

Translating Charlemagne: the Insular French Experience

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The move of materials originally in French into Middle English seems to constitute a very clear example of what we would understand by translation, although it cannot be approached without reflection on the continued co-habitation of French and English in the cultural and administrative domains in the community of fourteenth-century England. On the politico-cultural level the question arises of the motivation for developing insular versions of continental French epic poems focused on Charlemagne, whether in English or in insular French. This question has to be asked because for close on two hundred years, and very specifically in the fourteenth century, the Plantagenet kings of England and the Capetian and Valois kings of France focused the propaganda element of their rivalry respectively in the persons of Arthur and Charlemagne, so that the now mythic emperor provided a central icon for the French crown. The king of England was officially at war with the king of France from 1328 on the excuse of Edward III's claim to the French throne, yet this does not seem on the whole to have affected his preference for Arthur as a model for his kingship, or at least for the chivalric culture which he sponsored at his court. The problem is not new in the fourteenth century, of course. Claim and counterclaim of imperial conquest and domination date from the twelfth century with the *Historia regum Britanniae* and the Oxford *Chanson de Roland*. In the fourteenth century the cultural situation becomes more complex as Arthur and Charlemagne find themselves associated in the Christian subset of the *Neuf Preux*.

The question of translation when considering the insular French versions of texts also conserved in continental French is in itself a vexed one. The traditional appellation of Anglo-Norman has come under increasing challenge in the last two or three decades, and the presence of the element "Norman" in the name seems less and less defensible. The continuity of dialects covering northern, north-western and western France makes the identification of the sources of various elements of the French spoken in England even in the late eleventh century a delicate matter reflecting the origins of settlers who accompanied the Conqueror to England. Further complication comes from the introduction of more southern elements through the courts of the Plantagenets from 1154. This is not the place to discuss the nature of the concept "Old French", but it is probably fair to consider it as a literary language combining dialect traits

from regions that shift with the movement of cultural centres. Now, Paris was not a major centre of vernacular culture until the mid-thirteenth century, by which time it was also challenged by the mercantile towns of Picardy; earlier the major centres of vernacular culture in northern France – indeed of secular culture even in Latin – had been the ducal and comital courts of Normandy, Anjou and Champagne, so that elements from these dialects in a variety of proportions contribute to the language of literary texts. As far as *chansons de geste* are concerned from the first half of the thirteenth century northern dialects – “Picard” – replace western French – “Norman” – as the main constituent of the textual *koiné* alongside a loosely defined *francien* from the Île-de-France.¹ It will not have escaped notice that *mutatis mutandis* this is the dialectal mix of insular French as well, so that the question arises as to whether we are dealing with an extra layer of translation when insular versions of epics are produced, or if the phenomenon is not closer to the series of dialectal transpositions and recombinations which the same poems are subject to on the mainland.

To some extent this involves a consideration of the contact between French and English in the Anglo-Norman *regnum*. Was Anglo-French the sort of contact language that also arose in northern Italy in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and which was used as a literary language, without being generally spoken? Franco-Italian, as it is commonly called, raises even more questions about its nature than Anglo-French, but one widely held view is that it was a *Mischsprache*, a form of creole produced for cultural purposes from the artificial combination of French and Italian elements by poet-singers specifically for the purposes of producing Charlemagne poems.² This does raise its own questions about the nature of the audience, since the listener-reader would have to have a reasonable grasp of both idioms to follow the plot in any detail. Now, from the 1930s, in M. K. Pope’s classic history of the French language, the influence of English on the development of French in England has been established, and the influence of (Anglo-) French on the evolution of English is equally apparent.³ Unlike Franco-Italian, therefore, we must posit that to some

¹ Philip E. Bennett, “Le normand, le picard et les *koinés* littéraires de l’épopée aux XII^e et XIII^e siècles,” in *Picard d’hier et d’aujourd’hui*, ed. Jacques Landrecie and Aimé Petit, *Bien dire et bien apprendre*, 21 (2003): 43–56.

