comes precisely from the bidirectional movement between first world (history) and second world (fiction; in this case, poetry), identified by Harry Berger as crucial to Renaissance fiction-making. Far from presenting poetic place as an expression of a timeless *genius loci*, they self-consciously engage with history and affirm their limits, opening up to 'forces that impinge from the outside.'[14] The referential richness of French Renaissance lyric landscapes lies in this central tension between ideal and real worlds, a tension which is also at the heart of the pastoral mode. Pastoral landscapes are not simply idealized representations of nature, as Paul Alpers and others have definitively shown: they are about the human and social dramas that play out therein.[15] The bower, then, is a social relation, above all a place of containment, where the 'nightmare' of history is held at bay for a while, but always looms on the horizon.[16] This is not to deny that pastoral thematizes evasion into or idealization of nature, but the evasion is complex, operated in full knowledge of its status as fiction. It is a poetics of suspension, characterized by Luigi Monga as 'constantly suspended between a bitter acceptance of reality and the need to create an ideal refuge.'[17]

I shall return in the first chapter to a more detailed and historicized discussion of pastoral. For the moment, I am simply underlining its dialectic relation to history. Indeed, all landscapes – physical and represented, pastoral or not – articulate with complex socio-cultural mediations. Chris Fitter has thus argued for a historical approach to literary landscapes, one that reconstructs the 'enabling cognitive world' of the text and uses the 'scrutiny of historical change as the condition for comprehension of human landscape perception.'[18] I agree with this principle. But to historicize lyric landscape should not be to ignore the signal importance of the poetic, or of inherited textual and intellectual traditions (nor does Fitter suggest this). Throughout this study, I will pay attention to questions of genre and form, to the abundant presence of classical and Italian poetic – especially pastoral – models, to the practice of imitation, and to humanist intellectual commonplaces. So important are these contexts to Renaissance literature that it is perfectly possible to read poetic landscapes as having very little to do with extra-textual realities. Danièle Duport's consummate studies of poetry and gardens (broadly understood as any landscape imprinted by human activity), for example, argue that landscapes in poetry are primarily about the poet's own craft.[19]

I take such genre-related questions seriously, but attempt to do so in a way that opens them up to socio-historical contexts. Mark Rasmussen,

arguing that the recent critical 'flight from form' has impoverished both literary and cultural studies, posits a new formalism which takes as given that form is social, and that social history has form.[20] With respect to Renaissance France, Timothy Hampton makes a similar case for considering 'the ideological significance of the notion of literary form' at a time of 'discontinuity, violence, and fragmentation.'[21] Renaissance lyric landscapes, which intricately imbricate textual and social histories, are an ideal site in which to explore the connections between the poetic and its historical contexts. I propose that it was lyric poetry, more than any other cultural discourse, that mapped out a hopeful spatial and cultural identity for France during a time of increasing turmoil. Like Phillip Sidney's poet who grows a better nature but never affirms it as truth (and therefore 'never lieth'), French Renaissance poets insist on poetry's power and agency in the real world. While putting lyric landscapes in dialogue with various non-literary contexts, this analysis will therefore also take seriously specifically literary questions as I address the question of why it should have been lyric that took on this representational work.

Real and Imagined Place: The Problem of Metaphor

Landscape, of course, can signify either an exterior reality or its representation, and the notions of space and place have long been used metaphorically. Some geographers, in the tradition of Henri Lefebvre, see spatial metaphors as 'problematic in so far as they presume that space is not.'[22] I suggest throughout this study that Renaissance lyric landscapes offer us a way out of the impasse of metaphor, in that they dramatize an awareness of the interrelatedness of physical and mental landscapes. This is supported by recent critical thinking about landscape: as I shall further discuss in the following chapter, scholars now tend to understand *landscape*, and often *place*, as an inherently social and cultural relation to land, a meeting point between nature and human perception. It is a relationship itself, a 'way of seeing the world.'[23] This understanding of landscape as always already cultural blurs the distinction between the imagined and the real, and I believe that this blurring is entirely appropriate for Renaissance texts. Renaissance writers would not have been surprised by the idea that exterior, physical space and interior, mental place are necessarily and constantly producing each other. Ronsard himself defined poetry itself as a kind of landscape, writing in the address to the reader of the 1587 edition of his

