

## The Death of Cannelle and the Re-invention of the Pyrenees

*Martyn Lyons*

### *Introduction*

On All Saints' Day 2004, a hunter in the vallée d'Aspe (Pyrénées-Atlantiques) shot and killed Cannelle, the last female brown bear indigenous to the Pyrenees, during a boar hunt (*battue des sangliers*). Cannelle was suspected of making recent attacks on sheep. Now cornered by six hunters and their dogs, and trying to protect her cub, she had become unusually aggressive towards one hunter, René Marquèze, who confronted and killed her. The incident provoked a nationwide uproar. Cannelle's corpse was quickly helicoptered away for an autopsy. The socialist party declared itself "scandalized." In the *conseil des ministres*, President Chirac mourned "a great loss for biodiversity," in what *Le Monde* jokingly called a funeral oration.<sup>1</sup> Between 3,000 and 5,000 demonstrators protested outside the Panthéon in favor of protecting "la grande faune," and a further demonstration occurred at Oloron-Sainte-Marie (Pyrénées-Atlantiques) at the end of November. Within six months a petition in favor of protecting *les grands prédateurs* had gathered 120,000 signatures.<sup>2</sup> René Marquèze was charged with destroying a protected species; he claimed he acted in legitimate self-defense. In Pau, the judge declared he had no case to answer. Although this decision was reversed on appeal, Marquèze was to serve only a few weeks in prison. The French State sponsored a civil case brought against him by various green organizations, and in 2009 Marquèze was condemned to pay 14,500 Euros in damages and legal costs. Hunting organizations rallied round to raise the money for him, and this was to become a familiar pattern.

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<sup>1</sup> Laurent Greilsamer, "Aux bêtes sauvages, la patrie reconnaissante," *Le Monde* 7 November 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Farid Benhammou, *Vivre avec l'ours* (Blois, 2005), 117.

Why had the death of one animal sparked such severe reverberations that even the President of the Republic felt obliged to comment? The hunter, once the embodiment of Pyrenean endurance, ingenuity and masculinity, was now cast as the villain, while his victim was transformed from a public nuisance into a popular heroine. How had this dramatic role reversal occurred? I suggest that the importance of the bear lies in its ability to crystallize, more sharply than any other issue, the continuing conflict between an ailing pastoral economy on one hand, and the rising force of the ecological lobby on the other.<sup>3</sup> In briefly examining this conflict, and some of the historical influences which inform it, we can identify the death of Cannelle as a turning-point in popular mobilization in support of animal protection. The media war surrounding Cannelle, which was clearly won by the ecologists, also revealed something else: the Pyrenees themselves were once more being re-invented, and the brown bear, *ursus arctus*, was central to France's newly-constructed image of the region.

### *Conflicts and 're-introductions'*

The conflict had long pre-dated the death of Cannelle. Since the late 1960s, the Pyrenees were the theatre of abortive ministerial initiatives, the creation of a National Park in 1967 and plans to create bear reserves which were successfully resisted by the pastoralists. A full narrative of these developments lies beyond the scope of this paper. I take up the story with the decision to introduce Slovenian bears into the Pyrenees in 1996.

Béarn, not surprisingly, opposed the reintroduction of Slovenian bears. The only place which offered to host this event was the commune of Melles in the Comminges (Haute-Garonne). Here the mayor had his eye on potential tourist income. According to the daily *Libération*, he asserted in 2006: " Lourdes took off thanks to the Virgin; but here we will have the bear."<sup>4</sup> Nothing evened the conflict more than the reintroductions, first of two females Ziva and Mellba, both already pregnant, followed by the dominant male Pyros. Since bears are no respecters of frontiers, Mellba drifted into the Ariège and provoked local protests there before she was eventually shot dead near St Béat (Haute-Garonne). The hunter responsible was not prosecuted.<sup>5</sup> The same fate befell Ziva in Spanish Catalonia. By 1999, 445 sheep deaths had been attributed to Ziva, Pyros and their offspring.<sup>6</sup> In the Central Pyrenees, farmers had long since given up guarding their sheep, and there were no *patous* (Pyrenean guard dogs) on the high pastures. In other words, the sheep were completely unprotected.

In 2000, Augustin Bonrepaux, deputy for the Ariège, proposed an amendment to hunting legislation, which would have brought about the capture and expulsion of the newly-introduced Slovenian bears. The Slovenian bears were to be treated just like illegal immigrants. According to Senator Louis Althape, "When you have illegal immigrants, you charter a plane [i.e. to deport them]. We must buy a return ticket for the Slovenian bears."<sup>7</sup> But the amendment lost in the National Assembly. Local

<sup>3</sup> The conflict between ecologists and pastoralists over the Pyrenean bear does not prevent them from becoming allies in other causes, for example, in the campaign against genetically-modified crops.

<sup>4</sup> Violaine Bérot, *L'Ours: les raisons de la colère* (Pau, 2006), cit., 39.

<sup>5</sup> Benhammou, *Vivre avec l'ours*, 64-65.

<sup>6</sup> Olivier de Marliave, *Histoire de l'ours dans les Pyrénées de la préhistoire à la réintroduction* (Bordeaux, 2008), 199.

