LINGUISTIC AND POLITICAL FERMENT IN THE FRANCO-ITALIAN EPIC: THE *GESTE FRANCOR* AS MINOR LITERATURE[*]

The *Geste Francor* is a collection of Franco-Italian texts surviving only in the acephalic codex Venice, Marciana Fondo Francese 256 (known as V13). Produced in the Veneto in the first half of the fourteenth century, the *Geste* is made up, in order of appearance, of *Enfances Bovo*, *Berta da li pe grant*, *Chevalerie Bovo*, *Karleto* (an *Enfances Charlemagne*), *Berta e Milone*, *Enfances Ogier le Danois*, *Orlandino* (an *Enfances Roland*), *Chevalerie Ogier le Danois* and *Macario*. Some of these texts are versions of Old French *chansons de geste* (Morgan *Geste* 73-254 lists sources and analogues), but the *Geste* itself is hard to classify: although its subject matter – the feats of Pepin and Charlemagne, kings of France, and of their barons – relates it to the *chanson de geste* tradition, it is by no means a canonical epic. Its erratic meter means that it does not meet poetic ideals, and it has features of a *roman*. Like other "late" epics, it integrates elements of diverse origins (Roussel);[1] it could be considered a *chanson d'aventures* (Kibler) or a parody of the epic (Capusso "Mescidanze"; Cingolani; Negri). The *Geste* is partly a unified cycle, partly a hotchpotch of diverse material. Though critics have argued for its codicological coherency (Cingolani) and unity of ideology (Krauss *Epica*), the text disrupts the mechanisms that hold together other cycles: unity of lineage, or moral frameworks, or thematic togetherness. It is perhaps a "zibaldone" (Rosellini *Geste* 62; miscellany), with some misfit poems (Cremonesi "A proposito"). Overall, a vast set of thematic

connections replaces a linear plot-line: there are uncertain lineages and genealogies; unstable bodies and identities; disinherited kings and knights; banished queens; traitors and bastards. The twists of the text are lies, intrigues and conspiracies; jealousy and rivalry predominate; illegitimate claims and desires are rife. Although the "correct" order is re-established after each rupture, a new break never seems far away, with even the ending of the collection raising more questions than it answers about authenticity and authority. Moreover, its politics, without being revolutionary, are clearly anti-imperial and anti-monarchical; the heroes of the text are barons and occasionally non-noble figures, with the overall message that worth is not always found at the top of hierarchy. The stability of the monarchy is also troubled by the presence of usurpers who disrupt the linear succession of rightful kings.

The *Geste* is only one of a vast number of French manuscripts written, disseminated, compiled and reworked on the Italian peninsula in the Middle Ages.[2] Amongst these, there is a sizeable corpus of epic works in the hybrid language of Franco-Italian, which was mainly used for the dissemination of Carolingian epic on the Italian peninsula, notably in Lombardy and the Veneto. Yet no other text features such an extreme example of hybridized language as the *Geste*, whose *scripta* is a bewitching tongue combining the linguistic forms of literary Old French with those of Northern Italian vernaculars (both Gallo-Italian and Venetian), and of Tuscan and Latin (Morgan *Geste* 22-23). Throughout the text we see ambiguous, delirious and expressive linguistic play. Because the *Geste* sits ill within existing patterns of thought about literature and language, I will read it alongside Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "minor literature" – texts lying outside "major" or established genres and canons – developed in their *Kafka: pour une littérature mineure*. I take my cue from them in relating the hybridity of the *Geste*'s language to its plot movements and thus

to its politics.[3] Their thought – favoring flow, transformation, and combination over stasis, continuity, and unity – works well with the Middle Ages and in particular with the context of northern Italy, where borders between nations and between languages and literatures were much more fluid than traditional literary history would have it. Insofar as critics have sought dialogue between medieval texts and postcolonial theories of linguistic hybridity, the preferred option has been Derrida (Gaunt "*Desnaturat*"; Gilbert "Men"), but Deleuze and Guattari have much to contribute to "postcolonial" attempts to go against the grain of established literary histories, as has been demonstrated by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's work (*Medieval Identity Machines*). Cohen has done much to knit together postmodern and medieval thought, revisiting medieval humoral and astrological theories in light of Deleuzian images of the body to propose a reading of the medieval body as a machine: not a contained "self" but a compound of connections involving internal and external objects, disregarding the boundaries of the flesh, and defying understanding and control. My interest here, however, is in a particular medieval text as a machine that meshes together differing tongues and traditions, and thus blurs the straight lines of literary histories, national languages, and canons.[4]

In Deleuzian terms, the Franco-Italian epic can be seen as minor claim for expression arising in an area deprived of a major form, involving the creative, free use of a major tongue (French) and discourse (the *chanson de geste*) combined with varieties of Italian and material drawn from other genres. Such a reading attracts attention to the characters' escapes from power structures, and allows for a parallel between the disruptions to the sequencing of monarchs within the text and its language, which troubles any attempt to reduce the history of medieval literature to the development of major tongues. But the *Geste* also provides an alternative politics

of hybridity to that outlined by Deleuze and Guattari, one that involves all that is rooted and native alongside assertions of creativity and freedom. The forces of exile and alienation at work within the text's language and plot are in tension with forces of correction and order.

The categories of major and minor will here be deployed in a different way to those of *Kafka*, to think about reception (rather than composition) and thus to read the *Geste* as a terrain contested by divergent modern discourses. In particular, this will involve examining the idea of the canon and the genre definitions which stem from it. After giving an account of the idea of minor literature and of Deleuze and Guattari's reading of Kafka, I shall therefore turn to the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century criticism of the *Geste*; in this intellectual climate, when national literatures and philologies were being established and defined, the text was dismissed as corrupted French, just as it was sidelined by restrictive ideas of genre. With recent interest in minor texts, however, linguistic and generic hybridity has become an object of critical fascination, and this is where Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of literary polylingualism can contribute. They permit a reading of language that relates the linguistic heterogeneity of the *Geste* to its politics, which oscillate between claims for legitimacy and lines of flight, whereas the *Geste*'s *scripta* demonstrates the value of hybridity as a means of managing and harmonizing rival cultural and linguistic claims.

Kafka and The Idea of Minor Literature

Deleuze and Guattari's *Kafka* is both a close reading of Kafka's *oeuvre* and a manifesto (hence the "pour" in the title) for a particular type of literature and a particular way of reading that will reveal its value. They plead for interpretation that

does not function on the level of plot and character, that seeks the political import of texts not in representation but in the systems which drive them, in short, reading that looks for "machines" rather than structures, machines being sets of dynamic connections and couplings that defy ossification into fixed paradigms. By looking outside predominant structures, Deleuze and Guattari challenge canons, authors and authorities, and instead bring out the value of minor literature, which troubles the norms and constants of traditional literary analysis, precisely because our idea of what "literature" is has been defined in relation to major works.

