

# CONSTRUCTIONS OF NATIONHOOD IN THE LATIN WRITINGS OF HENRI ESTIENNE



By David Cowling

*This paper argues for the inclusion of writing in Latin in the narrative of “literary nation-building” in early modern France through an analysis of expressions of amor patriae in the learned prefaces of Henri Estienne (Henricus Stephanus secundus). Estienne’s celebrated defence of the French language against putative foreign (especially Italian) influence, conducted in his vernacular writings, is seen to have been nourished by his engagement with Italian and Spanish humanists in respect of Ciceronianism, the proper conception of Latinity and the ethical underpinnings of humanist editorial methodology.*

Recent work on the rise of nationhood in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France has, understandably perhaps, focused primarily on the role of writing in the vernacular in elaborating a shared notion of “Frenchness” that, although contested and frequently controversial, laid the foundations of the modern nation state. Thus Marcus Keller, in his *Figurations of France: Literary Nation-Building in Times of Crisis*, published in 2011, draws on a corpus of exclusively French-language texts to exemplify the ways in which writers such as Joachim Du Bellay, Pierre de Ronsard and Michel de Montaigne “shape and complicate a concept of nation by inventing notions of France and the French”.<sup>1</sup> Whilst this approach is understandable in terms of the historical importance of a shared national language in crystallising and promoting ideas of a common national identity, as recognised by Etienne Balibar in his essay “The Nation Form: History and Ideology” of 1991 and, of course, in Benedict Anderson’s celebrated *Imagined Communities*, which ascribes to (vernacular) “print-languages” a key role in “lay[ing] the bases for national consciousnesses”,<sup>2</sup> it does tend to obscure, or indeed occlude,

---

<sup>1</sup> Keller 2011, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Balibar 1991, 98; Anderson 1983, 47.

the contribution of writing in the learned language to the early modern construction of nationhood and national identity. I wish in this paper to redress this balance by investigating the close reciprocal relationship between writing in the vernacular and in Latin in the work of one of the most celebrated sixteenth-century “defenders” of the French vernacular, the humanist and Hellenist Henri Estienne (*Henricus Stephanus secundus*).<sup>3</sup> In parallel with an extensive scholarly output of editions of Greek and Roman authors, and his monumental *Thesaurus linguae graecae*, Estienne produced a series of texts in French during the period 1565–1579 denouncing what he saw as the pernicious influence on the French language of the contemporary Italian and, to a lesser extent, Spanish languages in the areas of phonology, morphology, lexis and syntax, arguing that the French language, and, more specifically, the language used by the leading figures of the legal establishment in Paris, deserved to be considered “pre-eminent” among contemporary European vernacular languages, all of which were, in essence, inferior to it.<sup>4</sup> In attending to Estienne’s learned output, I will draw attention to the ways in which what might appear at first sight to be exclusively scholarly and philological concerns, such as the debate on Ciceronianism and the ideal form of the Latin language, and the elaboration of an ethically-grounded humanist editorial methodology, can be seen to contribute to a parallel debate, conducted in French, on the proper relationship between vernacular languages. At the same time, I will demonstrate how a sense of specifically French – and Parisian – identity shapes Estienne’s learned output and informs his judgements about the Latin language and his changing attitude towards his fellow humanists beyond the borders of France.

A number of recent studies have focused on the construction of “nationhood” or, indeed, “literary nationhood” in sixteenth-century France. Timothy Hampton, in his *Literature and Nation in the Sixteenth Century: Inventing Renaissance France* (2001), defines the latter as “a kind of pre-history of the national” anticipating the subsequent invention of “nationalism” during the Enlightenment.<sup>5</sup> For Hampton and others, such as David Bell and Joep Leerssen, the concept of the nation in the sixteenth century crystallised itself in an often conflictual relationship with a feared or distrusted Other, be it the Ottoman Turks, the Italians or the Spanish. Identification of “us” and

---

<sup>3</sup> Despite a modest revival of interest in the work of Henri Estienne from scholars such as Bénédicte Boudou and Denise Carabin, who have devoted a book-length studies to his *Apologie pour Hérodote* (Boudou 2000) and his work on Seneca (Carabin 2006), the only monographic study of Estienne’s vernacular and other works dates from 1898 (Clément 1898). More recent critical work on Estienne is collected in the volume *Henri Estienne* 1988.

<sup>4</sup> For Estienne’s defence of French, see Hornsby 1998; Cowling 2007a and 2007b.

<sup>5</sup> Hampton 2001, 8.