<sup>7</sup> *La République des Pyrénées*, 30.04.2001, cited by Benhammou, "Vendre la peau de l'ours avant de l'avoir sauvé?: Une géopolitique locale de la conservation d'une espèce emblématique," in Benhammou, et al, *L'Ours des Pyrénées: les quatre vérités* (Toulouse, 2005), 103.

representatives like Bonrepaux and Jean Lassalle (leader of the Institut patrimonial du haut Béarn) were experts in the art of *populisme montagnard*, seeking to manipulate rural problems to secure funding from Paris. They trod a very fine line, careful to appear concerned for species conservation, but at the same time aware that the hunters and the agro-lobby were expecting their interests to be defended.

In fact the mobilization generated by the death of Cannelle in 2004 had made further reintroductions impossible to prevent. In 2006, a second group of five Slovenian bears was introduced, most of them again in the Haute-Garonne. A demonstration against these reintroductions attacked the *mairie* at Arbas (Haute-Garonne) and vandalized the premises. The culprits were fined, but the damage bill was picked up by the *syndicat de la chasse*. Another rally against reintroductions met at Bagnères-de-Bigorre (Hautes-Pyrénées), and supporters responded with a counter-rally in Toulouse. This ‘pro-bear’ counter-rally had originally been scheduled for Luchon, but fear of serious disorder forced it to move to the more benign environment of the regional capital. In 2006, one of the Slovenians, Palouma, was dead, having probably fallen down a ravine. Another bear, Franska, was killed in a road accident on the RN21 between Lourdes and Argelès-Galost. Her body was full of gunshot. Several pots of bear “poison” were found in the mountains: they contained honey laced with shards of glass.<sup>8</sup> The death of Cannelle, therefore, was just one episode, albeit a crucial one, in a thirty-year-old conflict between local authorities and Paris, and between the pastoral industry and the ecologists. The backlash after Cannelle’s death inspired the second wave of “reintroductions” of Slovenian bears. The polemic continues today over the internet.<sup>9</sup>

I would like to highlight some of the historical forces which lie behind the struggle. One of these is the ancient and pervasive culture of *la chasse* in the Pyrenees, together with the enduring interests of the pastoral economy in the face of long-term decline and threats to livestock. At the same time, the controversy echoes the historic claims of the Béarnais peasantry to carry arms as a basic democratic right. The struggle also generates regional and even xenophobic impulses with which historians of provincial France will be familiar. The conflict is exacerbated by the unique symbolic power of the bear, which is never simply an animal like any other. My second broad aim is to place the struggle over the survival of the bear in the context of the continual re-invention of the Pyrenees since the eighteenth century. The conflict over Cannelle illustrates the re-incarnation of the Pyrenees as a ‘green zone’, in which our understanding of what constitutes a ‘wilderness’ is being re-interpreted.

### *The Culture of Hunting*

Bears had once been extraordinarily plentiful and by no means confined to forest and mountain. Jean-Claude Bouchet, one of the few observers whose comments are based on scholarly analysis, estimated that at least 3,000 bears were killed in the Pyrenees over three centuries up to 1950.<sup>10</sup> Sancho of Navarre killed fourteen bears in a single winter in 1165, along with sixteen wild boar, twenty-two stags, twelve *izardes*

<sup>8</sup> Pascal Etienne and Jean Lauzet, *L'Ours brun: biologie et histoire des Pyrénées à l'Oural* (Paris, 2009), 333.

<sup>9</sup> See for example the ‘pro-bear’ and pro-tourism site, *Bienvenue au Pays de L'ours*, [www.paysdelours.com](http://www.paysdelours.com) (accessed 20 August 2013), and the ‘anti-bear’ and equally pro-tourism site, “Index of /Faune/ours,” *Le Monde des Pyrenees*, [www.pyrenees-pireneus.com/Faune/ours/](http://www.pyrenees-pireneus.com/Faune/ours/) (accessed 20 August 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Jean-Claude Bouchet, *Histoire de la chasse dans les Pyrénées françaises (XVIe-XXe siècles)* (Pau, 1990), 185.

(mountain goats), fifteen *mouflons* (wild sheep) and forty-four hare.<sup>11</sup> Hunting was then part of a chivalric and aristocratic ethos. When Gaston Phébus, count of Foix and viscount of Béarn, wrote his famous *Livre de la Chasse* in 1387, he devoted a whole chapter to the bear hunt. Capturing a bear involved swordsmen, lancers, archers and dogs. This was the honorable way and Phébus despised the use of poisons and traps as “la vilaine chasse.”<sup>12</sup> Before firearms became readily available, bear kills were sporadic. Shepherds were poorly armed and the use of traps and poisons was ineffective, at least until the twentieth century. Medieval hunters grappled *mano a mano* with the bear, plunging a sharp knife into its body to kill the animal as it tried to crush the hunter in a powerful embrace. Hunters who survived this personal combat were revered for their courage and daring.

By the late eighteenth century, what Olivier Marliave describes (with some exaggeration) as a “war of extermination” was under way.<sup>13</sup> In the mid-nineteenth century, the human population of the Pyrenees was at its peak and inhabitants sought to protect both their flocks and cultivated areas from predators. Peasants burned forests to flush out the bears and destroy their habitat. Communal *battues* were organized by the office of *la louveterie*. The royal *lieutenant de la louveterie* had been established in the fourteenth century. The office was abolished by the revolution in 1793, but re-established in 1814. It had overall responsibility for the fight against all *bêtes nuisibles*.

