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## Authenticating Tourist Culture: Review of Patrick Young, Enacting Brittany: Tourism and Culture in Provincial France, 1871-1939 (Ashgate Publishing)

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# Kaufman on Young, 'Enacting Brittany: Tourism and Culture in Provincial France, 1871-1939'

**Author:** Patrick Young

**Reviewer:** Suzanne Kaufman

**Patrick Young.** *Enacting Brittany: Tourism and Culture in Provincial France, 1871-1939*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2012. xii + 318 pp. \$134.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7546-6926-5.

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## Authenticating Tourist Culture

Katherine Macquoid, English novelist and travel writer, is a key figure in Patrick Young's *Enacting Brittany: Tourism and Culture in Provincial France, 1871-1939*. When Macquoid visited Brittany in the 1870s, she found a peasant culture full of "novelty and originality," and yet her 1877 book, *Through Brittany*, lamented that this enchanting world was slowly dying as its peasants became caught up in modern developments (p. 11). The very popularity of travelogues, such as Macquoid's, only ensured that such change would continue as Brittany's "authentic" peasant civilization became the site of touristic investigation. And herein lies the central dilemma that Young explores in this

impressive, deeply researched study of the development of regional tourism in Brittany.

Young's book uses Brittany, "long regarded as France's most culturally distinctive and tradition-bound region," as a case study to analyze how "tourist sites" became "key arenas for the negotiation of change" (p. 2). The study examines the forces unleashed by the expansion of organized tourism in the region during the period of France's Third Republic (1871-1939). As Young makes clear, it is the very idea of "authenticity" (embedded in the notion of a disappearing peasant civilization) that made Brittany a site for touristic exploration and imagination. Thus the ideal of an "original" and "distinctive" culture worth seeing and preserving became the basis for this regional tourist industry. Yet in doing so, Young suggests, this industry also created a set of fears (most profoundly articulated by elites) that the marketing of the peasant "authentic" and the rustic "picturesque" commodified and ultimately debased Brittany's distinctive culture.

Analyzing the promises and perils bound up in tourism to Brittany, Young argues, enables us to see a set of conflicts and dilemmas that represent the larger transition to modernity. Young builds on insights from Dean MacCannell, who argued in his canonical work *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (1976) that the tourist quest for authenticity was a reaction to the very conditions of modernity that rendered so-called traditional cultures moribund and thus refigured them as objects of longing. Yet Young goes further in his analysis by showing that Breton inhabitants (cultural elites and ordinary folks) were active participants in the creation of tourist representations and performances. Central to his argument is the claim that this kind of regional tourism was also integral to the process of nation building in France. As Breton elites responded to the uncertainties of change in the nineteenth century, Young argues, they created a distinct "Breton cultural patrimony" that not only became an object of exchange in an expanding tourist industry but also served to bring Brittany increasingly into a national framework through the building of a tourist infrastructure.[1] Thus the marketing of *bretonnitude* (Bretonness) became part of a regional and national French imaginary.[2] And yet the very success of these tourist endeavors also created a set of tensions over the authenticity of the manufactured Breton heritage on display.

Young has written an ambitious book, one that sets out to examine the development of Brittany's tourist industry at three different levels of analysis. At one level, Young provides a thorough social history of the development of regional tourism in Brittany by looking at the role of private tourist organizations and governmental offices in defining a distinctive Breton culture and marketing it to wider audiences. He also looks at Breton local elites who saw themselves as stewards of traditional *bretonnitude* and sought to preserve this culture in particular domains. Part of this analysis involves a careful examination of the writings of elite members who shaped notions of what constituted authentic Breton customs, rituals, and images. Here, Young moves to the level of cultural analysis by engaging in close readings of texts that called for constructing, preserving, and promoting a distinctive Breton character. He examines French mass-produced guidebooks, published travelogues, and diaries, as well as other unpublished texts often written by foreigners, probing all these for how they articulate notions of value and frame expectations for what should be seen and appreciated. Young also unravels the anxieties, fears, and disappointments embedded in these texts, which produced a distinctly modern discourse of authenticity and loss. Analyzing the impact of an emerging tourist industry on Bretons themselves, the study traces the new roles and activities these individuals assumed within the new regional economy.

This tripartite analysis of Brittany's tourist industry is developed over seven chapters that weave together discussions of tourist infrastructure and economy with more theorized analyses of texts. Early chapters lay out the

key actors and organizations that came to shape the area's "place particularity." This process started as early as the mid-nineteenth century when local Breton notables began to worry about the province's vanishing peasant culture in the face of outmigration to cities as well as the emergence of new industries and technologies. Drawing on romantic and orientalist currents popular at the time, native sons, such as the aristocrat Théodore Hersart de la Villemarqué, published song collections of Breton "chants" while "sociétés savantes" collected artifacts and designated natural sites as Brittany's special patrimony. Key outside actors, such as the Touring Club de France (TCF), a private association of mostly middle-class urban participants, were also at the center of modern tourist promotion for Brittany. TCF promotional campaigns were instrumental in designating the "sites, objects and even performances" that made "Brittany's culture available as a consumerable cultural repertory—one at once convincingly Breton, and also recognizably French" (p. 50). By the 1920s, Young notes, these sorts of campaigns and festivals, involving coordinated efforts between the state and private associations, really took off.