² For a thorough investigation of the problems posed by the concept Franco-Italian see Günter Holtus, “L’état actuel des recherches sur le franco-italien: corpus de textes et description linguistique,” in *La Chanson de geste: écritures, intertextualités translations*, ed. François Suard, Littérales, 14 (Paris: Centre de sciences de littérature, 1994), 147–71; idem, “Plan- und Kunstsprachen auf romanischer Basis IV. Franko-Italienisch / Langues artificielles à base romane IV. Le franco-italien,” in *Lexikon der romanistischen Linguistik*, vol. 7 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1998), 705–56.

³ M. K. Pope, *From Latin to Modern French* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1934), Part V, “Anglo-Norman”, Chapter II, Section 5, “English Influence”, 431–2; for the importance of bilateral influences in the development of languages in England from 1066 to

extent at least the audience for Anglo-French literature really spoke – or at least understood – the two languages which produced the *koiné* in which that literature was expressed. To leave the English part of the question to one side for a moment, this does not mean that the (Anglo) -French used in the literary texts with which I am dealing corresponded to the language that the audience for those texts would use in everyday life. While undoubtedly not as stylised and artificial as the corresponding Franco-Italian, the preparation of texts in Anglo-French for an audience that could undoubtedly handle continental French does imply a cultural transposition, which I would include under at least the broad rubric of translation.

I would like to consider this predominantly through the various redactions of what is generally known these days as the *Chanson de Roland*, although no manuscript has that name or title attached to it: one Franco-Italian manuscript (V4) has an *explicit* and colophon in Latin

Explicit liber tocius Romani Roncivalis
Deo gracias amen.⁴

Here ends the book of the whole romance of Roncevaux.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

while two continental French manuscripts (one conserved in Cambridge, the other in Lyon) refer to the “livre des douze pairs”:

Le livre des douze pairs est cy finé
don löenge soit a la sainte Trinité (Cambridge = MS T)⁵

The book of the Twelve Peers is here finished
for which be thanked the Holy Trinity.

or “li chançons des douze combatant” and the battle of Roncevaux:

Ci fenit li chançons des douze combatant
Explicit la desconfite de Roncevauz (Lyon).⁶

the fifteenth century see *The Anglo-Norman Language and its Contexts*, ed. Richard Ingham (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2010) and Richard Ingham, *The Transmission of Anglo-Norman: Language History and Language Acquisition* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2012).

⁴ *La Chanson de Roland / The Song of Roland, The French Corpus*, gen. ed. Joseph J. Duggan (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005); Part 2, *The Venice 4 Version*, ed. Robert F. Cook, *Explicit*. II/305.

⁵ *La Chanson de Roland / The Song of Roland, The French Corpus*, Part 5, *The Cambridge Version*, ed. Wolfgang G. van Emden, Colophon, V/321.

⁶ *La Chanson de Roland / The Song of Roland, The French Corpus*, Part 6, *The Lyon Version*, ed. William W. Kibler, Colophon, VI/152.

Here finishes the song of the twelve warriors
Here ends the defeat of Roncevaux.

The ways of reading the poem which these tail-pieces suggest, even if only retrospectively, take our gaze away from a possibly factitious hero and focus it onto a wider community and its myth-history. The group of twelve warriors surrounding the emperor Charles was already established in the résumé of an early version of the epic contained in the eleventh-century note inserted into a chronicle conserved in the Spanish monastery of San Millán de la Cogolla, whence its generally accepted title of *Nota emilianense*.

In as far as surviving French versions are not acephalous they begin by focusing not on Roland but on Charlemagne. The oldest of these raises a number of interesting questions from its opening line as represented in the Anglo-Norman manuscript Digby 23 of the Bodleian Library. That line reads