The law of 19 Pluviôse Year 5 regularized the system of organized *battues* to destroy *animaux nuisibles*, which essentially meant wolves and bears. The communal *battue* had a social function, and it was a festive occasion, in which the village enjoyed a celebration and the men paraded their kills as trophies. They were noisy affairs, as the beaters tried to scare their prey by bashing pans, spades, drums and other “instruments charivaresques,” as one eighteenth-century commentator described this rough orchestra.<sup>14</sup> However colorful they may have been, the *battues* were frequently ineffective. They appeased anxious pastoralists, but rarely captured a bear.

The system of rewards for successful bear killers, which dated from the Middle Ages, was still in force. When the last bear hunter of Vizcaya in the Spanish Basque country killed his bear in 1871, he received an ounce of gold and a merit certificate from the commune of Manaria.<sup>15</sup> In the sixteenth century, the Parlement of Pau gave a reward of ten *francs* eight *sous* for a bear, and half as much for a wolf. In the single commune of Laruns (Pyrénées-Atlantiques), to take one example, thirty-seven bear captures were thus rewarded in thirty-four years from 1577 on.<sup>16</sup> In the Old Regime, rewards were paid from communal funds, so that every locality had responsibility for its own protection, but in 1814 the system was centralized and put in the hands of the prefects. In the nineteenth century the scale of rewards had become more sophisticated. In the Ariège, a dead bear was worth twenty-four *francs*, but a female fetched thirty *francs*.<sup>17</sup>

Dynasties of professional hunters emerged, revered for their bravado and skill. Toussaint St-Martin from the vallée d'Ossau personally killed about thirty bears, and

<sup>11</sup> Marliave, *Histoire de l'ours dans les Pyrénées*, 45.

<sup>12</sup> René Cuzacq, *Maître Martin: L'Ours des Pyrénées* (Pau, 1961), 22-23 (offprint from *Les Pyrénées*, 1960-61).

<sup>13</sup> Marliave, *Histoire de l'ours dans les Pyrénées*, chapter 2.

<sup>14</sup> Bouchet, *Histoire de la chasse dans les Pyrénées françaises*, 19.

<sup>15</sup> Marliave, *Histoire de l'ours dans les Pyrénées*, 32.

<sup>16</sup> Archives Départementales des Pyrénées-Atlantiques (Pau), B5963, decisions of the Parlement of Pau, 1577-1601.

<sup>17</sup> Marliave, *Histoire de l'ours dans les Pyrénées*, 85.

subsequently made a career as an official tourist guide for the Club Alpin. He died in 1960.<sup>18</sup> The Authier family, including the remarkable but illiterate Tambel, operated in the Ariège between the eighteenth and the early twentieth centuries. The successful hunter returned in triumph, and it was customary to conduct a *tournée* of nearby villages to exhibit the dead bear as a trophy. During this triumphant exhibition of the bear, the hunter collected gifts from grateful villagers, some eggs, ham and perhaps wine and potatoes, for a celebratory and well-lubricated feast.<sup>19</sup> The bear's skin and fur were valuable commodities, and the grease, of which there was plenty, could be sold for various commercial uses. Bear fat was supposedly good for treating rheumatism and hair loss. The proceeds of three bear kills could keep a hunter for a year, but this was a very unreliable income.<sup>20</sup> The macho swagger of hunting culture was embedded in village tradition, which did not easily adapt to a new environment in which the hunter was criminalized.

For centuries bears and shepherds had co-existed, willingly or not, but by the 1950s only about fifty bears survived in the Pyrenees.<sup>21</sup> They had long since disappeared from Catalonia and more recently from the Ariège. In the Central Pyrenees, 124 bears were killed in the Couserans and the val d'Aran in the course of a century from 1890 to 1990.<sup>22</sup> The last Andorran bear was killed 1849; the last organized *battue* in the Ariège was held in 1940. Bears were increasingly confined to Béarn and Bigorre, and here they would make their last stand.<sup>23</sup>

By the 1990s, then, bears survived only in the upper valleys of Béarn and Aragon. Hunting, of course, was not the only reason for their decline. Their relatively slow rate of reproduction was a contributing factor. Bears live for twenty to thirty years, but a female will only give birth to about fifteen cubs in her lifetime, of which probably only one in three will live to adulthood. At this rate the survival of the Pyrenean brown bear was and still is precarious.<sup>24</sup> The gradual encroachment of human activity on the bears' traditional habitat reduced the population. New roads and tunnels, hiking paths, deforestation, new ski resorts and the development of Pyrenean tourism in general all reduced the bear's habitat or 'biotope'. But as the bears flee human contact, they have to compete with a rising population of wild boars, which share the same wooded habitats and consume the same diet of nuts and acorns.

### *The Shepherd and Maître Martin*

In late summer bears refuel their bodies in preparation for winter hibernation. This season is when they are most likely to descend on livestock, killing possibly dozens of sheep in a single raid. Traditionally, the resulting destruction was roughly estimated to deprive the peasant of ten per cent of his income, and it was known as Martin's tithe (Martin being one of the bear's generic nicknames).<sup>25</sup> The *Mémorial des Pyrénées* commented on this demanding *seigneur* in 1883: "The ancestors of the shepherds in the vallée d'Aspe never knew the feudal tithe [...] it would be ironic (*piquant*) if their

<sup>18</sup> Marliave, *Histoire de l'ours dans les Pyrénées*, 98.

<sup>19</sup> Bouchet, *Histoire de la chasse dans les Pyrénées françaises*, 85-89.

<sup>20</sup> Bouchet, *Histoire de la chasse dans les Pyrénées françaises*, 78.