Minor literature is defined firstly by its production of a foreign language within language. It is not work in a minor language; rather it is literature "qu'une minorité fait dans une langue majeure" (*Kafka* 29; that a minority writes in a major language). This gives it a high level of "deterritorialization," Deleuze and Guattari's slippery term referring to vectors for change that disrupt organizing norms, codes and regimes, to movements towards the virtual, to potential new modes of being (in constant tension with forces of reterritorialization which seek to embed, encode and restrain potential for change). Hence the second defining characteristic of minor literature: "tout y est politique" (*Kafka* 30; everything in it is political). The minor writer refuses the major way of seeing the world contained in canonical, major works. As Bruce Baugh puts it, "resisting the 'major' use of a language amounts to resisting how the dominant consensus defines reality and assigns roles and functions within it" (48). The minor text looks awry, perceiving "the logic and functioning of a society rather than its dominant categories and self-images" (Due 73). Within such a text, positions of privilege are undermined by "transformational multiplicities," alternative forms of being that disturb formal hierarchies (Patton 48). The final, related, characteristic of minor literature is that it is addressed to a virtual or potential

collectivity. Because authors of minor literature do not participate in dominant or national cultures or languages, they do not target their writing at an already defined and established audience, but rather write in expectation of a people that may never come. In short, it is never clear for whom the minor writer writes, if anyone.

Deleuze and Guattari argue that the minor should not be the work of any great man (*Kafka* 31), meaning that their choice of Kafka is rather perverse: he is an undoubtedly canonical writer. All their efforts in the book, then, are devoted to rescuing the minor from the clutches of the major, to restoring all that is disruptive and innovative in Kafka. How do Deleuze and Guattari bring out his minor politics? First, by treating Kafka's *œuvre* as a rhizome, an open, continuous, and intricate set of related texts without a single unifying strand. They include his letters, which they term a minor genre, alongside his short stories and novels, and ask, provocatively, where we should enter his body of work. The many possible entrances and exits, multiple beginnings and ends are explored without the imposition of a hierarchy. Deleuze and Guattari do not analyze Kafka's texts; instead, adopting an anti-psychoanalytic standpoint, they seek his politics which they term neither imaginary nor symbolic, and his machines, which are neither structure nor fantasy. Their reading constitutes a set of experiments on Kafka that seek not significance but expression: "une machine de Kafka est…constituée par des contenus et des expressions formalisés à des degrés divers comme par des matières non formées qui y entrent, en sortent et passent par tous les états" (*Kafka* 15; the Kafka-machine is made up of contents and expressions which are formalized to varying degrees, as well as of unformed matters which enter it, leave it, and pass through all different states). His style of writing reflects the machines of power which he denounces: Kafka portrays the cancer-like proliferation of offices and bureaucrats, and the pure, empty form of

the law. Power is not transcendent, but breaks down into blocks, linked only by connecting characters who are less individuals than functional parts of a "series." In *The Trial*, all characters are implicated in some way in the justice process; in *The Castle*, everyone is involved with the castle. All form part of the mechanism of power.

Opposed to this are "becomings" and "lines of flight," moments where life escapes the machinery of domination, including the transformation of Gregor into a giant insect in *Metamorphosis*. Such a becoming cannot to be understood in metaphorical terms – it is not a question of representation – but rather "le devenir est une capture, une possession, une plus-value, jamais une reproduction ou une imitation" (*Kafka* 25; becoming is capture, possession, surplus-value, never reproduction or imitation). By being something other than human, by embracing his animal side, the human can flee those aspects of power which operate specifically on humans. Another line of flight comes via language. Kafka's expressive, creative use of German responds to a linguistic impasse: as a Jew living in Prague, Kafka found it impossible not to write, impossible to write in German, but impossible to write otherwise (*Kafka* 29). But how to write creatively in formal, uprooted German?: "puisque le vocabulaire est desséché, le faire vibrer en intensité. Opposer un usage purement intensif de la langue à tout usage symbolique, ou même significatif, ou simplement signifiant. Arriver à une expression parfaite et non formée, une expression matérielle intense" (*Kafka* 35; since the vocabulary is dry, make it vibrate intensely. Oppose a purely intense usage of the language to any symbolic, or even significant or simply signifying, usage. Find the perfect, not pre-formed expression, the intense, material expression). The major language of German can be reinvigorated and its vocabulary made to fizz intensely through accentuating all that is pure sound,

beyond meaning, through making it stutter and spurt. In Kafka as in all minor literature: "l'expression doit briser les formes, marquer les ruptures et les embranchements nouveaux. Une forme étant brisée, reconstruire le contenu qui sera nécessairement en rupture avec l'ordre des choses" (*Kafka* 52; expression should break forms, signal ruptures and new connections. Once the form has been broken, the content, which is necessarily a rupture from the order of things, can be reconstructed). Forms are shattered because they shape content: the predominant way of envisaging and organizing the world is held within accepted literary forms and styles. Liberating ourselves from them allows new contents, new views and ideas, to enter the picture.

It is this question of deterritorialized language that relates Kafka to the *Geste Francor*, whose deterritorialized form of French is also a means of renewing expressive forms and allowing new content into an old genre.

Language and Genre: The *Geste*'s Hybridity

The *Geste* is clearly a different kind of minor literature than the works of Kafka. The author/compiler of the *Geste* remains unknown, and the work is an agglomeration of the labors of many redactors, drawing on a number of different sources. We do not know who read or heard the text, and it has a more manifest presence of different languages within it than do Kafka's works. The modern critic cannot discern who is speaking to whom, in what voice, in what tongue. It therefore allows for a different way of thinking the minor: as a category of interpretation rather than as one of composition, which avoids the circularity inherent in Deleuze and Guattari's conception, whereby Kafka is labeled minor and then read as such. But like Kafka's *œuvre*, the *Geste* is a rhizomatic text, less defined by its beginnings and ends than its middles which combine dynamically, as scenarios repeat themselves. In Deleuze and Guattari's terminology, the text contains no integrating themes and structures, only

machines producing repetitions and combinations. The plot spirals and accumulates rather than progressing smoothly, with "series" of characters who create connections but also trouble narrative order. Overall, the text is non-teleological, and works against epistemological mastery.