Carles li reis nostre emperere magnes

which I shall translate literally as

Charles the king our emperor [the] great

replicating the rhetorical device of *tnesis* which the poet has used in his French. Now this very well-known line not only translates the Carolingian way of referring to “Carolus rex magnus” without the epithet being attached as a particle to the name, but it makes a claim for continuity of classical literate culture in the very opening of a poem belonging to a genre which, at the turn of the eleventh century, still belonged, as far as we can tell, to oral culture. In that context we also note the use of the adjective “magnes” from classical Latin *magnus*, against the normal derivation for words meaning “big” or “great” in Romance languages from *grandis*. At one level this seems unremarkable. However, in the Tobler-Lommatzsch dictionary of Old French with very few exceptions all cited uses of *magne* apply to either Charles or to Alexander the Great. One exception is to the historical character usually called Hugues le Grand in French (the Count of Paris and father of Hugues Capet). Since this example is taken from the *Chronique des ducs de Normandie* which Benoît de Sainte-Maure prepared for Henry II, at first blush it seems puzzling, because the use of that adjective would invite a comparison with Charlemagne in the minds of most audiences, and one can hardly see that the Plantagenet patron of the *Chronique* would be happy with such an echo attaching to the ancestor of his Capetian adversaries; however, since Benoît was also the author of the *Roman de Troie*, with its overtones of twelfth-century humanism, the explanation may lie simply in an urge to classicising vocabulary. The one case in which the

word is attached to a common and not to a proper noun comes from the Anglo-Norman *Horn*, in the phrase “son maine desrei” (his over-reaching turbulence or arrogance) in which the moral overtone may have inclined a clerical author to use the adjective derived from an abstract rather than from a concrete epithet.

The other enigma of the first line of the *Roland* is to imagine how an audience in the kingdom of France or the kingdom of England could have reacted to the notion that Charles is “our emperor”, since both kingdoms and their current rulers in the early twelfth century were proud of their position outwith the Holy Roman Empire. With regard to the king of France a wilful confusion of *Franc* and *Français* and a desire to claim moral descent from Charlemagne, as part of what has been called the *translatio imperii* might be invoked, but, whether we consider Henry I or Henry II as the king most likely to be ruling England at the time the Digby manuscript was written, it is hard to conceive of an audience living in the political and cultural environment of late Norman-early Plantagenet England having the emotional bond to Charlemagne that the formula *nostrae imperere* implies, even allowing for the fact that Henry I was the father-in-law of an emperor and Henry II the son of an empress. Unfortunately none of the continental French witnesses to the tradition have preserved the beginning of the poem, so we cannot tell if the opening line of the Oxford version came directly from a continental French original. Now the affective link implied by the first person plural possessive, whether applied to the emperor or to the Frankish (French) heroes in general may have caused problems more widely than in England: Leslie Zarker Morgan in her edition of the Franco-Italian collection of Charlemagne epics known as *La Geste Francor*, speculates on how a northern Italian audience in the fourteenth century may have reacted to it.⁷ Certainly the Franco-Italian redactions we have of *La Chanson de Roland* find ways of avoiding the issue in the opening line of the poem. Of the three surviving manuscripts two are closely related to each other and to late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century continental French rhymed versions of the poem. These two manuscripts (Châteauroux, Bibl. mun., ms 1; Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, ms Fr. Z. 7 – in both cases line 1)⁸ totally change the second half of the line to remove the possessive, and indeed to remove the imperial allusion:

Karle li rois a la barbe grifaigne.

The adjective “grifaigne” has a wide range of meanings, only one of them potentially flattering to the wearer of this beard:

⁷ *La Geste Francor*, ed. Leslie Zarker Morgan, 2 vols (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2009), 243–4.

⁸ *The Châteauroux Version of the “Chanson de Roland”*, ed. Marjorie Moffat, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie, 384 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014).

Charles the king with the barbarian/wild/fearsome/imposing beard.

Under whatever impetus, this redaction, preserved in late thirteenth- or early fourteenth-century manuscripts, does not register the imperial allusion and the classicising construction found in the Oxford text, but focuses on a physical feature often exploited in Charlemagne epics – the emperor’s patriarchal white beard – and then applies to it an adjective with more negative than positive connotations. True, the choice of adjective might have been determined by the difficult rhyme, but the reception of the outcome poses serious problems for the perception of Charles from the opening of the poem.