Œuvres that 'poésie est un pré' while 'poème est une fleur' [poetry is a meadow, a poem is a flower].[24] Rhetorical theory since antiquity had taken as axiomatic the interpenetrabilty of mental and physical spaces: the etymologies of the words *topos* and *locus* themselves are both poetic and topographic.[25] The horticultural metaphors used in classical rhetoric (ornaments as flowers, the garden of letters), the dual meaning of *culture* as both biological and social, the idea of natural *varietas* reflected in the poet's creativity, as well as the spatial quality of the conception of rhetoric itself shown so decisively by Frances Yates,[26] all signal an awareness in the Renaissance not only that cultures have places, but that places are always cultural.[27] The implicit chiasmus of this book's title – the poetry of place, the place of poetry – might seem to elide the problem of metaphorical use of 'place' in the interests of a catchy turn of phrase. But perhaps one of the lessons of reading Renaissance texts is that, with respect to place at least, metaphor does not have to be a problem. It is part of how we understand the world around us.[28]

Some Traits of Renaissance Poetic Landscapes

The landscapes that are the particular focus of this book are those named as French in the lyric poetry of Joachim Du Bellay, Pierre de Ronsard, Jean-Antoine de Baïf, Jacques Peletier, Vauquelin de la Fresnaye, Pontus de Tyard, and Remy Belleau. These lyric places all share certain characteristics which I shall briefly review here, but which will all be discussed in detail in subsequent chapters. First, they are mostly rural. They are not wild: the idea of a wild 'beyond' of culture, 'call it nature or wilderness or environment, where deliverance from the constraints of culture […] might be found'[29] is modern and post-Romantic. Renaissance literary rusticity has a lot to do with pastoral, and the related literary-philosophical tradition of debate on the merits of country versus court life. It also refracts the experience of landscape through the cultural and political lens of the petty aristocracy, the class from which the poets almost exclusively come. Second, they are very often regional before they are national, or they show the nation to be constituted by an aggregate of entrenched local identities. The sixteenth century has been identified as an important moment in the 'naissance de la nation France' [birth of the French nation],[30] during which the question of who defined, held power over, and used, the kingdom's territories is particularly fraught. Poetic places certainly perform important work in the elaboration of the idea of a French nation, but they also and perhaps more often challenge this idea.

They witness to what I shall show is a productive dialectic – rather than an opposition – between nation and region (or, to use more chronologically appropriate terminology, between kingdom and province). The production of 'la douce France' is only fully captured by fragmentation into constituent regions. The poets I consider come from a class of landowners identifying with their regional ancestral territories, but they are also royal subjects who must appear to support the national cultural project of the Valois monarchy if they are to enjoy royal patronage. These identities intersect, build on each other, destabilize each other, in a dialectic that reveals how the forming of nationhood is complicated from within.

The nation–region dialectic is also evident in cartography during this period, and a third shared trait of lyric landscapes of this period is that they are cartographic. I do not mean this metaphorically, or not only metaphorically: I show that Renaissance poets and cartographers are in explicit dialogue with each other as they present and circulate images of France. In particular, poets represent the nation–region question as a problem of scale, showing that local and regional descriptions (or chorographies, in cartographic terms) fit more comfortably into the space of lyric than descriptions of the whole kingdom. Poetic landscapes have a more active and productive relationship with cartography than with painting in this period; indeed I suggest that landscape painting of French subjects haunts this period and its poetry as a kind of absence. When poets do refer to painting or other plastic arts, I argue, the effect is to dissipate the possibility of representing France with any cohesion.

Fourthly, just as cartographic maps reinforce and justify royal power over the kingdom, lyric geographies of France reinforce a conservative, nostalgic, often feudal vision of land, a peaceful refuge from perceived change and threats to the social order. Their vision of a stable society is sometimes aligned with royalist ideologies, sometimes suspicious of them, sometimes overtly Catholic, sometimes willfully apolitical. But in each case they are concerned with presenting noble land ownership as a rightful, almost natural privilege and guarantee of social order, resistant to any historical change. Such conservatism (as in will-to-conserve) also extends to the land itself, and the threat of change is at times environmental. I give two examples of poets who directly confront actual – rather than imagined – depredation of rural places by human activities. In this respect one might say that poetry is a locus of proto-environmental protest, although the projection backwards of modern ecological sensibilities is to be done with great care.