“them”, of friends and enemies thus played an important role in the genesis and growth of a specifically French national identity.<sup>6</sup> In addition, at a time when France was riven by civil conflict and trust in the Catholic king of France was in very short supply among Protestant intellectuals, Huguenot writers, such as Henri Estienne, turned to the nation in order to mount an appeal against royal abuses.<sup>7</sup> Hampton identifies language – and specifically figurative language – as the site of such struggles, although he maintains a focus on vernacular writing and uses Henri Estienne as a foil for Du Bellay’s more “original” recognition that the vitality of the French language lay not in its purity, which Estienne fought so hard to maintain, but rather in its capacity to appropriate other cultures in what Hampton describes as an “import-export model”.<sup>8</sup> Marcus Keller has, most recently, built on Hampton’s study by privileging the active role assumed by vernacular writers, often against the backdrop of civil unrest and external conflict, in developing what he terms, nuancing Benedict Anderson’s classic formulation, an “imaginary community” that, although constantly evolving and subject to contestation and critique in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, nevertheless laid the groundwork for the modern nation state. Keller makes no reference, however, to the Latin writing of any of the vernacular authors who make up his corpus, nor to the activity of “hybrid” individuals such as Estienne, whose published output spanned the vernacular and the learned language, and whose bilingual practice provides a challenge to Anderson’s unique emphasis on “unified fields of exchange and communications below Latin and above the spoken vernaculars”, in the form of vernacular print-languages, as motors of the growth of national consciousness in the early modern period.<sup>9</sup> It is clear, however, that Estienne deserves a place among other literary “nation-builders”, not least because of his tactic of playing on existing hostilities and rivalries of all sorts – political, cultural, mercantile, religious and, not least, scholarly – in order to radicalise French opinion against foreign influence and competition in all of these areas.<sup>10</sup> It is, of course, significant – but, given his humanist credentials, hardly surprising – that Estienne conducted this campaign in both the vernacular and in Latin, giving his ideas access to precisely those circles (Italian humanists

---

<sup>6</sup> Hampton 2001, 5; Bell 1996, 106; Leerssen 2000, 269. Leerssen also draws attention to a systematisation in European attitudes, over the course of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, “whereby character traits and psychological dispositions were distributed in a fixed division among various “nations”” (272).

<sup>7</sup> Hampton 2001, 8.

<sup>8</sup> Hampton 2001, 27–28, 156.

<sup>9</sup> Anderson 1983, 47.

<sup>10</sup> For a broader discussion of Estienne’s political and economic context, see Cowling 2009.

and others) who were most likely to be disdainful of the French vernacular. Before looking at some concrete examples of this technique it will be necessary to determine the peculiar existential position from which Estienne mounted this campaign, itself a product of the religious and political upheavals of the sixteenth century, and which contributed significantly to the literary *habitus* that is evident in his writings.

A key constituent of Henri Estienne's personality, as both a humanist printer and a defender of his own vernacular, was his acute consciousness of belonging to a great dynasty of Parisian scholar-printers. His grandfather, also Henri (*Henricus primus*), originally from Provence, established a printing business in Paris at the start of the sixteenth century, producing more than one hundred and twenty volumes over a twenty-year span from 1502.<sup>11</sup> His son Robert Estienne, Henri's father, took over the printing shop in 1526 and enjoyed significant royal patronage from both king Francis I and his sister Margaret of Navarre, culminating in his nomination as royal printer for Latin, Hebrew and Greek texts in 1541. The preface to Henri's edition of Aulus Gellius contains a detailed account of the culture of Robert Estienne's household, in which the vehicular language – common to the print workers, members of the family and, albeit largely passively, the domestic staff – was Latin.<sup>12</sup> The young Henri himself famously bucked this trend by insisting on learning Greek before he learnt Latin, and going on to design a set of Greek characters that were used in his father's editions in the 1540s.<sup>13</sup> During this period, however, Robert's repeated editions of Latin bibles, themselves a symptom of his growing Calvinist convictions, led to frequent difficulties with the Sorbonne and the Faculty of Theology from which, in the end, his royal patrons could not protect him; in 1551, taking the nineteen-year-old Henri with him, Robert sought refuge in Calvinist Geneva, where he continued to print works of both theological and linguistic interest – including a French grammar in the vernacular, which Henri translated into Latin<sup>14</sup> – until his death in 1559. His will stipulated that the entire Genevan printing operation should pass to Henri, on the condition that the latter remain loyal to the Calvinist faith and not transfer his residence, or the press, from the city.<sup>15</sup> Henri's own French nationhood is, therefore, best viewed as a peculiar mixture of family heritage – both geographical and intellectual – and the nostalgic regret of a lifelong exile for an essential element of that heritage

---

<sup>11</sup> For information on Estienne's family and a detailed biography, see Feugère 1853 (here 6–14).