<sup>21</sup> Gérard Caussimont, *Avec le naturaliste sur les pas de l'ours brun des Pyrénées* (Toulouse, 1997), 25-26.

<sup>22</sup> Marliave, *Histoire de l'ours dans les Pyrénées*, 24.

<sup>23</sup> Marliave, *Histoire de l'ours dans les Pyrénées*, 20-31.

<sup>24</sup> Etienne and Lauzet, *L'Ours brun*, 194.

<sup>25</sup> Marliave, *Histoire de l'ours dans les Pyrénées*, 61 and 66.

descendants had to pay a tenth of their livestock to Maître Martin.”<sup>26</sup> Sheep are the most common victims of bear attacks, but goats, cows and horses have also been killed by bears. At Bielle in 1824 even the “taureau communal” was killed after a combat with a bear.<sup>27</sup> The centralized system of compensation paid to pastoralists leaves records which allow us to measure the extent of recent damage to the Pyrenean sheep population. According to the Parc national, every Pyrenean bear kills 3.4 sheep annually on average.<sup>28</sup> In 2013, 171 animals were killed by bears in the Pyrenees.<sup>29</sup> The damage is not restricted to livestock. Bears love maize, apples, grapes and of course beehives. They are principally vegetarian, but their omnivorous appetite makes them twice as destructive as either wolves or wild boars.

Bears do not merely tear livestock apart, they also terrify it to death. There is a constant risk of panic and flocks stampeding over cliffs to their death. In 1979, a bear scared a flock in Ansó (Aragon), causing the loss of 149 sheep.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, in 2005 the bear Boutxi was responsible for driving 160 sheep over a precipice.<sup>31</sup> It is no wonder that shepherds on both sides of the frontier would like to see the bear eliminated.

Ecologists dismiss this damage as trivial compared to the enormous sheep population – perhaps half a million strong – which grazes across the whole Pyrenean range. They exculpate the bear by blaming wild dogs for many sheep deaths. They argue that ninety-nine per cent of sheep which die in the Pyrenees do so from causes other than bear attacks, such as disease, accidents and attacks by wild dogs. Bear predation, in their view, is a *faux problème*. Alain Reynes even went so far as to describe the bear as an “epiphenomenon.”<sup>32</sup> This seems to me to underestimate the passion which reintroductions have aroused. Moreover, the response that dogs kill more sheep than bears appears particularly insensitive to the fate of the sheep themselves. It seems a surprisingly callous attitude for a self-styled animal conservationist.

Most small peasants cannot afford a *patou* (the Pyrenean guard dog), although in 1990 the Artus Association created a pool of dogs which could be rented for the summer.<sup>33</sup> Sheep are generally unguarded on their mountain pastures except in Béarn, where local cheeses have been successfully commercialized, particularly in the vallées d’Aspe and d’Ossau. Here, unlike in the Ariège, the shepherd is likely to spend more time on the mountainside, milking and making cheese on the spot. Bear attacks following the Slovenian reintroductions may force reluctant shepherds up the mountains again.

Etienne Lamazou came from a family of shepherds who, every year, drove their flock from summer pastures in the Pyrenees to winter pastures in the Landes. For ten months of the year they were away from their home in Aydius, a small village of stone houses with a population of 500, which was first reached by road in 1907. Lamazou’s memoirs tell many stories of encounters with bears. Lamazou claimed that he never killed a bear, but lost perhaps twenty-five sheep to bear attacks over a

<sup>26</sup> *Mémorial des Pyrénées*, 30.3.1883, cited in Bouchet, *Histoire de la chasse dans les Pyrénées françaises*, 58.

<sup>27</sup> Bouchet, *Histoire de la chasse dans les Pyrénées françaises*, 57.

<sup>28</sup> Etienne and Lauzet, *L’Ours brun*, 155.

<sup>29</sup> *La Dépêche du Midi* (Ariège edition), 12.4.2014, 9.

<sup>30</sup> Claude Dendaletche and FIEP (Fonds d’intervention éco-pastoral), *Pyrénées: l’ours* (Pau, 1981), 48.

<sup>31</sup> Bérot, *L’Ours: les raisons de la colère*, 62.

<sup>32</sup> Alain Reynes, “De la chasse à la réintroduction: entre histoire et espoir,” in *L’Ours des Pyrénées: les quatre vérités*, in Benhammou et al., 60 and 64.

<sup>33</sup> Marliave, *Histoire de l’ours dans les Pyrénées*, 58-59.

working life which stretched from 1912 to 1969.<sup>34</sup> From the age of fifteen Lamazou was sent to guard his family's 280 sheep above Aydius. Lamazou slept in his pinewood cabin with his ancient First Empire pistol under his pillow, ready to make a noise to scare off the animal he knew as "l'ennemi" or "Martin."<sup>35</sup> Once, he relates, a bear entered a sheep-pen and killed or wounded several sheep, which meant potential ruin for the shepherd who had lost half his flock. According to Lamazou, other shepherds each gave the victim one of their own animals so that he could reconstitute his capital.<sup>36</sup> Lamazou's autobiography illustrates the fragility of the pastoral economy, and the complete lack of sophistication of protection measures against bears. His memoirs were published in 1988 when the author was eighty-eight, and they reflect the prevailing controversy over the bear. They are full of nostalgia for a lost way of life and they represent the shepherd not as a killer, but rather as a nomad who lived a hard but independent life and whose livelihood could be seriously threatened by predators.