It would be a mistake to read Renaissance lyric landscapes as if they were only about social, political, or environmental histories. They are also clearly about the place of poetry itself, about inherited traditions, about the dilemma of imitation. Even when identified as French, poetic landscapes are cluttered with references to classical and Italian *loci*, both textual and topographic. As Frenchmen writing in the vernacular, poets are acutely concerned with the problems and questions raised by writing in French while imitating *exempla* and *auctores* that are Roman, Greek, or Italian. In a sense, the poetic project of this period has to be a problem of place: poets must rewrite, or overwrite, inherited classical and Italian poetic traditions in order to present a native French landscape which is both topographic and cultural.

A significant consequence of this poetic referentiality is that it tends to eroticize and gender the landscape as female. Lyric tropes for expressing love of a woman – particularly admiration of her body which, as Nancy Vickers has shown, is fragmented into constituent parts by Petrarchan lyric and the French *blasons*[31] – are easily transformed into the constitutive parts of a landscape: the curve of a river, the rise of a hill. And as the woman is divided into parts by the process of lyric praise, so too is the kingdom, France, divided into smaller, local, parts by that same process. Inherited lyric tradition, then, lends itself above all to local scales of description. The fragile and threatened nature of these landscapes likewise facilitates their female gendering: the figure of the *nymphe éplorée*, begging male poets for help, becomes an allegory for trees or rivers as they are threatened by the brutality of human activity. And the trope of fertility, so often used in classical lyric to represent the poet's own creativity, is particularly apt for a generation of poets keen to present France as the soil from which a new illustrious vernacular will spring, with themselves as its figurative farmers.

Scope of Study

The tropes of fertility and cultivation are just as applicable to gardens as they are to the landscapes I consider here. Indeed, the garden has a rich allegorical tradition – bequeathed by antiquity – throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance, its external order reflecting an internal quietude or self-knowledge. And representing France as a 'garden of letters' had become, by the sixteenth century, a common poetic trope, even a cliché.[32] However, I have chosen not to focus explicitly on poetic gardens, primarily because they are less likely to be freighted with the

kinds of ideologies – so intimately responsive to political and environmental contexts – that I identify in pastoral poetic landscapes. When poets describe gardens, they are more likely to refer to philosophical and textual traditions, as Danièle Duport has shown.[33]

Equally intentional are the chronological parameters. I have limited their scope to about one quarter of a century, from 1549 (the publication date of Joachim Du Bellay's *La Deffence et illustration de la langue françoyse* and *L'Olive*) to 1584 (the publication of the last edition of Pierre de Ronsard's *Œuvres* to have been supervised by the poet himself). This generational moment represents the period during which the poetic coterie known as the Pléiade flourished and published most of its collections. I focus on the work of the Pléiade (or, in the case of Jean Vauquelin, a close acquaintance who never quite made it to Ronsard's exclusive list of members) because these poets were very much in dialogue with each other in their poetry in a way that is often spatialized and written into their landscapes. The late Rhétoriqueurs (especially Jean Lemaire), Clément Marot, and the poets of the Lyonnais school, are not considered here not because I consider their contribution to vernacular poetry to be any less, but because representing the landscapes of France is a particularly sustained and collaborative effort among the Pléiade. What is more, the principle period of the Pléiade's careers coincides with a complicated and crucial moment in the emergence of the image of France, the transition into the violence of the civil wars.

Another limitation, no doubt more arbitrary, is the exclusion of neo-Latin poetry. One might suppose that the vernacular played a particular and privileged role in the describing of native landscapes. But there are in fact descriptions of French landscapes in neo-Latin verse which could justify its inclusion.[34] French Renaissance intellectuals exhibited a fluid bi- or multi-lingualism to which our own zeal to identify one nation with one language have rendered us somewhat blind. The notion of a single French language is likewise simplistic, ignoring the significant dialectal variations of the period. The multi-lingual nature of Renaissance French culture is one of the most significant aspects of Renaissance literature, and while this study does not tackle such questions head-on, I hope to avoid using the concept of the vernacular as if it were a *fait accompli*.[35] Despite these crucial provisos, it is legitimate to talk of a nascent *ideal* if not practice of a 'langue françoyse' in the Renaissance, evidenced by the publication of grammars and treatises on the excellence of French (even if some were in Latin), most of which manifest a concern with identifying the language of certain social élites as correct usage.[36]

I am also keen to avoid suggesting that the period under consideration represents a radical break with the past, that the kingdom's landscapes are written for the very first time, or that the tensions and violence of its history are unprecedented. Medievalists are rightly irritated when early modernists – following the examples of many Renaissance intellectuals themselves – neglect the continuities that have been occluded by our periodizations. The sixteenth century is of course not the first time that France is described in poetry.[37] In the fifteenth century, Charles d'Orléans gazes longingly towards France from exile in England. And landscapes of the *chansons de geste* reference France specifically, both as part of narrative 'itinéraires' and as a territorial cognitive map.[38] While not common before the sixteenth century, then, topophilic descriptions of a named France are not entirely absent from medieval poetry. Such qualifications are important to bear in mind as a caution against taking the sixteenth century (or any other) as the moment when national sentiment was 'born.' Without claiming radical novelty for the period, however, we can explore its specificity: the ways in which poetry – more than other literary genres, royal iconography, or the plastic arts – comes to perform important work in the imagining of the nation as a place.