The *Geste* is written in a distinctive *scripta* that bears a complex relationship to the Franco-Italian corpus of texts. To demonstrate the contribution that Deleuze and Guattari's concepts can make, then, it is first necessary to digress into the historical context of Franco-Italian and into criticism on it. Franco-Italian was attributed to the "poor French" of Italians by early critics: Pio Rajna declared that a particular Italian author "volle e non seppe" ("La rotta" 396; wanted to but could not) compose in French. What supports this view is that some of the surviving epic manuscripts are only slightly Italianized versions of Old French texts.[5] But Franco-Italian can also be seen as an artificial literary language or *koinè* (Segre), used over a period two centuries from the late twelfth century to the late fourteenth.[6] It emerged in a time of linguistic ferment in Italy, when varieties of Italian were developing. The *Geste* manuscript may be contemporaneous with Dante's programmatic *De vulgari eloquentia* (c. 1305), which calls for an Italian vernacular with the prestige of the French and Occitan that had flooded onto the peninsula in the form of literature (see Meyer on this "invasion"). French stood alongside Latin as the "major" tongue of this historical moment, with Occitan surviving but already uprooted; Franco-Italian, in turn, was just one minor claim among many.

In modern criticism, the Franco-Italian literary tradition has been most enthusiastically received by Italian scholars who see it as part of their own literary

origins; most Italian literary histories – unlike French ones – dedicate a chapter to it (Roncaglia; Segre). On these accounts, Franco-Italian becomes the first stage in a narrative of progressive Italianization, with successive manuscripts enlisted to show linguistic features which are gradually less French and more Italian (Segre 641-45). Thus Italians are thought to have seized French literature and gradually transformed it into a literature of their own, with Franco-Italian an interim stage in the process. But such an argument reduces a complex literary and linguistic situation to linear development of a "national" literature and language. It dates from the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century context in which Rajna wrote, one of nationalist claims for the deep-rootedness of modern nations in the Middle Ages, which led in turn to the creation of national literatures and national philologies. Yet minor tongues had a life of their own: codices of Franco-Italian works were being produced even after works in Italian had appeared.[7]

The existence of a text like the *Geste Francor* that displays an accentuated form of hybridization, makes any argument whereby Franco-Italian is a mere precursor to Italian impossible to defend. The *Geste* clearly uses the expressive resources of both French *and* dialects of Italian; it has the vocabulary and syntax of more than one language at its disposal. For a long time, however, it was examined only in terms of major traditions.[8] An eighteenth-century reader incorrectly noted on the final folio that "questo è Provenzale, e ui si uedono per entro molte parole italiane meschiate" (Rosellini *Geste* 13; this is Provençal, and one can see many Italian words mixed in with it). Nineteenth-century scholars invested in the idea of a French culture originating in the Middle Ages were horrified by the mixing of tongues in the text. In 1866, Francis Guessard published an edition of *Macario*, one of the *Geste*'s constituent texts, but the language of manuscript offended him so greatly – he called

it a "chef d'œuvre de la barbarie" (xcix; a masterpiece of barbarism) – that he included a parallel "essai de restitution" (attempt at reconstruction), a translation into "correct" Old French. Léon Gautier, in turn, lauded Guessard's replacement of each of "ces vers italianisés, défigurés, méconnaissables" (these Italianized, deformed, unrecognizable verses) by "un vers très-français, un vers dans le plus pur dialecte de l'Île-de France, un vers que le trouvère le plus délicat du treizième siècle n'hésiterait pas à avouer" (3:685n; a properly French line, a line in the purest Île-de France dialect, a line to which the most refined French poet of the thirteenth century would not hesitate to put his name). Both Guessard and Gautier saw the *Geste* as an inadequate copy of a pure Old French original. Their contemporary Adolf Mussafia, on the other hand, critiqued Guessard's "restitution," as he considered the text an innovative, stand-alone reworking, and although he denounced its "Mischsprache" (hybrid language) as evidence of "Verderbniss" (corruption), he also noted that "pathologische Gebilde sind indessen oft ebenso interessant als gesunde Organismen" (v; pathological constructs are however often just as interesting as healthy organisms). Writing in 1880, Adolfo Bartoli further developed Mussafia's metaphor: the *Geste*'s language might be pathological rather than healthy, but it is nonetheless "un primo passo verso una lingua nuova" (97; a first step toward a new language). However, it never developed into a "specie nuova" (new species); instead it "rimase fermo e si pietrificò in un momento transitorio della sua vita" (100; got stuck and petrified in a transitory stage of its life). The views of these critics reflect nineteenth-century thinking on hybrid creatures: they were considered sub-species, unable to breed (Young). Accordingly, hybrid literary forms are unreproductive dead ends, opposed to those medieval literatures and languages that gave birth to today's national tongues.

But, curiously, they also have the status of living, breathing textual creatures which struggle against their imprisonment in major categories.

Modern ideas about medieval literary genres date to the same period. It was in the late nineteenth century that the Oxford *Chanson de Roland* was seized upon as the ultimate *chanson de geste*, because, on one reading at least, it embodies "une certaine idée de la France" (a particular idea of France; see Gilbert "The *Chanson de Roland*"), but also because of its apparent poetic perfection. Ideas of what a *chanson de geste* should be were shaped by the *Chanson de Roland*: the series of extant epics following the *Roland* are seen to represent gradual decay from these poetic and literary heights, as the *chanson de geste* succumbed to the influence of other genres, notably romance (see the deconstruction of this position by Kay). Thus genre has provided one foothold for those critics who have sought to marginalize Franco-Italian and other "late" epics as impure and derivative. Indeed the *Geste* invites condemnation as an epigone, as a hybrid, degenerate *chanson de geste*. Rhyme and meter are imperfectly maintained, and as in many other late *chansons de geste*, there is little variety of rhyme words (Morgan "Meter"). Some lines are hypometric as French, but hypermetric as Italian, and only 62% of all lines can be resolved into decasyllables (Morgan *Geste* 57).

Faced with late *chansons de geste* and their avatars, criticism has also moved to rethink generic categories, with the invention, for example, of the term *chanson d'aventures* to describe epics which aim to entertain rather than inculcate (Kibler), and of ideas of hybrid or mixed genres (Roussel). The *Geste* can contribute yet more to this rethinking: it underscores the fact that genres are not intrinsic to literary texts, and that mixing rather than purity is the default mode. The text identifies itself in multiple ways: it is termed by its narrator a "romans […] d'antiquité" (7685; a

romance from ancient times), and the title on its modern binding is "Doon de May. Rom." (Rosellini *Geste* 11; a romance about Doon de Mayence), Doon being the archetypal rebel baron of the *chansons de geste* (the Mayence clan are here named the Maganzesi). The work also calls itself as a "cançon" (17066; song), and it names as sources an "istolia" (2159; history), and a "sermon" (2514; sermon). The array of generic categories claimed shows once again that genre is a grouping of reception, elaborated from major works. Minor works defy them, not owing to any intention on the part of their authors to flaunt generic codes, but because of the very fact that they were excluded when these codes were drawn up: hence the continued value of minor works to rethinking of categories. Rather than suffering condemnation as degenerate hybrids, such works might be used to reconsider the very definitions that would have us marginalize them.