When the Parc National des Pyrénées Occidentales was created in 1967, local opposition argued that the park would violate centuries-old pasturing rights, and by protecting the bear it would endanger the pastoral economy. In practice the park satisfied no-one; ecologists complained that the protected area of the park was too small and that it did not correspond to the altitudes most frequented by bears.<sup>37</sup> The system of compensation put in place by the *Fonds d'intervention éco-pastoral* (FIEP) (together with the Parc national) went some way to protect pastoral interests, especially after the shepherd was awarded an additional *prime de dérangement* (115 Euros per attack), which compensated him not just for the loss of the sheep, but also for the time and effort needed to retrieve the carcass and report the fatal incident. In addition to the basic compensation fee of 120-140 Euros per animal, farmers could also claim forty-six Euros per sheep in compensation for lost income from the lambs, wool and milk which a dead sheep might have generated.<sup>38</sup> In 2012, the total amount of compensation available was potentially 240 Euros per lost sheep. A similar scheme operates on the Spanish side, although here payment is less prompt. Shepherds must provide attestations from the Guardia Civil, forest guards and a vet. To lodge a claim and collect payment, they must go down to Huesca or Pamplona, losing perhaps half a day in the process.<sup>39</sup>

Behind the nostalgia of Lamazou and the protests against current policy changes lies a pastoral economy in distress. In the last thirty years, the population of the Pyrenees has aged and the number of agro-businesses has declined. In the Ariège alone, sixty per cent of small farms disappeared between 1979 and 2000.<sup>40</sup> The number of traditional shepherds like Etienne Lamazou has shrunk. In 1905, Lamazou's village of Aydius had supported seventy-three shepherds, but in the mid-1980s there were only two left, and the village's population had fallen to a mere sixty-seven.<sup>41</sup> The Aragonese Pyrenees, too, have been deserted, leading to loss of pasture and creeping reforestation. Violaine Bérot, formerly a Toulouse businesswoman who returned to her native Ariège to run a small farm raising horses and goats,

<sup>34</sup> Etienne Lamazou, *L'Ours et les brebis: mémoires d'un berger transhumant des Pyrénées à la Gironde*, préface by Alain Bernard (Paris, 1988), 193.

<sup>35</sup> Lamazou, *L'Ours et les brebis*, 9-10.

<sup>36</sup> Lamazou, *L'Ours et les brebis*, 189.

<sup>37</sup> François Merlet, *Seigneur des Pyrénées: l'ours* (Pau, 1971), 82.

<sup>38</sup> Dendaletche and FIEP, *Pyrénées: l'ours*, 46.

<sup>39</sup> Dendaletche and FIEP, *Pyrénées: l'ours*, 48-49.

<sup>40</sup> Benhammou, *Vivre avec l'ours*, 74.

<sup>41</sup> Lamazou, *L'Ours et les brebis*, 198-203.

sympathized with the remaining shepherds, asking: “Who in our modern society is mad enough to accept to work for five months non-stop without a single rest day and in extreme solitude?”<sup>42</sup>

At the same time, sheep flocks have had to grow bigger in order to be profitable. International competition from New Zealand and elsewhere makes pastoral agriculture hard to sustain. Between 1980 and 2000 the minimum wage doubled in France, but the price of a lamb remained unchanged at seventy Euros (it is now about 120 Euros).<sup>43</sup> Is the bear simply a scapegoat for the troubles of the agro-pastoral economy? Are the pastoralists defending an obsolete agricultural system? The most militant and articulate spokesmen of the ecological lobby argue exactly that in his view, what is really at stake in the conflict is the economic future of traditional pastoralism in crisis.<sup>44</sup>

### *The Right to Carry Arms*

The anger of hunters and residents has deep historical roots: they lie in the Béarnais claim to the right to carry arms. Although legally speaking, hunting in the Old Régime was an aristocratic privilege, the nobility was never able to enforce its exclusive right to carry arms. Attempts by *seigneurs* to disarm their peasants ran up against the popular belief that carrying arms was an essential human right. Many landowners accepted reality by simply demanding that hunters deliver the choicest parts of the animals they killed. Thus the abbey of St-Savin in Bigorre demanded, in its charter of 1398, the head, the feet and a quarter of the prey, according to the right of *symier* (or *cimier*).<sup>45</sup> In legislation against *seigneurs*, the inhabitants of the Quatre Vallées of Bigorre claimed that hunting was not a privilege but rather a fundamental collective right, and in the seventeenth century the *fors* (i.e. the charter of customs) of Navarre allowed shepherds to use arms in self-defense against wild beasts.<sup>46</sup>

Repeated ordinances from Louis XIV to protect the aristocratic monopoly of hunting, and successive decrees in the same vein from his Intendants, suggest that the privilege was ignored by the Estates of Béarn and Basse-Navarre.<sup>47</sup> Nor would the Parlement of Toulouse enforce royal edicts against Languedoc's right to hunt. The peasants kept their crossbows and, later, their guns. Their right to do so was re-asserted in 1789: the *cahiers de doléances* of Bagnères-de-Bigorre claimed the right of mountain people to carry arms to defend themselves against *bêtes féroces*, and almost two-thirds of the communes of Béarn made the same demand, justifying it as necessary self-defense and indispensable for the protection of private property.<sup>48</sup> In fact peasants rarely possessed effective modern weapons. In the nineteenth century, they relied on single-barreled guns which had to be reloaded after every round.<sup>49</sup> As we have seen, in the twentieth century, Etienne Lamazou was armed with a pistol more than a hundred years old, which was intended to make a frightening noise rather than actually kill anything. In spite of this, attempts to limit hunting rights have to overcome the weight of centuries of local defense of democratic and customary rights.