Structural Overview

This book allies textual issues (imitation, the pastoral mode, formalism) with external contexts (cartography, environment, social history, nationhood). Each chapter except the first treats a particular ideological or thematic cluster (e.g., environmental change, the region–nation dialectic) through the work of one or two poets, while opening up the referential field of poetic landscapes to interdisciplinary contexts and discourses (e.g., art history, cartographic practice). This structure allows for sustained consideration of the development and treatment of landscapes throughout entire lyric collections, in a way that respects the collections' integrity and complexity as well as the close way in which Renaissance lyric demands to be read. This is not a transhistorical, universalizing argument about what literary landscapes do in the abstract. Instead, I propose a more situated and specific study: a generational moment during which poetry, consciously contrasted with other cultural discourses, staged a particular national landscape in a particular way.

Chapter 1, conceived in order to avoid an overly long introduction, contains more overview of Renaissance literary contexts, in particular the status of lyric, and additional theoretical positionality (ecocriticism)

or discussion of key terms (e.g. nation, region, landscape, space, place). Chapter 2 expands the discussion of intersections between literary criticism and geography by considering the case of cartography. It acts as a bridge between introductory material and specific textual readings, establishing and justifying with historical specificity the privileged articulation between Renaissance poetry and cartography which will be evoked in subsequent chapters. Cartographically oriented readings of texts have become particularly fashionable, and are sometimes done in a rather tropist way. I show that with respect to sixteenth-century poetry, it is possible to historicize the encounter in ways that justify the use of terms like 'mapping' when talking about poetic place. I reveal some of the lived, historical relations between poets and cartographers – for example, the peculiarly Renaissance phenomenon of poems printed on maps – and argue that poetry and cartography directly espouse each other's representational vocabulary and practices, working together to create and circulate images of French place. The chapter concludes with reflections on the idea of interdisciplinarity as applied to Renaissance systems of knowledge.

Supported by the historical overview of the first two chapters, chapter 3 presents a viable articulation between cartography and poetry that furthers current critical discourse on, for example, the 'graphic unconscious' in literature.[39] The chapter, through readings of sonnet sequences by Joachim Du Bellay, suggests that the problem of Renaissance *imitatio* is as much spatial as it is historical. I show how, in *L'Olive*, Du Bellay not only imitates but – in the spatial, deep-etymological sense – *translates* Italian models, in particular Petrarchan love lyric, onto a singularly French landscape, transforming Petrarchan landmarks (the laurel tree, the Arno) into his native Anjou (the olive tree, the Loire). In *Les Regrets*, Du Bellay imagines French landscapes in contrast to those of Rome. But, in a very conscious engagement with cartographic scale, he reveals the landscapes of poetic affect to be the result of a perpetual motion between chorographic (local) and geographic (national) lyric maps. Regional identity is not the binary opposite of national sentiment but a necessary constituent part thereof.

Having shown how lyric poets espouse cartographic modes of representation in their landscapes, I turn in chapter 4 to the relation between poetry and painting. In the sixteenth century there are very few paintings of named French landscapes; it is lyric poetry that does most of the work of representing France. Through an analysis of references to the plastic arts in Remy Belleau's *La Bergerie* supported by a comparison

with Ronsard's *La Bergerie*, and a reading of Pontus de Tyard's *Douze fables*, I argue that, unlike maps, painting haunts lyric landscapes as a sense of disillusion – and dissolution. In Tyard's *Douze fables*, the very possibility of representing French landscape is denied by an abundance of references to classical mythological scenes of metamorphosis, which suggest that France does not yet have the cultural descriptives to describe its places on its own terms: its landscapes are condemned to be endless repetitions of *loci classici*. In Belleau's *Bergerie*, the references to the plastic arts appeal to the sombre, critical, and fragmented aesthetic of Fontainebleau Mannerism in order to reveal the artificiality of idealized pastoral visions of landscape such as that seen in the more conventional *Bergerie* by Ronsard. Mannerist tension and formal self-awareness thus challenge and disrupt the 'spaces of hope' presented by other poets in their landscapes, making France unrepresentable as an ideal space.