Another Franco-Italian manuscript (Venice, Bibl. Marciana, Fr. 225, fondo antico IV) of the fourteenth century, although more closely aligned with the Oxford text, in its version also finds a way of avoiding the affective problem. It opens with a short didactic prologue indicating the moral import of the poem (its “vere significance”), which seems to echo Jean Bodel’s view, expressed in the opening of his *Chanson des Saisnes*, of the moral truth contained in the *matière de France*. This truth is further authenticated by deriving from a written text kept in the French royal abbey of Saint-Denis, even if it is being sung to the receiving audience:

a San Donis ert une geste in France.
Cil ne sa ben qui per le scrit in çante. (V4, lines 2–3)

there was a recorded history at Saint-Denis in France.
He knows it well who sings according to the written text.

Only when the French credentials of the poem have been well established does the author of this redaction launch into his story:

Des or comença li traïment de Gayne
e de Rollant li nef de Çarle el Mayne.
Çarle li reis nostre inperer de Frañçe... (lines 6–9)

Now begins (the story of) Ganelon’s treason
and of Roland, the nephew of Charles the Great.
Charles the king, our emperor of France...

This time Charles’s well-known byname is kept, but is dissociated from the formula of which it was an intrinsic part in the twelfth-century poem; equally the affective use of *nostre* now has a purely aesthetic value, because the insistent repetition of the toponym “France” distances the Italian audience from the story, its source, its locale and its political ideology.

To return now to the Anglo-Norman text of the poem, we find an ambivalent portrait of Charlemagne to say the least. Joyful at the capture of Cordres (Corboba), when the ambassadors from Saragossa find him we are informed that no one looking for him would need to ask who in any company is the emperor; this distinguishes him from Arthur, who is often presented as anonymous and undistinguished in his own court. Seated on a solid gold throne beneath a pine tree beside an eglantine bush he is very much presented “in majesty” (to use Alain Labbé’s term⁹) in a purely symbolic landscape which equates his military camp with Heaven. At other points in the poem, and despite the efforts of French scholars during the two World Wars to recruit Charlemagne as a proto French republican democrat, he is petulant and wilful: during the first council scene in the poem he goes so far as to tell Turpin, the Archbishop of Reims, to sit down and not speak until spoken to; during a balancing scene at the end of the poem, dealing with the trial of Ganelon for treason, he responds to the judgement of his court, that Ganelon should be let off with a caution, by expostulating to his barons:

Vos estes mi felun. (O, line 3814).

The import of this is that by their judgement the barons have broken their oaths of fealty to their overlord. Significantly, this line and the scene of deliberative judgement which precedes it are absent from all continental versions of the poem, whether French or Franco-Italian. These versions embed the entire trial of Ganelon within the procedures of judicial duel, which ultimately determine the outcome of the trial in the Oxford text as well. Because of the general view, undoubtedly correct, that the manuscript tradition of the *Roland* is bipartite, with the Digby manuscript isolated in one branch of the *stemma* deriving from a lost prototype α and all other witnesses united in the second branch, deriving from a prototype β , it is logically impossible to tell whether β suppressed the scene of deliberative justice or if α or O (the Digby MS) added it. One small clue that the depiction of Charles presiding over a court acting as a judicial body might be an Anglo-Norman pre-occupation comes from the different versions of the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*, or *Historia Karoli Magni et Rotholandi* to give it its proper Latin title. In the Latin original of this work, including in the Codex Calixtinus, probably the earliest manuscript containing the pseudo-chronicle, dating from 1160–73, Charles calls for a judgement to be made on the battlefield concerning the popular rumour that Ganelon has caused the deaths of Roland and those fighting with him in the rearguard:

⁹ Alain Labbé, *L'Architecture des palais et des jardins dans les chansons de geste: Essai sur le thème du roi en majesté* (Paris-Geneva: Champion-Slatkine, 1987); Labbé takes the term from the traditional iconography of the enthroned Christ.