The same process has taken place where hybrid linguistic forms are concerned, as part of a more minor politics of criticism that embraces all that lies outside the major. Thus Carla Cremonesi, reflecting in 1983 on her three editions of texts from the *Geste,* stated that the language displayed, "accanto ad una malsicura e cattiva conoscenza del francese, proprio l'*intenzione* di deformare allo scopo, probabilmente […] di divertire, quasi de raggiungere un effetto coloristico" ("Note" 12; alongside an uncertain and poor knowledge of French, the obvious *intention* to deform, probably with the aim of entertaining, or even of producing a colorful effect). Hybridity is no longer seen as aleatory, corrosive and invidious. Most recently, in 2007, Maria Grazia Capusso argued that the *Geste*'s language, "produce effetti quasi surreali e insieme sapidamente espressivi" ("La produzione" 179; produces almost surreal effects, which together are knowingly expressive). The *Geste* clearly has an expressive power which is difficult to recreate within modern languages. Two modern

scholars have edited the text in its entirety: Aldo Rosellini's edition of the text appeared in 1986; Leslie Zarker Morgan's in 2009. Both have tried to systematize and interpret, to find rhyme and reason in the babbling of the *Geste*. But Rosellini found only "una contaminazione linguistica senza soluzione di continuità; una lingua stratificata, polimorfa, mista" (*Geste* 56; linguistic contamination without continuous logic; a stratified, polymorphous, mixed language). Morgan, on the other hand, finds more systematic linguistic explanations:

> phonologically, the inconsistency can be seen in historical terms (that is, multiple developments of one Latin sound appear throughout the manuscript); morphologically, the inconsistency of verbal forms (multiple ending and stem types, deriving from Latin via different routes, appear throughout the manuscripts); syntactically, multiple constructions appear for a given structure (e.g., the future tense) (*Geste* 25)

The complexities of the text make it extremely difficult to edit. Verb forms are particularly variable: the text combines stems and endings from French and Italian. For example, the forms of *être/essere* used include, amongst many others: *è, erames, erent, eri, es, estoient, estoja, fomes, fosemo, fuimes, semo, seremo, seria, serisi, siamo* and *sumes* (Morgan *Geste* 1259-61). The text has many linguistic mysteries; it includes an especially high number of words found in no other text or dictionary (Morgan *Geste*; Capusso "La produzione"). The correspondences and overlaps between romance vernaculars at play in the text give rise to opportunities for double meanings, and the text should be approached with a logic of "both…and" instead of one of "either…or," so that multiple possibilities are embraced rather than eliminated.

As Morgan avers, "the writer of V13 takes advantage of the many possible forms at his disposition according to his needs at the moment" (*Geste* 26). The text retains mysteries which even computer-aided philology cannot resolve; the oddities of the text cannot always be reconciled with examples from elsewhere.

Such hybridity bears further investigation from perspectives informed by modern theory. A different illumination of the problem is possible through Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of literary polylingualism, which cast hybrid combinations as productive engines, not as corrupting, inferior species. Deleuze and Guattari unwittingly continue the nineteenth-century pattern of thought that sees hybrid languages as living mutants, but they follow through with the consequences, considering standardized, nationalized, canonized texts lifeless, static and monological, and focusing instead on uprooted, homeless languages. Alienation from the language in which the author writes is one of the definitive characteristics of "minor literature." Kafka is not the only possible example: they also cite Joyce as an Irish writer using English and indeed "toute langue" (*Kafka* 35; every language) and Beckett as an Irishman writing in English and French. Henri Gobard's taxonomy of languages provides them with a way of conceptualizing the play of different languages within minor literature. There are four main types of language in Gobard's classification:

la langue vernaculaire, maternelle ou territoriale, de communauté

rurale ou d'origine rurale; la langue véhiculaire, urbaine, étatique ou

même mondiale, langue de société, d'échange commercial, de

transmission bureaucratique, etc., langue de première

déterritorialisation; la langue référentiaire, langue du sens et de la

culture, opérant une reterritorialisation culturelle; la langue mythique, à

l'horizon des cultures, et de reterritorialisation spirituelle.

(*Kafka* 43)

the vernacular, maternal or territorial language of a rural community or

of rural origin; the urban, vehicular language of the state or even of the

world, the language of society, of trade, of bureaucratic

communication, etc., the language of the first deterritorialization; the

referential language, language of meaning and culture, which operates

a cultural reterritorialization; the mythical language, on the cultural

horizon, offering spiritual reterritorialization.

Each of these languages is given a place in a toponymy: "la langue vernaculaire est

ici; véhiculaire, *partout*; référentiaire, *là-bas*; mythique, *au-delà*" (*Kafka* 43; the

vernacular language is *here*; the vehicular, *everywhere*; the referential, *far away*; the

mythical, *beyond*). The setting of actual languages within this system varies over

time: as Deleuze and Guattari state, the vehicular language in Europe was Latin; then

it became referential, then mythical, with English now the vehicular (*Kafka* 44). For

Kafka, the vernacular was Czech, German was a vehicular language, the classical

German of Goethe was referential, and the mythical language beyond was Hebrew

(*Kafka* 46). Deleuze and Guattari conceive of literary polylingualism spatially,

whereas philology allows us to situate different linguistic features historically (see for example Morgan's comment about different historical developments of the same Latin sound appearing in the text). The taxonomy developed here is general and abstract but supple enough to allow understanding of the linguistic forces at play at given historical moments; hence Deleuze and Guattari's ideas are not restricted in their application to Kafka.

The author of the *Geste* draws on linguistic materials associated with different spaces: the vernacular was probably represented by varieties of Italian, whereas French is both the vehicular language – it circulated throughout the world according to Brunetto Latini (I, i, 7) and Martin da Canal (I, i) – and the referential language of high culture: the same two authors also refer to its beauty. By the fourteenth century, French was home to a well-established cultural and literary tradition. The mythical language was classical Latin – the "grammar" to which Dante accorded a timeless quality – as well as the dream of an Italian that could match its prestige. In the *Geste*, there is a mixture of the homely, familiar vernacular (*ici*); of French (*partout*, as a vehicle, a widespread language comprehensible to many); respect for French (*là-bas*, as tradition), all of which stretches toward the unreachable goal of a vernacular with the dignity of Latin (*au-delà*). The author uses French because it is the dominant "major" language for this literary form: it probably seemed impossible to write a *chanson de geste* in a language other French. The age and tradition of the *chanson de geste* is also thereby signaled.