Chapter 5 analyses poetic responses to deforestation (Ronsard's Odes and Elegies) and to water pollution (Baïf's poem 'La Ninfe Bievre'). In both, lyric poetry, brimming with classical references, configures landscape as a space of natural, social, and moral order threatened by the corrupting processes of modernity. The trees of the Gâtine in Ronsard's poetry represent a conservative, Catholic, and poeticized regionalism which is threatened by the Protestant monarch Henri IV, who instigated the partial clearing of the forest in 1572. And Baïf personifies the river Bièvre outside Paris, whose waters were contaminated by the dyers of the Gobelins, as a classical nymph begging poets – significantly, the poets of the Pléiade – to come to her rescue. In each case, poetry and its classical tradition are allied with a stable, unchanging landscape immune from exploitation. I avoid reading Ronsard's and Baïf's defences of their landscapes merely as antecedents of modern environmentalism, showing instead the extent to which the forest and river are overdetermined as poetic (pastoral) and aristocratic spaces. I also further engage my discussion of regionalism by showing how, in Ronsard, regional loyalty is not so much a bastion of liberal resistance against the exclusivity of royal power as it is an exclusive ideology in its own right.

Finally, chapter 6 discusses historical shifts in the role of the aristocracy (in particular of the poet-landowner) and the problem of France's internal coherence, in order to frame a discussion of two texts that present self-consciously poetic places of refuge. Vauquelin de la Fresnaye's *Les Foresteries* present the poet's ancestral Norman forest as a stable guarantor of his aristocratic name and identity, evidencing nostalgia for an imagined time when the nobleman was defined by his land and vice

versa. The reality of his financial situation – debts, and the need to work as a lawyer – is willed away in the timeless, privileged space of his 'second world' woods, where he can be a true aristocrat-poet immune to historical reality. Jacques Peletier, in his long poem, *La Savoie*, seeks this place of refuge in the independent territory of Savoy. It is a fitting work with which to conclude, as it represents one of the last attempts to imagine landscape with hope and idealism – but it seems that this is already only possible on the perimeter of the French kingdom, not within France itself. Savoy's liminal historical position with respect to France suggests that the lyric space of hope has been chased to the frontiers. Peletier presents Savoy as a haven of peace away from the ravages of civil war, but, like Vauquelin's forest, his landscape contains within itself an awareness of its status as artifice, of the vulnerability of any 'second world' to the violence of history.

Which leads us to the vanishing point of this study: the dissolution, in the last quarter of the century, of the 'spaces of hope' previously represented by lyric landscapes. In such works as Agrippa d'Aubigné's *Les Tragiques*, landscapes are ravaged and chaotic, as a Baroque aesthetic of fragmentation comes to dominate court poetry. Poetic transcendence, if it is sought at all, is located no longer in France but in the cosmic spaces of scientific poetry. This turning away from landscape further accentuates the singularity of the poetic moment traced in *The Poetry of Place*, a moment when poetry produces French place in a particularly enduring way.

Landscape studies in general have become a productive point of contact between diverse disciplines, and my use of contexts such as cartographic or environmental histories might suggest the label *interdisciplinary*. While I embrace recent critical moves to interdisciplinarity, I put pressure on the concept itself by asking throughout what it might have meant for the sixteenth century. The word is not entirely appropriate to Renaissance forms of knowledge, of course, since the very concept of interdisciplinarity originates in a perceived compartmentalization to be overcome. Sixteenth-century humanists moved quite fluidly between knowledge spheres, a fact that gave rise to our concept of the 'Renaissance man.' If such perspectives are occluded to modern readers, it is because, as Anthony Grafton reminds us, 'we have allowed the divergent forms of scholarship that we now recognize and practice to delude us into reconstructing a past culture as fragmented as our own.'[40] But nor is it quite adequate to talk of Renaissance mentalities as *pre*-disciplinary; even if boundaries were somewhat permeable, each 'art libéral' was seen as occupying its own distinct place on the spectrum of knowledge.