<sup>42</sup> Bérot, *L'Ours: les raisons de la colère*, 41-42.

<sup>43</sup> Benhammou, *Vivre avec l'ours*, 74.

<sup>44</sup> Reynes, “De la chasse à la réintroduction: entre histoire et espoir”, 64.

<sup>45</sup> Bouchet, *Histoire de la chasse dans les Pyrénées françaises*, 42.

<sup>46</sup> Bouchet, *Histoire de la chasse dans les Pyrénées françaises*, 43.

<sup>47</sup> Christian Desplat, “La Chasse en Béarn à l'époque moderne,” *Annales du Midi* 98, no. 176 (1986): 486-90.

<sup>48</sup> Bouchet, *Histoire de la chasse dans les Pyrénées françaises*, 45.

<sup>49</sup> *Pêche et Chasse dans les Pyrénées françaises* (Pau, 1972), 76-77.

Hunting was part of the peasant's egalitarian agenda in the French Revolution, and it was part of everyday village life, in which legal prohibitions were freely ignored.

### *Regionalism*

The campaign against the reintroduction of bears into the Pyrenees thus drew on a millennial discourse of equality and peasants' rights, bolstered by arguments for public utility and the defense of property. The campaign opportunistically appealed to a sense of regional pride and identity. Béarnais and Ariègeois alike felt with some dismay that policies concocted in Paris were gradually depriving them of control over their own environment. Local peasants' defense of their mountain pastures against the bear has even been compared to the *Guerre des Demoiselles* of 1829-32, which was the occasion of armed retaliation against royal attempts to restrict collective rights in the forests.<sup>50</sup> This spirit prevailed in 1906, when the law on the Separation of Church and State sent inspectors into French parishes to make an inventory of church property. At the parish church of Cominac (Ariège), the detested officials were confronted by two *montreurs d'ours* together with their bears. They stood guard at the front door while the priest read out a protest.<sup>51</sup> Here the bears were imagined in collusion with the local community. On this rare occasion villagers had appropriated a folkloric image of the bear for their own purposes.

The rhetoric of campaigners against reintroduction indicates the tone of regional and xenophobic sentiment generated by the conflict. Ecologists are condemned as eco-fascists or *khmers verts* (green Khmers).<sup>52</sup> The Slovenian bears, it was claimed, were inferior in quality to the indigenous French bear which was more adaptable and of superior intelligence. The Slovenian bears, in contrast, were vehicles of genetic pollution, dubbed "ours poubelles" (garbage bears) in a pamphlet of 2001 entitled *La Colère des Pyrénées*.<sup>53</sup> "Slovene: Go Home" was a slogan touted by a demonstration in the Ariège which the Toulouse daily *La Dépêche du Midi* freely appropriated.<sup>54</sup> A three-way conflict developed, between local politicians, the Minister for the Environment and the ecologists' lobby. In this struggle, local politicians claimed that both the ministry and the ecologists were intruders who threatened Pyrenean identity.

A homogeneous Pyrenean identity is a fiction, or at least a notion full of contradictions. The independence and isolation of valley communities always fragmented the mountains into distinct communities often antagonistic towards one another. Perhaps joint demonstrations against the bear changed this: Violaine Bérot interestingly claimed that resistance did create new solidarities and forged a Pyrenean identity. This identity, however, is far from monolithic. There are many who identify with the Pyrenees but at the same time support the reintroduction of bears. An opinion poll of 2004 in the Pyrénées-Atlantiques suggested that seventy-seven per cent of residents favored new reintroductions, and a similar poll in the Central Pyrenees in 2005 found sixty-two per cent in favor.<sup>55</sup> Local opinion itself is clearly polarized for and against the bears. The traces of these divisions remain visible in the graffiti

<sup>50</sup> Bérot, *L'Ours: Les raisons de la colère*, 50.

<sup>51</sup> Michel Papy, "Sur l'image de l'ours des Pyrénées dans l'opinion d'après quelques cartes postales du début du XXe siècle," in *L'Ours brun: Pyrénées, Abruzzes, Monts Cantabriques, Alpes du Trentin*, ed. Claude Dendaletche et al., (Pau, 1986), 191-92.

<sup>52</sup> Benhammou, "Vendre la peau de l'ours avant de l'avoir sauvé?", 102.

<sup>53</sup> Published in Tarbes by the ADDIP (Association pour le développement durable de l'identité pyrénéenne), cited by Benhammou, "Vendre la peau de l'ours avant de l'avoir sauvé?", 103.

<sup>54</sup> Benhammou, "Vendre la peau de l'ours avant de l'avoir sauvé?", 104.

<sup>55</sup> Etienne and Lauzet, *L'Ours brun*, 332.

regularly encountered by any motorist in the upper Ariège, which proclaim “Oui aux ours” or alternatively “Non aux ours.”