Because of the presence of the Italian vernaculars, however, there is also a move to seize back the initiative from French, which had stolen a march on Italian. Perceived French cultural hegemony is attacked and a potential alternative ownership of the material – which had been circulating on the Italian peninsula from the twelfth

century onwards (Roncaglia; Vitullo) – asserted. The hybrid language of the *Geste* upsets the linguistic stability of the *chanson de geste* – by this stage a "major" form – making it take on new meanings and values in new contexts. The following extract displays some of the text's linguistic peculiarities, as well as permitting an examination of its political positioning. It demonstrates the extent to which the narrative, along with the language, is a movement between heres, theres and beyonds, with repeated uprootings and relocations, and rightful places constantly lost and refound. It comes when the baron Bovo d'Antona has just recaptured his family lands from the traitor Do, who conspired with Bovo's mother to kill his father and to take hold of his territories. Do however now bribes Pepin to come to his aid:[9]

Segnor baron, e vojo qe vu saçé,

Gran pena durò Bovo en tuto son aé.   1025

Or q'el est en sa tera torné

E q'el cuitoit stare à sal(vi)té,

Ancora no est sa ventura finé.

Quando Do de Magançe fu da Bovo sevré,

Deliberé l'oit por soa gran bonté.   1030

E quando fu en Maga(n)ça reparié,

E de ses plaie e guari e sané,

A li rois Pipin el se fu acosté,

Tanto li oit de·l so qe promis qe doné

Qe avec lui estoi(t) si acordé,   1035

Qe li oit mandé por França li regné,

E fe bandir oste e davant e daré,

Por aler à Antone e prender la cité.

Mes avantqe cesto fose, (s)i cu*n* vos oldiré,

Li rois Pepin li oit mesaçer mandé   1040

A savoir qe Bovo oit en pensé,

S'el cre tenir Antona, ni est tanto olsé,

Contra Pepin li rois de la Crestenté,

Et a Do de Magançe, qi tant est honoré,

En tota França e davant e daré,   1045

Non est homo de major parenté.

Se Bovo vole vivere en tant eré,

Renda Blondoie e lasi sa cité;

Colsa como no, el serà sbanojé

De la corone e de tot li regné.   1050

(1024-50)

(Lord barons, I want you to know that Bovo suffered greatly throughout all his life. Now he has returned to his lands and thinks he is in safety, but his adventures have not yet finished. When Do of Maganza left Bovo, who freed him because he is very generous, he went back to Maganza and healed and recovered from his wounds, and then he sidled up to the king, Pepin, and promised and gave him so much of his wealth that he got him to agree to summon an army from throughout the kingdom, from north to south, to go and take the city of Antona. But before this happens – and you will hear about it – King Pepin sent a messenger to find out what Bovo's intentions were: was he daring enough to think he could defend Antona against Pepin, the king of all Christendom, and against Do of Maganza who is very well respected, as in all of France, from north to south, there is no man of finer breeding? If Bovo wants to live in his rightful lands, let him hand over Blondoie and the city; otherwise, he will be exiled from the king's lands and from the entire kingdom.)

Firstly, the extract reinforces the argument that Franco-Italian, far from being an inferior version of Old French, uses Italian phrases to express ideas for which Old French has no neat solution. Instead, Old French is exposed as inadequate and supplemented by varieties of Italian. Here, the Italian verb *stare* "to stand/to be (in a location)" – as opposed to *essere* "to be" – makes a distinction that has no exact Old French equivalent. Also noteworthy is the Italian phrase "colsa como no" (1049), meaning "otherwise/or else." Likewise, the distinction *de/da* is deployed, a nuance is not present in Old French – both of these are *de* – but this corresponds roughly to the distinction between *di* and *da* in modern Italian, with *da* notably used to indicate

provenance, or separation, as in "Do de Magançe fu da Bovo sevré" (1029). However, the respect for French as a referential language, associated with specific areas, is shown by the use of French vocabulary to do with land-holding: *eré* (inherited lands), *cité*, *tenir* (to hold land); terms to do with political organization: *regné*, *baron*, *parenté*; chivalric or noble qualities: *bonté*, *honoré*; military terms: *bandir oste* (to summon an army); and finally the stock phrases used by narrators of the *chansons de geste*, such as *si con vos oldiré* (as you will hear). French is the best, the most natural, language in which to express these things: it is *the* language associated with barons, kings, military might, chivalry, and nobility, as well as with the genre itself. Thus French connotes a certain type of society, a certain type of military and a certain type of literary text.

On the level of politics, the text here opposes a violent, sovereign claim for land made by Pepin – who demands it without justification – to Bovo, who sees the territories as established, rightful holdings. Minor claims (regional, family) are defended against major (imperial, deterritorializing) ones. But, unlike in Deleuze and Guattari's theories, there is no revolutionary aspect to the minor here, because it is native and rightful. Exile and alienation are not affirmations of freedom, but something suffered by the minor, and the "major" power seeks to disrupt the social order rather than standing for stability and tradition. That Bovo eventually gets rightful place back reveals the pairing of a search for continual variation with a drive to end exile and return to a correct order of things.

In the other texts of the collection, the terror of imperial power is felt everywhere. Pepin and Charlemagne are virtually omnipotent, because they can impose themselves militarily almost anywhere. In *Berta e Milon*, Charles plans to

marry his sister Berta to a high prince, unaware of her affair with his seneschal Milon. The pregnant Berta suggests they flee Charles, but Milon thinks this futile:

El no è tera ni castel ni dojon,

Qe non soit sota li rois Karlon;

E çascun reame qe de Cristian son,

Si l'obedise por honor de la coron

Qe il oit da l'inperio de Ron.

Nu semo morti, qual part qe nu alon.

(9152-57)

(There is no land, castle or stronghold that is not under Charles's power; and in every Christian realm they obey him because he wears the Roman imperial crown. We are doomed, wherever we go.)

They eventually flee and their son, Roland, is born in exile. He subsequently achieves reintegration when he comes to court and steals from Charles's plate after seeing that he has a bigger portion that the others (10928-95). The king, impressed by his qualities, indulges him. Later Roland's exiled parents Berta and Milon fetch up at court, and Charles is about to attack them when Roland seizes his hand in a powerful grip. The sovereign cedes to him, and agrees to pardon his parents when he threatens to punch him (11260-302). Again, there is a movement whereby exile leads to reintegration, in a story told in a hybrid language that combines respect for tradition and a vector for innovation.