<sup>12</sup> See Feugère 1853, 23–24.

<sup>13</sup> See Feugère 1853, 14–15.

<sup>14</sup> Estienne, Robert 2003.

<sup>15</sup> See Feugère 1853, 35; Clément 1898, 10.

that had passed into other hands. The Estiennes' Parisian printing house and the *librairie* that was attached to it were, indeed, retained by Henri's uncle Charles and subsequently given to his younger brother Robert (*Robertus secundus*), a loyal Catholic who escaped from Geneva and, despite being disinherited by his father, became printer to the French crown in 1563.<sup>16</sup> Despite the provisions of his father's will, Henri maintained close ties with Paris and, in particular, with the milieu of the *Parlement*; these ties are evident in the dedications of a number of his learned editions in the 1570s and 1580s, culminating in the edition of Aulus Gellius in 1585, which is addressed to five leading Parisian lawyers and members of the *Parlement*. He also cultivated the ill-fated king Henry III, at whose instigation he composed, while resident at the French royal court, his *Traité de la Précellence du langage françois* of 1579.<sup>17</sup> During this period, however, Henri's access to the French book market was increasingly disrupted by the series of Wars of Religion, and his desire to resettle in France was finally frustrated by the assassination of Henry III in 1589.<sup>18</sup> Such material frustrations, while debilitating for Henri's printing business (which had frequently fallen foul of the censorship restrictions imposed by the Genevan Consistory), did not, however, prevent him from conducting a long-running promotion, through both his Latin and vernacular writings, of French nationhood. I will now look at some examples of Henri's "patriotism" – a characteristic, it should be pointed out, that was much vaunted by his nineteenth-century French biographers<sup>19</sup> – in his Latin writings, as a manifestation of the interpenetration of his learned and vernacular activities discussed above.

The rich vein of paratextual material conserved in the more than one hundred and sixty scholarly volumes that Estienne edited or printed over the course of his career from the early 1550s until his death in 1598, which includes prefaces, postfaces, addresses to the reader, dedicatory letters, introductions and commentaries, enables us to trace Estienne's changing relationships with other humanists across Europe and his developing ideas about both Latin and Greek and his own vernacular. Study of the material recently gathered together and edited by a team led by Judit Kecskeméti for the series *La France des Humanistes*<sup>20</sup> reveals a gradual shift of focus away from Italy, to which Estienne made a number of journeys in the 1550s in search of manuscripts of Greek authors, towards Germany, where he attempted to secure the financial support of Ulrich Fugger of Augsburg for

---

<sup>16</sup> See Feugère 1853, 29–31.

<sup>17</sup> Estienne 1896.

<sup>18</sup> See Feugère 1853, 136–138.

<sup>19</sup> See Cazes 2003, xx; Feugère 1853, 132.

<sup>20</sup> Kecskeméti et al. 2003.

work on the *Thesaurus linguae graecae*, eventually published in 1572, and, of course, towards France.<sup>21</sup> For H  l  ne Cazes, the range of dedicatees present in Estienne’s learned output reveals not only the progress of his intellectual training, but also what she terms “sa perp  tuelle et difficile h  sitation quant    son appartenance    un cercle, une ville, une patrie” (his continuous and painful uncertainty about whether he belonged to a specific circle, town or homeland).<sup>22</sup> There are, however, as we might expect, clear pragmatic motivations for Henri’s choice of dedicatees, and it is no accident that Estienne famously presented himself as the “travelling salesman” for his press in his 1579 piece on the Frankfurt book fair.<sup>23</sup> Early editions are dedicated to his erstwhile Italian collaborators, who provided access to the libraries of Florence and Venice, and with whom Estienne had obviously enjoyed a close working relationship: Estienne’s first edition of the works of Dionysius of Halicarnassus (1554) is, for instance, dedicated to the Italian humanist Pietro Vettori, with whom he subsequently collaborated on an edition of Aeschylus (1557), for which Vettori provided a manuscript of the hitherto unpublished *Agamemnon*.<sup>24</sup> The edition of Aristotle and Theophrastus of the same year was offered to Vettori as an apology for Estienne’s slowness over the Aeschylus volume.<sup>25</sup> The preface to the edition of Ctesias, the fifth-century BC Greek historian (also 1557) stages a dialogue between Henri and another Italian collaborator, Carlo Sigonio, in the library of St Mark in Venice, to which Sigonio has acted as guide. At the same time, however, Estienne takes the opportunity to make the case for his French compatriots by selecting an area of scholarship, knowledge of Greek, in which he believes that French scholars are well placed to claim pre-eminence; in the Ctesias preface, he asserts that his own Greek teacher, Pierre Dar  s, is now as well known as a scholar in Italy as he is in his native France, as are his compatriots and fellow Hellenists Jean Dorat and Adrien Turn  be.<sup>26</sup>