Whatever their other skills may have been (I shall discuss poets who were also cartographers in the second chapter, for example), sixteenth-century French poets had a clear idea of the particularity of *poésie* itself, and it behoves us to take poetry seriously on its own terms, as well as inasmuch as it relates to other disciplines. To do so is already to try to render more specific the kinds of interdisciplinary encounters that have exercised literary scholars recently. In other words, interdisciplinarity – at least with regards to the early modern period – should not jettison historically appropriate considerations of the specificity of certain cultural discourses. Reading a poem primarily *as* a poem need not send us back into the world of New Criticism. Indeed, one of the best ways to honour and deepen the combined legacies of New Criticism and New Historicism is again to take the category of the literary seriously. Perhaps it is by retrenching ourselves somewhat in our various disciplinary strongholds that we can start to forge more meaningful connections between them.

1 Place and Poetry: An Overview

Lyric, Pastoral, Georgic

Something happens, in the third quarter of the French sixteenth century, to the ways in which poets describe landscapes. Poets start to identify their landscapes as specifically French, rather than as unnamed picturesque backdrops. They refer to multiple extra- and inter-textual contexts to produce an abiding sense of cultural, political, and topographic place, as dynamic and complex as Renaissance France itself. Poetic landscapes re-imagine national and regional places as 'spaces of hope' which are, variously, aristocratic, exclusive, gendered, regional, national, Catholic, or conservative. By the end of the century, however, the effort to describe France poetically is abandoned, as the violence of history becomes uncontainable. I make a sustained case throughout this study for the specificity of the *poetic* to the construction of these images of place. In other words, while I am interested in general articulations between literature and environment(s), there are also important formal and thematic reasons for poetry to have become the vehicle for a certain kind of imagining of French place. This chapter will discuss some of these.

One cannot, of course, discuss Renaissance poetry as if it were monolithic.[1] It was *lyric* poetry which became the vehicle, in sixteenth-century France, for irenic visions of landscape. Lyric was a somewhat fluid category, but as Du Bellay reminds us in the fourth chapter of his *Deffence et illustration de la langue françoyse*, it was intended to designate poetry that was sung 'au son de la lyre grecque et romaine' [to the sound of the Greek and Roman lyres].[2] More particularly, the types of lyric in which it seems possible to present France as a space of hope correspond to

those listed by Du Bellay in the very same chapter of the *Deffence*, in which he sets forth 'quels genres de poèmes doit élire le poète françois' [which type of poem the French poet should choose].[3] The chapter starts with his well-known rejection of vernacular traditions, 'rondeux, ballades, virelais, chants royaux […]' in favour of classical models: 'feuillette de main nocturne et journelle les exemplaires grecs et latins' [you should thumb through Latin and Greek examples night and day]. He then proceeds to describe the classical modes of choice: the epigram, the elegy, hendecasyllabic verse, the ode,[4] the sonnet, and the eclogue. When describing the last three, he uses musical language to describe the process of poetic creation:

> Chante-moy ces Odes, incogneues encore de la Muse françoise […] Sonne-moy ces beaux sonnets, non moins docte que plaisante invention italienne […] Chante moy d'une musette bien resonante et d'une fluste bien jointe ces plaisantes eglogues rustiques, à l'exemple de Sennazar.
>
> [Sing me those Odes as yet unknown to the French Muse … Play me those beautiful sonnets, an Italian invention no less learned than pleasant … Play me those charming eclogues, like Sannazzaro's, with a melodious pipe and a well-made flute.]

It is the genres associated with music – odes, sonnets, and pastoral *prosimetrum* – as well as certain of Ronsard's elegies, whose landscapes will become charged in the ways I shall suggest in the following chapters.[5]

Through the commonality of music, Du Bellay theorizes the already close association between lyric and pastoral: odes and sonnets, because they are sung, participate in a pastoral vision of poetry in which shepherds generate lyric. The themes and tropes of pastoral make it an obvious vehicle for the circulation of idyllic images of France as a beautiful and fertile land. Classical and Italian pastoral texts were some of the first texts published, translated, and imitated in Renaissance France: Virgil's *Eclogues* were published by the Sorbonne in the 1470s, the French bucolic *Temple d'honneur* by Jean Lemaire in 1503, and Virgil's First Eclogue translated by Marot around 1513.[6] Pastoral continues to hold appeal in the Renaissance because, as stated above, it is *not* just about idealization, yearning, and peaceful landscapes. I am here using the term in a more general, less taxonomic sense than Alice Hulubei, author of the authoritative study on French Renaissance eclogue. For Hulubei, pastoral is but one mode – along with the bucolic and the *bergerie* – of the eclogue, a 'poem with rustic settings and people.'[7] This

is not to deny the Renaissance taxonomy of pastoral, nor its intensely complex (inter)textual traditions, which Hulubei so eruditely traces throughout her study. Rather, following Alpers and others working in the English tradition, I understand it as both a textual and a profoundly social mode, a self-conscious mediation between personal and public, between history and ideal.