### *The Name of the Bear*

The bear is a symbol in which much emotional capital has been invested, which is another reason why the fate of the species in the Pyrenees has aroused such heated argument. Michael Pastoureau brilliantly outlined the animal’s mythical and symbolic status since earliest times in his book *The Bear: History of a Fallen King*.<sup>56</sup> Anthropomorphic qualities have always been attributed to the bear. The bear stands upright like a human, although this is not its preferred means of mobility. The animal is a similar height to a human and surprisingly dexterous, able to throw objects, pick berries, climb trees and catch fish. For centuries medieval scholars thought that bears copulated not like other quadrupeds, but *ad modum hominem*, that is to say face to face.<sup>57</sup> Marcel Couturier, doctor, hunter and pseudo-zoologist, would write of the bear in 1954: “[son] intellectualité est caractérisée par le jugement, la mémoire, le sang-froid, la compréhension rapide, le discernement, l’association des idées, l’interprétation des faits.”<sup>58</sup> Here, the bear became not simply human, but an impeccable genius.

Legends and folk tales contain many stories of human infants nurtured in the wild by bears, and there are some real cases as well. The Mad Woman of Montcalm (Ariège), found by hunters running wild and naked on the mountain in 1807, claimed the bears had kept her warm in winter for many years.<sup>59</sup> She was imprisoned as a lunatic in the Chateau de Foix but clearly could not tolerate confinement, and died after three months there in 1809. Stories abound of children born of a bear and a woman, like the fictional strongman of Languedoc, Jean l’Ours. Male bears were considered to be strongly attracted to women and prone to abduct and rape them. Bear festivals in Catalonia still re-enact such events in early February. This is the moment when the bear emerges from hibernation to test whether winter is over. Festivals of Candlemas traditionally saw the bear as the harbinger of springtime and the revival of nature. In the annual *fête de l’ours*, for example at St Laurent de Cerdans, a man dressed as a bear abducts a young girl and takes her to the forest. A group of young men come to her rescue and symbolically kill the bear. But since this is a festival of rebirth, the bear is resurrected, and then celebrations can begin.<sup>60</sup>

In the nineteenth century bears were exploited by Ariègeois *montreurs*, who trained them to dance and perform, usually after a particularly cruel apprenticeship as a cub. In 1880, the Ariège supported about 200 bear trainers, and entire villages depended on the profession.<sup>61</sup> In Béarn, the *montreurs d’ours* were active until the First World War. The last *montreur* of the vallée d’Aspe, Pierre de Listou, died in 1950 after being attacked by his own bear.<sup>62</sup> A cruel form of justice, perhaps.

<sup>56</sup> Michel Pastoureau, *L’Ours: Histoire d’un roi déchu* (Paris, 2007, English edn published by Belknap Press, Cambridge, Mass, 2011).

<sup>57</sup> Pastoureau, *L’Ours*, 71. According to Pastoureau, this urban myth was not dispelled until the eighteenth century.

<sup>58</sup> Marcel Couturier, *L’Ours brun* (Grenoble, 1954), cited in Marliave, *Histoire de l’ours dans les Pyrénées*, 72.

<sup>59</sup> Christian Bernadac, “Madame de ... qui vivait nue parmi les ours,” *Historama* 2 (April 1984), 89-93.

<sup>60</sup> Daniel Fabre, “Le Carnaval de l’ours à Saint-Laurent de Cerdans,” in *L’Ours brun*, ed. Dendaletche et al., 146-49.

<sup>61</sup> Marliave, *Histoire de l’ours dans les Pyrénées*, 200.

<sup>62</sup> Cuzacq, *Maître Martin*, 41.

The bear, then, is an animal like no other, with human characteristics and a great symbolic presence. Nothing better illustrates the endurance of the bear's charisma in modern times than the practice of naming the bear. For the shepherds he was always a person to be respected, "Monsieur Martin," *lou moussou* (Le Monsieur) or *lou pedescaous* (the barefoot one). Now each individual bear has a name. At the time of the first reintroductions, names were proposed by schoolchildren in the vallée d'Aspe itself. More recently, suggestions were invited over the internet by the organization Pays de l'Ours-ADET. In the process of humanization, this is called "baptizing" the newly-introduced bears, and each bear is assigned a godparent.<sup>63</sup> A child who proposes the winning name is given a teddy bear (*peluche*) named after the real bear concerned. The names are significant: Caramelles and Mellba contain references to Melles, the only commune willing to launch the reintroductions in 1996; Pyros and Pyrène were references to the Pyrenees; while Franska, killed after a chase by a car only three kilometers from Lourdes, was intended to suggest eastern European origins while keeping a French identity. Callisto was named after the mythological nymph who was transformed into a bear, and later placed among the stars as Ursa Major. The Slovenian male bear introduced in 2006 was named Balou, after Mowgli's teacher in Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, which angered many as it camouflaged a wild predator in the role of the children's friend. The mythical bear, however, has entered our subconscious, which makes it difficult to think of it entirely objectively in its wild animal reality.<sup>64</sup>

#### *The Re-invention of the Pyrenees*

Since the second half of the eighteenth century, the Pyrenees have been continually re-invented by outsiders, and the controversy over the reintroduction of bears embodies the most recent incarnation of the region.

The Enlightenment Pyrenees, for example, were visited by geologists and botanists gathering information on their *voyage savant*. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, visitors to the Romantic Pyrenees experienced "l'exotisme des hauteurs," and searched for the experience of the romantic sublime and the contemplation of the infinite.<sup>65</sup> In the late nineteenth century, people actually started climbing the peaks, many of them publishing their stories so that the "ascent narrative" became a recognizable literary sub-genre.<sup>66</sup> Mountaineering, or "Pyrénéisme," had been invented, and the age of twentieth-century tourism, cycling and hiking, promoted by the Touring Club de France, was about to begin.