1557 was also marked by two editions of Cicero, in which Estienne’s first attacks on Italian Ciceronians are evident; this hostility expresses itself first in the use of the Horatian term *servum pecus* (*Epistulae*, I, 19, 19) to denigrate the Ciceronians as servile imitators, and then in a series of inventive sobriquets for those who ignorantly revere solecisms in faulty manuscripts as the true words of the master of Roman eloquence: *Ciceronias*tro

---

<sup>21</sup> Cazes 2003, xvi, xviii.

<sup>22</sup> Cazes 2003, xvi.

<sup>23</sup> Cazes 2003, xvi.

<sup>24</sup> See Cazes 2003, xvi; Kecskem  ti et al. 2003, 22.

<sup>25</sup> Kecskem  ti et al. 2003, 29.

<sup>26</sup> Cazes 2003, xvi; Kecskem  ti et al. 2003, 20.

*Ciceronicolas*, *Ciceronipetas*, and *Ciceronitribas*.<sup>27</sup> These apparently playful jibes are, however, grounded in a personal editorial methodology that, as modern scholars such as Hélène Cazes have recognised, ascribes moral fault to editorial error and condemns those who fail to show proper respect to the texts of the ancients by allowing them to be read in faulty editions or inadequate translations.<sup>28</sup> While there is clearly an element of professional rivalry, not to say marketing spin, in Estienne's criticisms of the deficiencies of other editors' punctuation, typography and *mise en page*, his ethical approach to editing, which expresses itself through the metaphor of the editor as doctor treating wounds inflicted on texts, leads him to repeated criticisms of the Italian humanist translators of Maximus of Tyre or Thucydides; no less a figure than Lorenzo Valla is lambasted in 1564 for translating identical passages of the Greek historian inconsistently from one book to another, and again in 1566 for his errors and inconsistency in translating Herodotus.<sup>29</sup> In the preface to his great satirical work in the vernacular, the *Traité préparatif à l'Apologie pour Herodote* of the same year, Estienne pursues his attack on the Italian Ciceronians by criticising those among the moderns who presume to sit in judgement on the writings of the ancients, and to decide that "la monarchie du langage Latin" (the monarchy of the Latin language) should be given to one author alone.<sup>30</sup> Estienne returned to this theme ten years later in his *De latinitate falso suspecta*, which, like the *Apologie*, sought to right a wrong inflicted on the culture of Antiquity by the purported ignorance of modern – and specifically Italian – scholars. Just as Herodotus needed to be defended from the claim that his historiography dealt exclusively in lies and fabrications, Latinity itself, in Estienne's view, required rehabilitation after the attempts of the so-called "Nizoliani" (the followers of Mario Nizolio, author of a *Thesaurus ciceronianus* in 1535) to assert that it could be defined exclusively through the works of Cicero.<sup>31</sup> In order to reinforce his point, Estienne went on to demonstrate that a number of presumed Gallicisms in contemporary neo-Latin, such as *promissum tenere* (*tenir promesse*) could in fact be found in Cicero, and to illustrate the manifest similarities between the pre-classical Latin of authors such as Plautus and the French vernacular.<sup>32</sup> This broader conception of Latinity to include forms subsequently found in the vernacular languages was clearly in-

---

<sup>27</sup> Kecskeméti et al. 2003, 36, 42.

<sup>28</sup> Cazes 2003, xv, xxxii; Carabin 2006, 115–116.

<sup>29</sup> Kecskeméti et al. 2003, 45, 105, 109, 110, 167; Cazes 2003, xxxiv. For the metaphor of the doctor, see Cazes 2003, xxxiii, and Estienne 1980, 438–439; for Ciceronianism as a sickness in Erasmus' *Ciceronianus*, see Cave 1979, 44.

<sup>30</sup> Kecskeméti et al. 2003, 175–176.

<sup>31</sup> Kecskeméti et al. 2003, 384–385; Clément 1898, 205.