Defunctis et infirmis et vulneratis ad locum quo Rotolandus iacebat translatis, coepit inquirere Karolus si verum esset annon, quod Ganalonus pugnatores, ut multi asserebant, tradidisset. Illico duos milites armatos, Pinabellum scilicet pro Ganalono, et Tedricum pro semetipso... (ed. C. M. Jones, 209, xi–xv)

Once the dead, injured and wounded had been brought to the place where Roland lay, Charles began to inquire whether it was true or not, that, as many affirmed, Ganelon had betrayed the warriors. Immediately two knights were armed, namely Pinabel for Ganelon and Thierry for himself...

The text passes from Charles's call for justice immediately to the judicial combat a pattern followed in continental translations of *Pseudo-Turpin* into French:

Puis s'en revint li rois en Roncevaus et fist porter toz les morz et les navrez jusque la ou li cors Rollant gisoit. Guenes, qui fu a Marsille mesagiers, en ot grant blasme par l'ost. Charles fist enquerre s'il estoit voirs qu'il les eust traïz, et fu seu et entendu qu'il les avoit venduz par Tierri, l'escuier, qui l'en apela de murtre, et il s'en deffendi par Pinabel, son neveu (Anonymous Old French *Pseudo-Turpin*, ed. R. N. Walpole, XIV, 14–20)

Then the king returned to Roncevaux and had all the dead and wounded carried to where Roland's body lay. Ganelon, who had taken the message to Marsile, was greatly criticised throughout the army. Charles enquired whether it was true that he had betrayed them, and it was known and made clear that he had sold them by Tierri, the squire, who accused him of treacherous killing, and he was defended by Pinabel, his nephew.

Whatever the nature of the inquiry, in the Latin and continental French texts the solution to the inquiry is immediately provided by the warrior solution of trial by combat, subtended by the transcendental implication of the judgement of God. The Franco-Italian texts, which belong to the same tradition, begin the trial process on the road back from Saragossa, where Charles acts as his own judge and jury, as well as being the prosecutor:

Saceç, signur, che nul se departira
a tant che Gainelon juceç sera.
La traïson molt cer conparera. (V4, 5461–63)

Know this, my lords, that no one shall leave here until Gainelon has been condemned. He will pay very dearly for his treasonable action.

In fact the full trial is postponed until the court can re-assemble at Laon, where it takes the form of a trial by combat in which the only treason involved is that of taking money to ensure that Roland would be killed: neither the court nor Charles appears to conceive of any higher interest. Understandably Ganelon's defence is in the same mould, so that, when Ganelon's champion is defeated, all that has been proven is that he did conspire to cause his death.

However, the Anglo-Norman translation has a small but significant addition to the standard text, indicating a forensic process of accusation and denial, leading to an impasse, the solution to which is a judicial combat:

En cele place meyme (i.e. Roncevaux) comensa Charles a enquere si ço poeyt estre veyr ke ly poples disoyt, ke Genyloun avoyt fete la tresoun de la chivalerie. L'em ne pout pas ben saver la verité kar il le denya, et pur ce s'en armerent dues chevaleres, Terry pur Rollant e Pynabel pur Genyloun. (William de Briane, *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*, ed. I. Short, p. 66)

In that very place Charles began to inquire if it could be true what the people were saying, that Ganelon had committed treason against his knights. The truth could not be known because he denied it, and so two knights took up arms, Thierry for Roland and Pinabel for Ganelon.

Williame de Briane's is the only version even to hint that a form of pragmatic human justice may be in force in Charles's court. This hint is a much reduced account of what is given at length in the mid-twelfth-century Anglo-Norman manuscript of the poem, which shows Charles presiding over a human court of justice, in which argument and counter-argument are followed by debate and judgement. In this version the barons weigh the evidence and produce a reasoned verdict:

Dient al rei: "Sire, nus vus p̄ium
 Que clamez quite le cunte Guenelun,
 Puis si vos servet par feid e par amor.
 Vivre le laissez, car mult est gentilz hoem.
 Ja pur murir n'en ert veüd cist barun,
 Ne por aveir ja ne.l recuverum." (O, lines 3807–13)

They say to the king: "Lord, we beg you to acquit Count Ganelon, on condition that he serve you faithfully and loyally. Let him live, because he is a very noble man. His death will not bring back this baron (Roland), and he can never be replaced for any amount of money."