But what did it mean to mass-market Breton "originality" and the "quaint picturesque" for an audience that increasingly expected rustic charm as well as modern convenience? Subsequent chapters present mini-case studies that analyze in detail Breton costume and heritage festivals, religious processions, and landscape preservation. Young uses these case studies to tease out the tensions over the quest for "authenticity" in the modern tourist encounter. Focusing on the producers, consumers, and actors engaged in these kinds of tourist exchange, these cases reveal a set of invented traditions and designated sites that came to represent Breton originality in the tourist imaginary. Young is at his best in these chapters as he unravels the many contradictions and ironies embodied in such tourist encounters. For example, heritage festivals, by making costume a key marker of Breton originality, transformed a style of dress worn by well-to-do Bretons for special occasions into a cross-class "collective inheritance worn and/or honored by all" (p. 157). As "authentic" Breton costume, in turn, was packaged and mass-marketed for the tourist economy, travel writers increasingly complained that the festivals were becoming inauthentic and guidebooks offered tips for finding "real" Breton inhabitants off the beaten track.

The author exposes similar tensions within the recasting of religious pardons (open-air veneration of local saints) as well as campaigns to preserve Breton natural sites. In these chapters, Young presents a wealth of information about the attitudes and actions of Breton cultural elites, various tourist associations, and the educated foreigners who came as tourists to Brittany. However, he provides less extensive access to how ordinary Breton inhabitants participated in the making of Breton tourism. Using letters of complaint written by tourists to the TCF, Young does find evidence that out-of-work fishermen acting as tour guides sometimes took advantage of visitors, and local youth demanded money from tourists to keep their cars safe from vandalism. Such moments suggest just a few of the ground-level kinds of conflict and resistance found within the tourist encounter.

Young's multilevel analysis provides a nuanced argument that teases out the many contradictions that abounded in marketing Breton originality to a tourist audience. Several interesting insights about the role of nostalgia, loss, and longing within the rhetoric of a new "tourist modernity," however, get lost amid the details of tourist associations, state initiatives, and festival campaigns. Young brings in so many different groups (Breton elites, foreign travelers, local residents, returning migrants, Parisian businessmen, intellectuals, and artists) that it can become difficult to sort out which of these actors were most important in the construction of Breton's regional identity and at what moment they became central.

That earlier chapters remain somewhat disconnected from broader theoretical claims suggests a second problem with *Enacting Brittany*. How does the emergence of tourist modernity relate to the nation-building process that

brought the region of Brittany into the imagined community of the nation-state? Young's book shows well how tourist development made Brittany's place particularity an important component of the nation's patrimony, but it does not link this nation-building argument to his analyses of cultural loss and longing embedded in the tourist encounter. Is there a politics of longing and authenticity that is related to the nation-building process? Moreover, it seems clear that foreigners (in this case British visitors) helped to define key ideas of *brettonnitude*. But what does it mean that non-French nationals played such a central role in the process of regional and national identity construction in France?[3] There are also some missed opportunities to go deeper into the nuances of the tourist encounter. In the three cases studies, Young treats heritage festivals, religious processions, and landscape preservation as essentially variations on a similar dynamic of preserving and promoting Breton particularity. Yet this reader wondered if there was not something qualitatively different about preserving landscapes for the "general interest" and the preservation of "living heritage" for Brittany? Does the tourist who interacts with the landscape have a different experience than the one who watches heritage on display? One encounter seeks to breakdown the distance between visitor and the site (making the landscape a kind of communal possession), while the other may work instead to reify the differences between visitor and host.

What Young does demonstrate very well is that the very success of marketing Brittany's place particularity created a set of profound dilemmas that were not easily resolved. His epilogue reminds us that recent debates about the loss of place particularity in the face of "globalization" and homogenization are not new. The call to preserve the local in the face of modernizing forces has a long history, and the tensions created by such preservation efforts are a constitutive aspect of modernity itself. These insights make *Enacting Brittany* a significant contribution to both the field of national and regional identity construction as well as the study of the history of tourism.

#### Notes

[1]. There is a large scholarship on French nation building during the era of the Third Republic that has examined the region of Brittany in particular because the province was a site of vigorous debates over its traditional (read: politically reactionary) culture. Recent scholarship has argued that conflicts over schooling and religion in Brittany helped to facilitate its integration into the nation-state. Such studies include Caroline Ford, *Creating the Nation in Provincial France: Religion and Political Identity in Brittany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Michel Lagrée, *Religion et cultures en Bretagne, 1850-1950* (Paris: Fayard 1992); and Anne-Marie Thiesse, *Écrire La France: Le mouvement littéraire régionaliste de langue française entre la Belle Époque et la Libération* (Paris: Presses Univeristaires de France, 1991).

[2]. For a similar argument about another French region, see Kolleen Guy, *When Champagne Became French: Wine and the Making of French Identity, 1820-1920* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

[3]. For a recent work that emphasizes the impact of foreign visitors on nation building, see Eric Storm, "Overcoming Methodological Nationalism in National Studies: The Impact of Tourism on the Construction and Diffusion of National and Regional Identities," *History Compass* 12, no. 4 (2014): 361-373.

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