<sup>32</sup> Clément 1898, 244.

compatible with the attempts of the Ciceronians to “purify” Latin of its non-canonical features and provides further proof of Estienne’s desire to rediscover and propagate a respectfully authentic view of Antiquity grounded in methodical textual scholarship and an intimate knowledge of both Latin and Greek. In this respect, Estienne’s contemporaneous campaign to “defend” the French language against the encroachments of other Romance vernaculars, chief among them Italian, can be understood both as a polemical riposte to the nation that was most enthusiastic, in his view, in its adoption of Ciceronianism and as an attempt to demonstrate respect for the authentic nature of a language formerly untouched by linguistic borrowings, which he consistently tarred with the brush of unnecessary novelty. The identification of “friends” and “enemies” that runs through the humanist polemic of Estienne’s Latin prefaces thus contributes, albeit indirectly, to the elaboration of a distinctively French approach to language that is inherently hostile to unnecessary foreign borrowings motivated by fashion or unthinking emulation of the nation’s neighbours. It is, furthermore, clear that Estienne’s conception of his own vernacular draws on his broader view of Latinity as extending beyond the works of Cicero to embrace linguistic material that can still be discerned in French, and that thus demonstrates the worth of that language despite its foreign detractors.

The one source of borrowing to which Estienne did not object – predictably, perhaps, given his own pre-eminent status as one of Europe’s leading scholars of that language – was Greek. Indeed, one of the defining characteristics of this language for him was the fact that it had lent to other languages (chief among them Latin, of course) and had borrowed nothing from them in return.<sup>33</sup> Already in the *Ciceronianum lexicon graeco-latinum* of 1557, Estienne lists the words, figures and phrases that Cicero had borrowed from Greek authors;<sup>34</sup> it is, perhaps significant that (as Jean Balsamo has noted) at the moment when Latin had become the universal language of the Republic of Letters, Estienne opted to devote himself to Greek, the study of which he saw as on a declining trend in Italy.<sup>35</sup> It is, in any case, striking that it is in the preface to the *Thesaurus linguae graecae* of 1572 that Henri identifies himself most clearly with his French, and specifically Parisian, origins:

Iam vero quoniam multa Graeci habent loquendi genera quae Latinae linguae sunt negata, quum Gallica contra non adumbret ea tantum, sed ad vivum (ut ita loquar) exprimat: me, Gallum hominem, et vero in

---

<sup>33</sup> Estienne 1853, 19; see also, for the proto-mercantilist dimension of this claim, Cowling 2009.

<sup>34</sup> Feugère 1853, 61.

<sup>35</sup> Balsamo 1992, 69.

ipsa Galliae Gallia, id est Parisiis, natum atque educatum, patriae et linguae meae iniuriam facturum existimabam nisi latentes has sermonis ei familiaris divitias in apertum proferrem, et exteris etiam nationibus conspiciendas praeberem. Ideoque in multis huius operis locis, quum latinismis destituerer, Gallicismorum auxilium imploravi, aut saltem ad eos qui a me commemorati fuerant in libello de Gallicae linguae affinitate cum Graeca (qui inscriptus est, *De la conformité du langage François avec le Grec*) lectorem remisi.<sup>36</sup>

(Now since the Greeks have numerous expressions that are denied to the Latin language, and French does not merely sketch them but expresses them [so to speak] in a living form, I considered that, as a Frenchman and, indeed, one born and brought up in the very heart of France, that is Paris, I would be doing my homeland and my language a disservice if I did not bring to light those hidden riches of language that were shared with it, and bring them to the attention of foreign nations. For the same reason in many places in this work, where I had no latinisms to hand, I called on gallicisms for help, or at least I referred the reader to those that I had recorded in a little book on the affinity of the French language with Greek entitled *De la conformité du langage françois avec le grec*.)

As well as providing an advertisement for his earlier work in the vernacular, *Traicté de la conformité du langage françois avec le grec* of 1565,<sup>37</sup> which sought to demonstrate in some detail the features of French that could be argued to derive from Greek as opposed to Latin (such as the definite and indefinite article), Estienne argues here that French is peculiarly able, unlike Latin (or, *a fortiori*, the Latin of Cicero), to render the expressive qualities of Greek, and that it is his patriotic duty as a Frenchman and a native of the most authentic part of France, namely Paris, to bring this affinity to the wider readership of the “exteris nationibus”, who must recognise that French forms (“Gallicismi”) are often more appropriate as a means of explaining a Greek term than are Latinisms.<sup>38</sup> The French vernacular is thus presented as better suited to render the riches of the Greek language than the artificially impoverished Ciceronian variety advocated by the Italian humanists whom Estienne has criticised elsewhere. This pragmatic relationship

---

<sup>36</sup> Kecskeméti et al. 2003, 303–304; Cazes 2003, xx. All translations from Latin sources are my own.

<sup>37</sup> Estienne 1853.