Much of the collection casts sovereigns as the source of deterritorialization. There is a nightmarish vision of sovereign power, which works expansively to claim

everything and subordinate everyone.[10] There is no logic to it; no limit or structure.
Rulers are error-prone, unreasonable, tyrannical. In Deleuzian terms, this is less about
the structures of power than the machinery: the *Geste* has not a static but rather a
generative conception of power. The king, less a person than an engine generating
repressive energies, constantly produces fresh examples of injustice.[11] Just as Kafka
shows the anxieties and horrors of "la machine technocratique américaine, ou
bureaucratique russe, ou la machine fasciste" (*Kafka* 22; the technocratic American or
bureaucratic Russian machine, or the fascist machine), the *Geste* embodies the terrors
of the Carolingian military and administrative machine.

In opposition to this, a positive role is accorded to disobedience as a means of
bringing the king to reason. In *Enfances Ogier*, Ogier becomes the object of Charles's
son Carloto's jealously by winning glory against two Saracen giants in a battle where
Carloto's own incompetency is manifest (9496-10895). Seething with envy, Carloto
later kills Ogier's son, but the Dane is persuaded to forgive him. Peace reigns until
Carloto taunts Ogier over a game of chess, provoking Ogier into killing him with a
strike of the chessboard (11907-12187). Charles summarily condemns the Dane to
hang. Unlike Ogier earlier, the king cannot be persuaded that forgiveness serves the
greater good. He alienates the worthy just as he favours the wicked. But Roland now
keeps Ogier alive by bringing him to court in his safe conduct and later disobeys
Charles directly by feeding Ogier in prison when the emperor wants him starved to
death (12198-305). This defiance eventually serves the Christian cause: a prophecy
states that the evil king Braier who threatens Charles's kingdom cannot be defeated
by any knight "sor tera" (12313; "above ground"). The knight who will vanquish him
is Ogier, incarcerated underground but alive thanks to Roland's defiance. Ogier is
eventually able to save Christendom (13103-432). Thus Roland saves the kingdom

from the king. But Ogier first demands "vençament' (12962; vengeance) on Charles who wrongly imprisoned him; he wants to give the king "trois colpe…de ma spea trençent" (12979; three blows with my sharp sword). Charles is terrified by the possibility: he exclaims "El me fendera trosquament à l'orie, | Ne por nul arme non averò guarentie" (12986-87; he will slice me open down to the ears, and no armor could protect me). In a striking scene, Ogier cannot help laughing as Charles dons two helmets to protect himself from mighty blows he expects, but the first is so weak "ne fose por cil una moscha perie" (13005; that it would not have hurt a fly) and the other two "no l'inpira qe valist una alie" (13007; do not harm him one bit). The point of the scene is clearly symbolic: Ogier seeks no real power over the king. Similarly, Bovo has the opportunity to kill Pepin when he captures him, but chooses not to as this would be a terrible sin (3747-48). These examples reveal a model of revolt combining ideological attachment and antagonism: these are non-linear, non-teleological moments of defiance, irrecuperable acts of insubordination. Each is a deterritorializing attack on a power structure, then, that avoids the revolutionary reterritorialization of creating a new regime. Though there is a critique of sovereign power, no alternative is proposed: this is symbolic and limited rebellion. Like the language of the text, it has revolutionary potential but is constrained within overall respect for status and tradition. The barons seek only their rightful place within the hierarchy.

Barons and sovereigns are divergent parts of the social machine of the text. But throughout the *Geste,* another production-line creates new problems for the worthy barons in the shape of the ubiquitous and terrible Maganzesi clan of traitors, who are not so much characters as a force perverting language, truth and justice. For

Morgan, the Maganzesi are like weeds "no sooner exterminated than they spring up elsewhere" ("Bovo" 25). The poet declares:

Segnur, or entendés e siés certan,

Qe la cha de Magançe e darer e davan

Ma non cesò de far risa e buban.

Senpre avoit guere cun Rainaldo de Montealban,

E si trai Oliver e Rolan,

E li doçe pere e ses conpagna gran.

(13647-52)

(My lords, listen now and know that the Maganza clan are everywhere; they never cease causing strife and committing acts of arrogance. They were always at war with Renaut de Montauban, and they betrayed Oliver and Roland, and the twelve peers and all their great company.)

Imperial court life is rife with dishonesty because of their presence. In Deleuzian terms, they are a deterritorializing force: they uproot everything because their arrogance means that they recognize no good other than their own. Their mockery upsets the right order; they embody everything that is wrong with court life; and they distort language such that it becomes an unreliable vehicle for truth. Just as in Deleuze and Guattari's reading of Kafka's *The Trial*, this is not representation of the system *per se* but rather a revelatory intensification of certain of its features (*Kafka* 89). The text exposes the scandalous machinery of the Carolingian court by accentuating its effects; as a consequence, the breakdown of moral, legal and social order never seems far away.

The entire Western Christian kingdom is perilously close to destruction when Charles favors Maganzesi traitors in *Macario*, the *Geste*'s final text. Macario buys favor at court but his amorous advances are rejected by the queen, so he takes revenge by falsifying proof of her adultery with a dwarf. Charles readily believes Macario over his wife and agrees to have her burned (13478-816). Only after opposition from Naymes is she allowed to live, and she is instead exiled. Her father, the Byzantine emperor, is nonetheless angered, provoking the great internecine war which is *Macario*'s main subject. Throughout, the narrator emphasizes how senseless is the loss of life: they need not be enemies as "tuti son Cristian qe in Deo creon" (16146; they are all Christians who believe in God). Naymes too admonishes Charles for forgetting that many of the Maganzesi clan have betrayed him in the past (15720-24). Terrible destruction is wrought and France is nearly destroyed before peace is concluded, all because Charles allies himself with traitors. Again here, a royal character loses her position and has to go through exile, trial and ordeal before regaining it. On this occasion, it involves a moment of becoming where the human order is troubled by an identification with the non-human. The unthinkable – the queen's adultery with a dwarf – is thought and its consequences faced before a fragile final victory for truth and rectitude.