To understand the pastoral impulse socio-historically is to understand that it almost always presents the point of view of those for whom country living means *otium*: the landed gentry. Since Raymond Williams's influential study of the tradition of the country–city opposition,[8] most readings of English literary rusticity have emphasized the way that social relations and tensions are embedded in landscape representation, or more specifically how idealizing country life 'provided the aristocracy with idealized images of the organic society on which their privileged status was supposedly founded.'[9] Scholarship on French traditions has not evidenced the same cultural orientation, although French ideals of rusticity in the Renaissance certainly lend themselves to analyses focusing on the ideologies of social class.[10] Renaissance poets themselves understood the mode as being a moral lesson to the nobility against a backdrop of social strife. Thomas Sebillet writes in his 1548 *Art poétique* that pastoral is 'un Dialogue, auquel sont introduïs Bergers et gardeurs de bestes, traittans sous propos et termes pastoraus, mortz de princes, calamitez du temps, mutations de Republiques, et telles choses […] sous allegorie' [a Dialogue in which are presented Shepherds and keepers of beasts, dealing in pastoral terms with deaths of princes, disasters of the imes, political shifts, and other such things … allegorically].[11] Renaissance France saw many publications discussing (and thus reifying) the opposition between court and country, particularly in the mid-century.[12] Agricultural treatises were also widely published, and while they were intended as practical advice, they were usually prefaced with moralizing chapters on the pleasure and virtue of farming. Charles Estienne's 1564 *L'Agriculture et maison rustique*, the translation of his 1554 *Praedium rusticum*, is a good example. This text was widely read in Europe: it was republished and expanded several times after his death by his nephew Jean Liébault, and appeared in England as *The Countrie Farm* in 1600. In its liminary material, the *Agriculture* puts rural life and labour morally ahead of the court. The notice to the reader exalts agriculture as a 'life of liberty and innocence' and identifies pastoral ('chansons bucoliques') as its descriptive mode.[13] The intended readers of such texts, of course, were the literate landowners, who could indeed experience the countryside as a life of liberty.[14] There was also a social critique

behind the praise of rural life: as civil strife increased over the second half of the century, the order and plenty of georgic landscapes became symbols of desired political peace and reconciliation.[15]

French poets seeking to describe their native land had at their disposition a long tradition of literary rusticity, both pastoral and georgic, that promoted an aristocratic world view and could also be used for social critique. The question then arose of how to adapt the inherited tradition – Theocritus, Virgil, and Sannazaro are the exemplars cited by Du Bellay – to sixteenth-century France. Even Estienne's *Agriculture* wrestles with this question, as the author notes the limits of the exemplarity of ancient agriculture practised in different times and different places: French soil 'ne ressemble du tout à celuy des anciens,' [is in no way like that of the ancients], and so 'il faut apprendre les moeurs antiques, et faire comme de présent' [we must learn ancient ways, but do according to our own].[16] This is of course a version of the fraught question of imitation. In the second half of the century especially, imitation of exemplars became a guarantee of literary prestige, as the poets of the Pléiade downplayed the richness of existing French poetic traditions in favour of the erudite *imitatio* proposed by Du Bellay in his *Deffence et illustration de la langue françoyse*.[17]

Renaissance imitation is a creative and active process, and theorized as such at the time: Du Bellay urges poets not to imitate 'without reflection,' and Sébillet insists that French poets don't simply pillage 'all that we see, but only that which we judge to be useful to us.'[18] In order for the Pléiade to present themselves as the heralds of a new, illustrious native poetry, France has to be differentiated from classical territory even while imitating it. One sustained metaphor, paradoxically borrowed from classical literature, is that of fertile soil from which a new French literary culture will grow. There is an abundance of horticultural metaphors used to describe the art of poetry at this time. Du Bellay at the beginning of his *Deffence* describes the practice of imitation as a grafting process, and the vernacular as a plant that has as yet barely sprouted but that will one day, with the help of its farmer-poets, attain its full height. (In this sense, the georgic tradition, like pastoral, is about the production of poetry itself). Remy Belleau, too, is georgic about poetry, presenting his *Amours et nouveaux eschanges de pierres précieuses* to Henri III as 'ce que j'ay sogneusement receuilly de la fertile moisson des auteurs anciens qui en ont parsemé la memoire jusques à nostre temps' [that which I have carefully gathered from the fertile harvest of ancient authors who sowed the memory of it for our era.][19] Speech, or poetry, as gardening is not a notion