<sup>38</sup> Estienne had already argued that Greek and French were more closely related than Greek and Latin, with resultant benefits for French learners of Greek, in his *Colloquiorum seu dialogorum graecorum specimen* of 1564; see Kecskeméti et al. 2003, 114–115. For Estienne’s arguments concerning the superiority of both Greek and the language of Paris, see Demaizière 1988.

between French and Greek, grounded in a putative family resemblance, is further developed in Estienne's *Hypomneses de gallica lingua* of 1582, a grammar of contemporary French addressed to foreign learners (and therefore written in Latin), in which Greek is used as a means of better understanding some of the particularities of French.<sup>39</sup> This work is, like the *Thesaurus*, explicitly linked to Estienne's vernacular output and presents itself as a means of continuing a polemical debate on the relative merits of the French and Italian vernaculars in the learned language. Estienne has been moved to write, he tells his "lector Gallicae linguae studiosus" (reader keen on learning the French language), by a particular occurrence at the court of king Henry III:

Invitavit me (ut verum fatear) is quoque amor quo hanc patriae meae linguam, pro eo ac debeo, prosequor: & alacriorem simulque audentio-rem (audaciorum enim nolim dicere) ad opus aggrediendum reddidit, iam navata circa eandem linguam opera. Quum enim refellendi mihi coram rege nostro essent qui sermonem Italicum nostro anteponebant (qua de re libellum etiam edidi postea qui de Gallica lingua praecellentia est inscriptus) penitius quam antea unquam introspicendae mihi omnes nostri sermonis partes fuerunt.<sup>40</sup>

(I was also motivated, to tell the truth, by that love that makes me cultivate, as I must, the language of my homeland, which made me more enthusiastic and bolder [not to say more foolhardy] in approaching the task, having completed a number of works on the topic. Since I had to refute a number of people who were arguing before our king that the Italian language be preferred to our own [a topic on which I subsequently published a little book entitled *On the Pre-eminence of the French Language*], I was obliged to look more closely at all the elements of our speech.)

The rivalry between italianising courtiers and the defender of French, or "them" and "us", has thus given rise to both a vernacular treatise, the *Précellence du langage françois*,<sup>41</sup> and the learned *Hypomneses*. As far as the best variety of French to teach to foreigners is concerned, the speech of the Ile-de-France (*Francia*) and Paris are again presented as exemplary, with Athens, *Graecia Graeciae*, providing the classical model. This is not to say, though, that there is no place for the French dialects in Estienne's Atticist conception of authentic French;<sup>42</sup> just as the Attic dialect has borrowed from

---

<sup>39</sup> Estienne 1999.

<sup>40</sup> Estienne 1999, 28–29.

<sup>41</sup> Estienne 1896.

<sup>42</sup> For the relationship between language and land as a source of authentic "Frenchness" in Estienne, see Hampton 2001, 156.

the other Greek dialects, especially Ionian and Doric, so the French language can draw on dialects outside the Ile-de-France:

Quemadmodum autem Graeca in lingua praecipuo quidem sermo Atticus laudatur, sed ita ut peculiarem quondam laudem alicubi unaquaque dialectus mereatur: sic profecto, quanvis Gallica lingua in ea potissimum quam dixi Galliae parte [sc. Francia] sedem habeat, non parvum tamen illi decus atque incrementum sunt dialecti: atque ibi quidem commoratur, sed tamen ita ut per has, tanquam colonias, longe illi sit iucundissimum aliquando expatiari, ac nonnulla quae illis propria sunt vocabula domum referre.<sup>43</sup>

(In the same way the Attic speech is praised above all others in the Greek language, but each dialect deserves its own particular praise: accordingly, although the French language has its most important seat in the part of France that I have named [sc. the Ile-de-France], its other dialects are no small adornment and benefit to it; and, although it lives in that place, it is also pleasant for it to travel through others, as though through its country estates, and to bring home many words that are native to them.)

Estienne goes on to assert that the dialects of French, unlike those of other vernacular languages, conserve between them the full semantic and stylistic richness of Latin – which the Ciceronians had, of course, sought to curb – and also display numerous borrowings direct from Greek. Their combined resources make them a suitable instrument for understanding the full richness of the Latin language, as Estienne had already claimed in the *De latinitate falso suspecta*: a suitably humanistic argument for the learning of a vernacular language.

It should be clear from the above that Estienne's promotion of France and its language grew out of, and was supported by, his engagement with the Ciceronian debate and his pioneering – and, occasionally, lonely – work on Greek. His Latin prefaces also betray a preoccupation with the French Wars of Religion that pitted his co-religionists against French Catholics, themselves generally supported by the French crown, throughout the 1570s and 1580s.<sup>44</sup> While Italian involvement on the Catholic side, personified by the Queen Mother Catherine de Medici, was the focus of Estienne's ire in his vernacular writings, most notably the *Deux Dialogues du nouveau langage françois italianisé* of 1578,<sup>45</sup> which attack what the author presents as the degenerate manners and language of the French royal court, evocation of the activities of the Catholic League is frequently accompanied by criticism

---

<sup>43</sup> Estienne 1999, 31; Kecskeméti et al. 2003, 513–514.