The malign sovereigns and wicked traitors of the text produce recurring ruptures in the social order, as characters repeatedly lose their rightful place. Kings, queens and barons alike are ousted and disinherited. Even the privileged have to suffer and earn their place, introducing an element of meritocracy. The idea of an inevitable linearity of succession that might place the masters of this world on a level above any contingency is troubled throughout. The story of *Berta da li pe grant* is revelatory in this respect: an ageing Pepin urgently needs to find a wife to produce an

heir. The squat, plump, unappealing king falls in love with Berta, whose extraordinarily large feet make her as deformed as he. Bodily abnormality, it seems, makes them compatible as lovers and sovereigns. But upon their return to Paris, Berta is too tired to consummate the marriage, so she substitutes for herself a "double" from the Maganzesi clan. The presence of "doubles" in Kafka is also a focus of Deleuze and Guattari's book, because the tendency to duplicate characters is a form of social and narrative disruption; both society and texts need to distinguish between characters if they are to function (*Kafka* 98). Doubles are transformational multiplicities which trouble positions of power. Here, the surrogate queen is not supposed to sleep with the sovereign, but she nonetheless cedes to him. The swap now proves irreversible, with Pepin believing that the nameless substitute – referred to only as "la malvés" (2027; the wrong/bad woman), or "malvés raine" (2328; the wrong/bad queen) – is his bride, despite her lack of big feet. The false queen now orders the death of the true one, but Berta manages to escape and goes into exile. Pepin later finds her when out hunting and sleeps with her, conceiving Karleto (2226-343). But later, Berta's deformity allows her to regain her rightful place: her mother comes to court and recognizes the impostor because she has small feet.[12] Despite the restoration of the true queen, however, doubts concerning fidelity, identity and legitimacy are not fully resolved, and the birth of the true heir to the throne is no more than an accident.

Like the doubles, bastards are extraneous products which trouble linearity. The three products of Pepin's false relation – Lanfroi, Landris and Roland's mother – remain: in *Karleto*, Lanfroi and Landris fatally poison the true Berta and their father, drive out the good barons, and rule France as two tyrants. Once displaced, characters produce more displacements. Karleto (the young Charles), first works as a cook at his own court, but goes into exile at the court of the Saracen king Galafre to avoid death

at the hands of his wicked half-brothers. But in exile, Karleto demonstrates his prowess in a series of combats earning the jealousy of Galafre's sons who plan to kill him (5749-7609), as does the Pope, himself a Maganzesi. Karleto is about to succumb to the Pope's forces when Brunor, king of Hungary, comes to his aid. Now Karleto kills the Pope, but refuses to become emperor: "Nen prenderò corone qe sia d'or lusent | Se França no conquer tot en primement" (8175-76; I will not take a crown of shining gold without first conquering France). In the *Geste*, then, one becomes a king by taking action, not by seeking legitimacy through birthright. Karleto defeats Lanfroi and Landris, and his coronation is preceded by their execution. Yet if everything is restored at the end, then there is still a fragmentary middle never fully recuperated, not least because Lanfroi can quite rightfully claim "Rois son de France, e de Paris la cité | E si fu filz Pepin" (8577-78; I am king of France and of the city of Paris and I am son of Pepin). Lanfroi, whom Karleto terms a "bastardo" (8591; bastard), in fact has a legitimate claim on the throne, and the very distinction between legitimate and illegitimate is thus made insecure. Karleto must negotiate his way to the top in relation to a multitude of figures: he becomes his father's son rather than being born as such. Eventually, right is restored, but only ever temporarily, and doubts remain.

Throughout, with its series of broken families, the *Geste Francor* recalls Deleuze and Guattari's desire to upset Oedipalization by blowing it up out of all proportion (*Kafka* 19). Tales of traitors such as Macario show how identification with the king and desire for the queen – a displaced version of the Oedipal – goes alongside linguistic perversity. Overall, the sheer number of inadequate father figures and alternative horizontal relationships makes it impossible to resolve the family histories of the text into neat triangles. Indeed even the ascension of the divinely-selected sovereign to the throne becomes a tale of social progress. As a corollary to

these repeated movements of exile and alienation, there is elasticity to all social structures: the mighty can fall and the humble rise. The text looks intensely at those outside "the system," such as the wild man Varocher of *Macario*, who protects the exiled queen Blanchefleur before distinguishing himself through his superhuman strength in the war between the emperor of Constantinople and Charles. He is favorably compared to Roland and Oliver (16170-72), eventually becoming the emperor's champion against Ogier. Capusso suggests that such "outsiders" have moral priority ("Mescidanze" 164). Indeed they are vital connectors: the plot is held together by non-central characters such as peasants and Saracens, and there is some space for those in the lower orders who can assert and prove themselves. But though there is fluidity to the social order, there is also a desire for fixity, and crucially, there is no revolution, just regeneration of the same. Ruptures never cease, but they are followed by movements back to legitimacy, similar to the movements of the text's language: away from and back toward stable tradition.

The *Geste* was born in a period of linguistic and political becoming, at the crossing over of different powers, influences, and literary discourses; it therefore needed the stability of "French" literary culture as a reference point. Ultimately, the text provides no alternative to the "feudal" social order: its world is not that of the communes but of that of the *chanson de geste*, and its heroes are barons modeled on those of the Carolingian epics. Though these barons are privileged, they are presented as minor because they have regional rather than imperial interests, and because they are the victims of royal oppression. As long as the barons retain their place, however, kings and major powers are acceptable. Indeed Charles is eventually praised as "li major rois qi fo unqua d.i Fran" (11398; the greatest ever king of the Franks) and the text clearly draws on the appeal of his greatness. Similarly, Deleuze and Guattari

argue that the minor is defined by its presence within – rather than by its rejection of – the major: "'mineur' ne qualifie plus certaines littératures, mais les conditions révolutionnaires de toute littérature au sein de celle qu'on appelle grande (ou établie)" (*Kafka* 33; "minor" is no longer a label for particular literatures, but for the revolutionary conditions of any literature within any other literature thought of as great (or established)). A similar logic is at work in the *Geste*, as revolutionary potential is countered by a drive to remain within tradition. Just as the barons seek no more than their correct place within the Carolingian social order, the Italian vernaculars make a nest for themselves within French.

Conclusion: The *Geste*'s Politics of the Minor

The literatures of northern medieval Italy and the *Geste* in particular unravel any narrative which attempts to set out a succession of national philologies. Accordingly, the *Geste*'s plot movements are irreducible to a series of untroubled monarchical reigns. The *Geste* is many things at once: a genuine Italian creation written in the vernacular *ici*; a use of vehicular French and of the *chanson de geste* genre *partout*; a tribute to the power of French culture and empire *là-bas*; and a move towards a noble vernacular with the prestige of Latin *au-delà*. It is written with respect for hegemony and tradition – with a desire to draw on their legitimacy and stability – but also works as an attack on them. This assertion of plurality against hegemony starts with the combination of languages: the *Geste* encapsulates what Deleuze and Guattari's definition of language as "une bouillie, un mélange schizophrénique, un habit d'Arlequin" (*Kafka* 48; a stew, a schizophrenic mixture, a Harlequin's costume). Prestige, referential and mythical languages are combined with vernacular and vehicular tongues of more pragmatic value. The *Geste* generates a foreign language

not as an alternative to French, but within French. Hybridity, through its "both…and" logic, forestalls any attempt to set out cultural hierarchies, and represents a search for a form of expression on the part of a cultural group with no "major" cultural codes of its own.