It is this pragmatic judgement, that Roland is irreplaceable, so that executing Ganelon will serve no useful purpose, and no fine (no assessment of

weregeld) will buy a substitute for him, that causes Charles's outburst in which he confuses justice and personal interest. It is only when this impasse has been reached that Thierry, the brother of Geoffrey of Anjou, steps forward and offers judicial combat, accusing Ganelon not of betraying Roland but of committing treason against Charles, because Roland was actively in his service when his death was encompassed:

Que que Rollant a Guenelun forfesist,
 Vostre servise l'en doüst bien guarir.
 Guenes est fels d'ïço qu'il le traït,
 Vers vos s'en est parjurez et malmis. (O, lines 3827–30)

Whatever wrong Roland might have done to Ganelon, the fact that he was in your service should have protected him. Ganelon broke fealty with you in the very act of betraying him: he broke his oath to you and damaged your interests.

This can be compared to the other versions, for which Duggan's composite edition of the V7 and Châteauroux texts can stand exemplar:¹⁰

Pinabel fu el palais en estant
 quant li vaslez li est sailli avant.
 Terriz ot nom, mout ot le cuer vaillant;
 escuier fu Rollant le combatant.
 Mout parla bien et si dist avenant:
 "Tenez mon gage, emperere puissant,
 por vostre droit que voil mostrer avant,
 que Guenes est traïtre et soduiant.
 En Sarragoce vendi le duc Rollant
 au roi Marsile qui en Deu n'est creant." (lines 7917–26)

Pinabel was standing in the great hall when the young man leapt up in front of him. He was called Terriz, and was very brave; he was the squire of Roland the warrior. He spoke very well and to the point: "Accept my gage, powerful emperor, because I want to show that you are in the right, because Ganelon betrayed for money. In Saragossa he sold duke Roland to king Marsile, who doesn't believe in God."

In all these other versions the scope of the crime is doubly limited, first by being reduced to the act of handing over Roland for money, second by the fact that Thierry, instead of being the brother of Geoffrey of Anjou, to whom

¹⁰ *La Chanson de Roland / The Song of Roland, The French Corpus, Part 3, The Châteauroux-Venice 7 Version*, ed. Joseph J. Duggan.

the Oxford version attributes the role of standard bearer to Charles, is reduced to being Roland's squire. The much broader perspective of the Oxford version of the *Roland* transforms Charles as king and emperor into the figure of a proto-state embodying interests beyond the personal. And surely it is no accident that the character who enunciates this principle in the Digby text is presented as a member of the house of Anjou, since Henry II, the son and the brother of a Geoffrey of Anjou, concerned himself in his law-making with this set of problems.

The clerkly, legal interests manifest in the trial scene echo those established in the opening line of the Oxford version of the song. They come back even more strongly in the last line of the poem in the Digby manuscript:

Ci falt la geste que Tuoldus declinet. (O, line 4002)

Here ends the history as Tuoldus recounts it

This line has provoked endless controversy as to its meaning, and as to the possible identity of Tuoldus: is he, for instance, the groom or one of the knights pictured in this scene from the Bayeux Tapestry?¹¹



As for the word *geste*, everywhere else in the poem it refers to a written history, on two occasions probably the *Annales Francorum*: I believe this to be true of O, line 788 as well, where Roland's assertion "Deus me cunfunde, se la geste en desment" is usually translated "God confound me if I betray the family reputation", but I would prefer "...if I give the lie to the history."

¹¹ Rita Lejeune, "Tuold dans la Tapisserie de Bayeux," in *Mélanges offerts à René Crozet ... à l'occasion de son soixante-dixième anniversaire* (Poitiers, 1966), 419–25; Philip E. Bennett, "Encore Tuold dans la tapisserie de Bayeux," *Annales de Normandie*, 30 (1980): 3–13; the image below is reproduced from that publication where it was reproduced from *The Bayeux Tapestry and the Norman Invasion*, ed. Lewis Thorpe (London: The Folio Society, 1973) with the permission of The Folio Society and Michael Holford (photographer); Carola Hicks, *The Bayeux Tapestry: The Life Story of a Masterpiece* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2006) gives a recent assessment of interpretations.