<sup>44</sup> Kecskeméti et al. 2003, 354–355, 361, 483; Estienne 1590, 304–352.

<sup>45</sup> Estienne 1980.

of Spain. Already in the *Traicté de la conformité du langage françois avec le grec* of 1565, Estienne gives both “italianised” and “hispanised” French short shrift,<sup>46</sup> his hostility towards Spain is, however, crystallised, in typical fashion, in a scholarly controversy. In the “Parisian Nights” appended by Estienne to his 1585 edition of Aulus Gellius, the Spanish humanist Juan Luis Vivès is taken to task for criticising Aulus Gellius’ Latin style.<sup>47</sup> Such criticism, Estienne asserts, is motivated by Aulus Gellius’ own attacks on the style of the Spaniard – as Estienne puts it – Seneca. With a certain irony, Estienne acknowledges that Vivès’ position is grounded in a love of his own *patria*, but is unworthy of a serious scholar. This tendency to link scholarship and politics finds, perhaps, its clearest expression in the preface to another work devoted to a discussion of Latin style, the *De Justo Lipsii latinitate* of 1595.<sup>48</sup> Shortly before his death, Estienne addressed what he perceived as the unnecessary neologisms and impure, but highly influential, Latin of Justus Lipsius, to which he preferred the more down-to-earth style of Seneca. After evoking the recent presence of Spaniards on the streets of Paris, almost as an occupying force, Estienne attacks the followers of Lipsius, who had himself become historiographer to the king of Spain in 1592, in the following terms:

Quod Gallica liga adversus hunc quoque, verum et legitimum Galliae regem, molita est, Hispanico auxilio freta: idem secta antiquaria, quae tandem (proh dolor) evasit in gentem magnam, ac quae quotidie magna magisque fit populosa, adversus florentis Romae latinitatem, veram et legitimam Latini eloquii reginam, molitur.<sup>49</sup>

(Just as the French League has mobilised against the true and legitimate French king, with Spanish help, so this archaising sect, which has, unfortunately, grown large and grows more popular by the day, is mobilising against the flourishing Latinity of Rome, the true and legitimate queen of Latin eloquence.)

Just as the Catholic League (“Gallica liga”) has waged war on the legitimate king of France – Estienne is thinking about Henry III, whose compromises with the League and subsequent assassination had previously prevented his own return to France<sup>50</sup> – so the followers of Lipsius (“secta antiquaria”), again with Spanish support, are attacking the true queen of Roman Latinity. Scholarly controversy and political conflict seem to be interlinked, or rather indissoluble, in Estienne’s mind, as T. E. Hope has recognised in respect of

---

<sup>46</sup> Estienne 1853, 20.

<sup>47</sup> Kecskeméti et al. 2003, 527; Estienne 2007, 12, 30.

<sup>48</sup> Kecskeméti et al. 2003, 696–698.

<sup>49</sup> Kecskeméti et al. 2003, 698.

<sup>50</sup> Clément 1898, 43–44.

his vernacular writings;<sup>51</sup> although sharing a common scholarly language, early modern humanists are viewed as motivated by essentially sectarian and nationalistic concerns that express themselves to the detriment of the classical authors on whom they write. In this respect, Estienne's conception of scholarly error as moral fault lends itself to a set of judgements about national character refracted through use of, and commentary on, the learned language.

The preceding discussion has sought to demonstrate that Henri Estienne's contribution to the construction of French nationhood – his “patriotism” – is fuelled, throughout his career, by fundamental aspects of his practice as a humanist editor and printer, involving not just the need to compete in a Europe-wide market for scholarly books, but also the deeply held conviction that the editing or translating of ancient texts required a scrupulous respect for the original source and a catholic attitude towards Latinity. The notion that scholarly error was a form of moral fault, stridently expressed in his criticisms of other scholars – chief among them the Italians – underpins not just his editorial work but also his criticisms of linguistic innovators in the vernacular, who, like the italianising courtiers of Henry III, are often portrayed as morally degenerate. The construction of *amor patriae* in Estienne's Latin output is thus, I would argue, indissoluble from his constructions of French nationhood in his vernacular writings and is, for that reason, deserving of inclusion in any account of the growth of nationhood in early modern France.

---

<sup>51</sup> Hope 1971, 231 (Estienne as an “unrequited political theorist”).