The text makes connections across boundaries – bodies, genres, hierarchies, and philologies – and thus stimulates processes of recategorization. Deleuze and Guattari's terms open up the value in the *Geste*'s literary, linguistic and political heterogeneity. Indeed the medieval period, with its paucity of author figures, makes an excellent venue for the deployment of Deleuze and Guattari's ideas, and medieval cycles in particular, multi-authored works with spiraling plots and endless series of similar characters, invite Deleuzian readings (see Sunderland *Old French Narrative Cycles* for an interpretation which goes it this direction). On one level at least, the *Geste* provides a better example of a minor text than Kafka, for it is sometimes impossible to reconstruct what it means. It opens a way of thinking about minor and major as a politics of reception rather than one of composition, taking the emphasis away from the author's act of writing. By claiming that Kafka writes in a minor way, Deleuze and Guattari elide their own critical gesture of reception whereby they mark him as minor. They make Kafka the meaning of his *œuvre*; governed by restrictive author-politics, they forget their claim that minor literature is free of "great men." Are they simply making Kafka canonical all over again, for different reasons?

The *Geste,* on the other hand, remains a field of contestation where major, nationalizing discourses square up to minor ones. It offers an alternative model for the capacity of hybrid languages than that set out by Deleuze and Guattari, who do not sufficiently develop the implications of Gobard's taxonomy in terms of hybridity's "both…and…" logic, which allows for the coexistence of revolutionary drives with

drives for integration. Hybridity involves some measure of respect for stability and tradition, and the *Geste*'s hybrid language is a negotiation between competing influences. A plural use of language is married to a plural view of the political: a complicated, energistic politics – where disobedience is seen as a productive engagement with the social machine – combines collaboration and opposition. Belonging to no genre and obeying no poetic rules, the text sits ill within medieval French and medieval Italian language and literature, hence its worth in posing methodological and terminological questions to modern medievalists: what use are labels such as "French" and "Italian" in approaching such an artifact? The *Geste* is perhaps the ultimate minor text, a recurring challenge to criticism, linguistics, and philology.

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[1] See the deconstruction of the idea of "late" epics by Cook ("'Méchants romans' et épopée française: pour une philologie profonde," *L'Esprit créateur* 23 (1983): 64-74), who points out that most extant *chansons de geste* are from the late twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries: "les copies sont pour ainsi dire toutes tardives" (68).

[2] See on Arthurian romance Daniela Delcorno Branca, *Tristano e Lancillotto in Italia: studi di letteratura arturiana* (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 1998); on epic Günter Holtus and Peter Wunderli, *Les Épopées romanes: franco-italien et épopée franco-italienne (=Grundriss der Romanischen Literaturen des Mittelalters, III, 1/2)* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2005).

[3] In this respect, my reading differs from that given by Stefano Maria Cingolani, who demonstrates the humorous rather than political potential of the text's disruptiveness.

[4] My use of Deleuze to criticize nationalizing philology also owes something to the work of María Rosa Menocal: *Shards of Love Exile and the Origins of the Lyric* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1994); Deleuze and Guattari are cited on 205. My thinking on Deleuze's theory of the book, on the other hand, draws on Sarah Kay: *The Place of Thought: The Complexity of One in Late Medieval French Didactic Poetry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). Peter Haidu, finally, has suggested that the *chanson de geste* becomes "minor literature" by representing the point of view of embattled nobles,

faced with an expanding and more powerful monarchy: *The Subject Medieval/Modern: Text and Governance in the Middle Ages* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2004), 151.

[5] See for example the Franco-Italian versions of *Aliscans* (*La Versione franco-italiana della "Bataille d'Aliscans": codex Marcianus fr. VIII (=252)*, ed. Günter Holtus (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1985)) and *Roland* (*Il testo assonanzato franco-italiano della "Chanson de Roland": cod. Marciano fr. IV (=225)*, ed. Carlo Beretta (Pavia: Università di Pavia, 1995)).

[6] Segre makes the following arguments in support of his *koinè* argument: Franco-Italian was never used outside literature: it is a purely literary creation, with its own codes and conventions. A fairly large ensemble of recurring phonetic traits is found across a number of literary texts composed mainly in the Veneto but also elsewhere, including Lombardy. These traits are rarely attributable to specific local dialects and in fact include some Latin forms, evidence of willful literary obscurity. Moreover, Franco-Italian also had a literary life outside the epic: historiographical and didactic literature was produced in the *koinè* by authors including Martin da Canal and Marco Polo.

[7] Use of French was conscious and prolonged, and Franco-Italian co-existed with Italian. See the arguments made by Alison Cornish ("Translatio Galliae: Effects of Early Franco-Italian Literary Exchange," *Romanic Review* 97 (2006): 309-30): "when Italian starts to be a literary language […] gallicisms remain, and French texts continue to be read and even written by Italians" (310).

[8] Since the Middle Ages, the codex has baffled critics, editors and readers. See the accounts of scholarship given by Rajna, *Geste Francor* (Milan: Bestetti & Tuminelli, 1925) and Rosellini, "Il cosidetto franco-veneto: retrospettive e prospettive," *Filologia moderna* 2 (1977): 219-303; 4 (1980): 221-61).

[9] I take all quotations from Morgan's edition (*La Geste Francor*).

[10] The negative view of sovereign power offered here is not unique to Italian epics, whatever the arguments of Rajna, who thought that Italians adored stories about rebellious vassals because they loved freedom and could not tolerate the conceit of princes ("Rinaldo da Montalbano," *Il Propugnatore* 3.2 (1870): 58-127, 213-41), or those of Krauss (*Epica*), who argued that the *Geste* represented popular, communal and bourgeois values unique to Italy, against feudal, "French" ideas. See Vitullo, who has demonstrated the problematical nature of feudal/bourgeois and French/Italian dichotomies (5-6), arguing that the Franco-Italian epic attempts "to resolve the oppositions that had always defined the boundaries of the genre's contested terrain" (11).

[11] See the readings offered by Krauss "Aspects de l'histoire poétique de Charlemagne en Italie," *Charlemagne et l'épopée romane: actes du VIIe congrès international de la Société Rencesvals*, 2 vols. Paris: Les Belles-Lettres, 1978. 1:103-23); Karl-Heinz Bender ("Les Métamorphoses de la royauté de Charlemagne dans les premières épopées franco-italiennes," *Cultura Neolatina* 21 (1961): 164-74).

[12] The tale strongly resembles the False Guinevere episode of the prose *Lancelot*: *La Fausse Guenièvre*, ed. François Mosès (Paris: Lettres Gothiques, 1998).