peculiar to the sixteenth century; the metaphor goes back to Tacitus, Cicero, Quintilian, and arguably Pindar.[20] What is new is the rise in importance of the vernacular language in literature as distinct from Latin, and hence the need to imagine a new terrain on which such metaphorical planting and harvesting – textual fertility – would take place.

Given such a semantic and metaphorical cluster, it is not surprising that the conceptual space of such cultural gestation should be a reimagining of a female body. This is another reason why lyric in particular might lend itself to landscape description: its tradition of descriptives of the female body, easily transferable to landscape, is particularly appropriate for a feminized France. Thomas Greene has noted, in Ronsard, this 'tendency of a woman's body to become landscape and conversely, of a landscape to become her body.'[21] While Greene links this dynamic vitalism to the dominant perception of phenomena as constantly mobile and metamorphic,[22] there seems to be more at stake in this transformation of the lyric female body into features of landscape. Nature, of course, has usually been gendered female in the history of Western ideas.[23] This is not my concern here, since I am specifically not dealing with 'nature' as a philosophical concept. Rather, the process is analogous to what has been called 'national embodiment […] a strategic process or program of natural-ization (*sic*) by which the nation is defined and redefined in critical historical moments,'[24] that is, the projection of human forms onto natural spaces. That is, rather than simply pointing out that almost all poetic landscapes were created by male poets, and thus likely to feminize a desiring relationship to French place, I am interested here in a more formal question: how Renaissance lyric offered a set of tropes which predetermined this gendered rendering.

Such considerations help us to better understand the specificity of lyric's contribution to French landscape history. The question of the pastoral mode in particular will be important to more than one subsequent chapter. I turn now to more theoretical questions, starting with the question of the applicability of ecocriticism – which has an intricate and sometimes problematic relation to pastoral and literary rusticity – to reading Renaissance French poetry.

Ecocriticism

Scholarly studies of landscape and nature in literature are not new, but not until recently was there a self-defined school of criticism devoted to them. The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment was

founded in 1992, becoming an important laboratory for the newly self-styled ecocriticism, which 'takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artefacts of language and literature.'[25] Ecocritics read literary landscapes as examples of a 'mutual constructionism: of physical environment (both natural and human-built) shaping the cultures that in some measure continually refashion it.'[26] Some early ecocritics rejected theory as part of the malady of modern thinking that has alienated humans from nature, promoting the idea that there is an unmediated, authentic relationship with nature recoverable by, ironically, rejecting the world of books entirely.[27] Many wrote exuberantly about the interdisciplinary possibilities of conversations about nature between scientists and literary scholars. For such reasons, ecocriticism has sometimes been characterized as lacking scholarly rigour, although it is considerably more sophisticated and self-aware than its detractors claim.[28]

While a study of literature and the environment surely must engage ecocriticism, application of current ecocritical theory to sixteenth-century French literature is nevertheless problematic. Reflecting the specializations of those who have developed it, the field is largely concerned with Anglo-American literature, and tends to focus on Romantic or post-Romantic literature, nature writing in particular.[29] The dominant ideas of nature and landscape in play are themselves the legacy of a post-Romantic mindset. The concepts of wilderness, of a restorative relationship between the human psyche and uninhabited spaces, of solitude in these spaces as desirable, are all anachronistic with respect to sixteenth-century mentalities. There are some points of contact. The poets I consider here certainly present their landscapes as sites of beauty and meaning, and also, like many nature writers today, as endangered by modernity. And like some contemporary environmentalists, their perspective is that of the privileged viewer or owner (or consumer) of landscapes rather than that of those who must labour in them. Yet one cannot see in them the harbingers of modern environmental sensibility. We must avoid the temptations of a teleology which would have these landscapes be of interest only inasmuch as they announce a relation to land that we decide to call modern, whether we are trying to locate the origin of a national imaginary, a post-Romantic environmentalist sense of connection to place, or will to protect it. For one thing, we do not have the same criteria for beauty. We privilege mountains, for example; solitude is salutary rather than suspect. But people did not always climb mountains for pleasure, solitude in a dehumanized landscape