### Bibliography

- Anderson, Benedict 1983, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London.
- Ayres-Bennett, Wendy & Mari Jones (eds.) 2007, *The French Language and Questions of Identity*, Oxford.
- Balibar, Etienne 1991, “The Nation Form: History and Ideology”, Balibar & Wallerstein 1991, 86–106.
- Balibar, Etienne & Immanuel Wallerstein (eds.) 1991, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, London.
- Balsamo, Jean 1992, *Les Rencontres des Muses: italianisme et anti-italianisme dans les Lettres françaises de la fin du XVIe siècle*, Geneva.
- Bell, David 1996, “Recent Works on Early Modern French National Identity”, *Journal of Modern History* 68, 84–113.
- Boudou, Bénédicte 2000, *Mars et les muses dans ‘L’Apologie pour Hérodote’*, Geneva.
- Carabin, Denise 2006, *Henri Estienne, érudit, novateur, polémiste: étude sur ‘Ad Senecae lectionem proodopoeiae’*, Paris.
- Cave, Terence 1979, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance*, Oxford.
- Cazes, Hélène 2003, “Introduction”, Kecskeméti et al. 2003.
- Clément, Louis 1898 (repr. 1967), *Henri Estienne et son œuvre française: étude d’histoire littéraire et de philologie*, Geneva.
- Cowling, David 2007a, “Henri Estienne pourfendeur de l’emprunt linguistique franco-italien”, *Le Moyen Français* 60–61, 165–173.
- Cowling, David 2007b, “Henri Estienne and the Problem of French-Italian Code-Switching in Sixteenth-Century France”, Ayres-Bennett & Jones 2007, 162–170.
- Cowling, David 2009, “‘Neither a Borrower nor a Lender be’: Linguistic Mercantilism in Renaissance France”, Musolff & Zinken 2009, 190–204.
- Demaizière, Colette 1988, “Deux aspects de l’idéal linguistique d’Henri Estienne: hellénisme et parisianisme”, *Henri Estienne* 1988, 63–75.
- Estienne 1590, *Principum monitrix musa, sive, De Principatu bene instituendo & administrando Poema. Autore Henrico Stephano. Eiusdem poematum cuius versus intercalaris, Cavete vobis principes. Eiusdem libellus, in gratiam principum scriptus, De Aristotelicae Ethices differentia ab historica & poetica. Ubi multi Aristotelis loci vel emendantur, vel fidelius redduntur*, Basel.
- Estienne, Henri 1853 (repr. 1970), *Traicté de la conformité du langage françois avec le grec*, ed. Léon Feugère, Paris.

- Estienne, Henri 1896 (repr. 1973), *La Précellence du langage françois*, ed. Edmond Huguet, Paris.
- Estienne, Henri 1980, *Les Deux Dialogues du nouveau langage françois italianisé et autrement desguizé, principalement entre les courtisans de ce temps*, ed. Pauline Smith, Geneva.
- Estienne, Henri 1999, *Hypomneses (1582)*, ed. Jacques Chomarat, Paris.
- Estienne, Henri 2007, *Introduction à la lecture de Sénèque (1586)*, ed. Denise Carabin, Paris.
- Estienne, Robert 2003, *Traicté de la grammaire françoise (1557)*, Paris.
- Feugère, Léon 1853, *Essai sur la vie et les ouvrages de Henri Estienne suivi d'une étude sur Scévole de Sainte-Marthe*, Paris.
- Hampton, Timothy 2001, *Literature and Nation in the Sixteenth Century: Inventing Renaissance France*, Ithaca.
- Henri Estienne 1988, *Henri Estienne: actes du colloque organisé à l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne le 12 mars 1987 par le Centre V. L. Saulnier*, Paris.
- Hope, T. E. 1971, *Lexical Borrowing in the Romance Languages: A Critical Study of Italianisms in French and Gallicisms in Italian from 1100 to 1900*, Oxford.
- Hornsby, David 1998, "Patriotism and Linguistic Purism in France: *Deux Dialogues dans le nouveau langage françois* [sic] and *Parlez-vous Français?*", *Journal of European Studies* 28, 331–354.
- Kecskeméti, Judit, Bénédicte Boudou & Hélène Cazes 2003, *La France des Humanistes: Henri II Estienne, éditeur et écrivain*, Turnhout.
- Keller, Marcus 2011, *Figurations of France: Literary Nation-Building in Times of Crisis (1550–1650)*, Newark.
- Leerssen, Joep 2000, "The Rhetoric of National Character: A Programmatic Survey", *Poetics Today* 21, 267–292.
- Musolff, Andreas & Jörg Zinken (eds.) 2009, *Metaphor and Discourse*, Basingstoke.