Every era, therefore, has given the Pyrenean landscape a different value. With the death of Cannelle, a new conception of the green Pyrenees came into focus. Increasingly, public opinion is aware of the destructive contribution of human actions to the disappearance of the bear and of other species indigenous to the mountains. Out of this guilty conscience has arisen a new emphasis on species conservation and the protection of bio-diversity. The brown bear, to be sure, is not an endangered species globally speaking.<sup>67</sup> It survives in Russia and Finland, as well as in parts of eastern

<sup>63</sup> *Bienvenue au Pays de L'ours*, [www.paysdelours.com](http://www.paysdelours.com) (accessed 20 August 2013).

<sup>64</sup> More recent names include Bambou, Noisette, Caramellita, Hvala (which means 'thank you' in Slovenian), Pélut (a Catalan grape variety), Boavi, Bonabé, Alos, Isil (all four are place names on the Spanish side of the frontier), Sarousse (the Gascon name for wild sorrel) and Moonboots.

<sup>65</sup> Jean Fourcassié, *Le Romantisme et les Pyrénées* (Paris, 1940), 308.

<sup>66</sup> Anne Lasserre-Vergne, *Les Pyrénées Centrales dans la littérature française entre 1820 et 1870* (Toulouse, 1985), 151.

<sup>67</sup> "Species: Brown Bear," *World Wildlife Fund*, [www.worldwildlife.org/species/brown-bear](http://www.worldwildlife.org/species/brown-bear) (accessed 19 November 2014), suggests a world population of 200,000.

Europe – otherwise reintroductions would not be possible. The complete extinction of the bear in the Pyrenees would not drastically affect the mountains' eco-system. But the bear has now become indelibly identified with the Pyrenees and environmental protection.

Public perceptions of animal species can change radically and often for reasons which are far from scientific. A notorious predator has been reborn as a regional icon. The Pyrenees region has become what two Spanish scholars call a "state-sponsored zoo." Introduced species include the rainbow trout for recreational purposes, the Louisiana shrimp for gastronomic reasons and the Asian hornet which apparently arrived by accident in Chinese pottery imports. The fate of fauna, native or introduced, depends on ecological engineering, in which "nature is reinvented to fulfill our postmodern standards for wilderness."<sup>68</sup> In the contemporary Pyrenees, the "natural" is now fabricated, preserved and carefully managed.<sup>69</sup> The Pyrenees are reborn as a new Noah's Ark, into which species can be introduced with electronic trace collars and observed as in a laboratory. The death of Cannelle confirmed and accelerated this new form of environmental manipulation, and a new way of imagining the Pyrenees.

### *Conclusion*

Since the 1970s various ecologist organizations have defended the cause of the bear and succeeded in enacting measures for its protection. These included the system of compensation to shepherds for the loss of livestock killed in bear attacks, the relatively ineffective institution of National Parks, and restrictions on hunting. All such measures conflict with the deep-seated historical forces mentioned in this paper, namely: the glorification of the hunter; the demand to bear arms for the protection of property as a natural right; and the sense of regional independence affronted by directives denounced as illegitimate interference in local matters. The system of creating reserves hardly seems practical, given the bear's natural mobility and the near impossibility of fencing off areas of difficult terrain straddling a national frontier. Fencing sheep behind electric enclosures is an option which requires more investment than anyone has yet contemplated, and in any case could never be bear-proof. Reintroductions have stalled in France and the political deadlock is unresolved. The Catalan government's plan to re-introduce a bear in 2015 threatens to inflame the situation further.

In 2009, a dossier of complaint against the French government for its negligence was presented to the European Commission in Brussels. The dossier claimed that the Pyrenees could receive 400 to 500 bears – suggesting that some ecologists live in political fantasy-land. In addition, it accused public authorities of inertia, and blamed the local judiciary for complicity with the hunting lobby and "activistes ultrapastoraux."<sup>70</sup> The Commission was in no haste to respond.

In spite of road accidents, illegal hunting and the virtual impunity of shooters like René Marquèze, the bear population of the Pyrenees is now estimated at twenty-

<sup>68</sup> Ismael Vaccaro and Oriol Beltran, "Livestock versus 'Wild Beasts': Contradictions in the natural patrimonialization of the Pyrenees," *Geographical Review* 99, no. 4 (2009), 499-516.

<sup>69</sup> Sophie Bobbé, "L'Ours des Pyrénées, un sauvage parmi tant d'autres," in *L'Ours des Pyrénées: les quatre vérités*, ed. Benhammou et al., 123-46.

<sup>70</sup> Stéphan Carbonnaux, *Plainte contre la France devant la Commission des Communautés européennes pour défaut de protection de l'ours des Pyrénées: Suivi de Le Pays des forêts sans ours* (Paris, 2010), 11-12.

four.<sup>71</sup> Thinly spread across Béarn, Aragon and the Ariège, this group remains too small for sustainability. Civilized dialogue between conflicting parties has been absent, and in any case, no solution can work without taking into account the anxieties of the pastoral industry. Meanwhile, Cannelle's son, the ten-month-old cub who was with his mother when she was shot, escaped and survived. His name, in deference perhaps to the Spanish dimension of the problem, is Cannellito, and he lives today with his elders in upper Béarn.

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<sup>71</sup> *La Dépêche du Midi* (Ariège edition), 12.4.2014, 9; and 12.6.2014. The recent death of Balou from a lightning strike presumably reduces that figure to twenty-three.