For its part the verb *décliner* still has a quasi-legal or administrative connotation in modern French, when one is required to *décliner* one's name. Between these two terms appealing to learned if not to classical tradition the poet (i.e. the person responsible for this version of the story) chooses to name "Tuoldus" in Latin, and the importance of this fact is normally overlooked, especially by those who wish to see this version of the *Chanson de Roland* as the more or less accidental transcription of an oral performance. However, one can hardly believe that scribal intervention used the Latin form of a Norse-Norman name, Thorhold-Tuold, whatever the status of the bearer of that name, to fill the six syllables of the second hemistich: so many other monosyllabic possibilities would have been available. What the Latinised name does is to close the circle opened with the translation of a Latin formula in the first line of the poem. If my translation of the line is correct it also completely closes the story as it is given to us, preventing any possibility of continuation. If this is so the line serves yet another purpose, because the last image we are given of Charles is not that of the hieratic emperor, Carolus Rex Magnus, of the opening episodes, but that of a human being made aware of the limitless burden of fate he is required to bear.

The whole *Roland* tradition structures itself around the insistent use of the formula *set anz* [seven years], to characterise the duration of the war in Spain and its major episodes. Now the number seven is one of the best known in numerology for indicating perfection and completion, an idea made explicit lines 703–705 of the Oxford text, and corresponding lines of the other versions, in which Charles states that the war is over:

Carles li magnes ad Espaigne guastede,
 Les castels pris, les citez violees.
 Ço dit li reis que sa guere out finée.

Charles the Great has laid waste to Spain,
 captured its castles, ravaged its citadels.
 The king said that he had ended his war.

However, every time the formula is used its symbolic force is undermined by a fresh twist in the action. With the defeat first of Marsile, pagan king of Saragossa, then of Baligant, supreme ruler of all pagans who came from the East to save his vassal, and finally the execution of Ganelon, the internal traitor, Charles had good reason to believe that his task of eradicating evil and instituting the Kingdom of God on earth was accomplished. However, in an episode unique to Oxford, the angel Gabriel appears on cue to summon him to another war against pagans. Charles's reaction would not be that expected from the figure we have been accustomed to through most of the poem:

Li emperere n'i volsist aler mie.
 "Deus", dist li reis, "si penuse est ma vie!"
 Pluret des oilz, sa barbe blanche turet. (lines 3999–4001)

The emperor had no wish to go there at all.
 "God," said the king, "how burdensome is my life!"
 He wept from his eyes and tugged at his white beard.

The use of the words "emperor" and "king" in close proximity may also be designed to remind the audience of the opening line, so that they would be aware, as we can be too, of this fresh appropriation of the great emperor as Everyman.

Of the other *chansons de geste* conserved in Anglo-French versions only five, *Le Pèlerinage de Charlemagne*, *Aspremont*, *Fierabras* and its prologue *La Destruction de Rome*, and *Amis et Amiloun*, present Charlemagne as a character. *Amis* has actually become a romance written in octosyllabic couplets, and like the *Pèlerinage* fits into a pattern of multiple generic shifts, although in the absence of a viable continental French version of the *Pèlerinage* it is less easy to see than in the case of the *Roland* exactly which cultural shifts were involved. This may also be true of *La Destruction de Rome*, although its relationship to *Fierabras* gives a better anchorage in a wider tradition. *Aspremont* poses political problems similar to those I mentioned at the start of the discussion of *Roland*: if, as seems likely, it was written in support of Philip Augustus's campaign in the Third Crusade with the rebellious red-haired Girart de Fraite standing for Richard Lionheart, one must again wonder how an insular, Anglo-French public would have received the poem.

This paper was first given at the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, The University of Edinburgh.

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