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Nicola Morato and Dirk Schoenaers, eds., *Medieval Francophone Literary Culture Outside France*. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2018. xvi + 576 pp. Illustrations, notes, and tables. €100.00 (hb). ISBN 9-78-2503554440.

Review by Laura K. Morreale, Independent Scholar.

While exiled in France in the mid-1260s, self-described “Italian” writer Brunetto Latini defended his choice to use the French vernacular for his encyclopedic blockbuster, the *Trésor*, for the following reasons. He wrote in French, he claimed, “because we are in France,” and, “because it is the most delightful and common of all the languages.”[1] What we learn from Latini’s brief aside is that he and other medieval readers, writers, and users of the vernacular actively questioned how personal identity, geographic placement, and pragmatic concerns might dictate language choice.

Much of the incertitude concerning when and how certain languages were used, and French in particular, seems to have been brushed away as part of the sweeping nationalist projects of the nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. During this time, and especially in concert with efforts to solidify the geographic boundaries of the modern French state, scholars greedily took up medieval French-language works, submitted them to the rigors of textual editing, then disseminated them in a flood of books, journals, and *recueils*. In one such late nineteenth-century tome, a set of “unified sentiments,” were posited as the necessary baseline for the national language we now call French, and the literature written in that language presented as both the evidence for and expression of such national feeling.[2] In the context of nineteenth-century scholarship, language, territory, and identity were intimately correlated, and the distinctions among them erased; to be French was to speak French and to be of France.

Now, in the twenty-first century, and particularly as we so blithely cross borders and confront linguistic barriers while working in the digital medium, scholars have begun to harken back to Latini and his contemporaries, whose real-time, articulated negotiations of medieval language complicate the neat associations put forth by medievalists of a previous age. The essay collection *Medieval Francophone Literary Culture Outside France*, edited by Nicola Morato and Dirk Schoenaers, and the grant-funded project of the same name which preceded it (colloquially called *MFLCOF*), take up the challenge of painting a more complete picture of medieval French-language writing to include and incorporate works and practices that extended beyond the borders of the medieval kingdom of France. The volume does so expertly, in three important ways: first, by surveying the landscape of medieval francophone production in both geographic and generic terms; second, by offering a categorization of the materials to track the breadth and

number of works within the repertoire, and finally, by introducing key concepts, vocabularies, and governing metaphors as scholars reconsider where the topic of medieval French literature begins and ends. Among the most important of these concepts are the “polycentric dynamics” and “tightly interwoven networks” (p. 3) of medieval non-hexagonal francophone literary activity, as well as the “hub and spoke” model of diffusion (p. 7) that existed within decidedly transcultural spaces, whether personal or corporate (p. 5).

In the first two sections of the collection, Morato and Schoenaer’s wise decision to maintain the geographic typology between the southern and northern axes of medieval francophone activity that was first put forth in the MFLCOF project, (that is, Mediterranean Europe and the Middle East versus England, the Low Countries, and the Empire) allows readers an entryway to and appreciation of what is a very large repertoire indeed. Because geography is one of the main critical elements of the inquiry, these first two sections especially provide the most potent rejoinder to the literary histories that in the past left this corpus largely untouched. However, the volume also steps away from a purely geographic orientation, in three additional sections that explore “Material and Documentary Evidence,” “Textual Evidence,” and “Constructing *auctoritas*.” The nineteen essays and afterword flesh out the theoretical skeleton presented by the editors in the Introduction and bring the words, ideas, and settings of long-ago and oft-forgotten francophone authors to our eyes and ears.

The opening article, Fabio Zinelli’s “Inside/Outside Grammar: The French of Italy between Structuralism and Trends of Exoticism,” addresses head-on the volume’s efforts to dismantle such entrenched national literary histories. “Who,” he asks meaningfully “owns Franco-Italian Literature?” (p. 31). After a careful inventory of linguistic and scribal traits common to Franco-Italian writings, Zinelli concludes that authorial or scribal variation from an imagined French norm should not automatically suggest ignorance or neglect on the part of these same writers or copyists. Rather, since many of them maintained “an active attitude towards language,” (p. 54), variation was a deliberate choice to tailor their literary products to appeal to any one of a range of known francophone audiences. These writers were not poor users of the language, but instead highly skilled communicators who anticipated the effect certain vocabularies or orthographies might elicit from their intended audiences.

Charmaine Lee’s excellent survey of French-language writings produced and circulated in the southern part of the Italian peninsula uncovers the cultural and political backdrop for a literature that was long assumed to have been imposed by a series of “French” foreign leaders. Lee’s contribution restores medieval Naples and its environs to the cultural center-point it was, replete with multilingual possibility, rather than the colonized backwater such argumentation suggests. Similarly, F. Regina Psaki’s study of two related misogynistic textual traditions, one in Old French (the *Chastiemusart*) and the other in Italian (the *Proverbia*), tracks the back-and-forth between the French source material and the innovations introduced by the Italian author. In doing so, Psaki confronts the well-received narrative of French as the primogenitor and necessary predecessor of most successive vernacular literatures. Psaki’s claim that “the *Proverbia* author looted what he chose from the Old French text and its *confrères*, borrowing and bending, reframing and reversing, with an intellectual agility that may have escaped his first admirers” (p. 136) reinstates French-language writing as an equal partner in literary exchange rather than the stodgy grandfather figure from which all other literatures issued. Lourdes Soriano Robles also mentions the importance of Italian writers of French in her study of Arthurian texts in Iberia, thereby demonstrating the spoke and hub model of francophone literary diffusion introduced by

the volume editors. Robles' work tasks the reader with imagining an Iberian audience that would have readily welcomed and consumed chivalric material which arrived to them *en version originale*.

The collection's attention then shifts to the furthest extension of the Mediterranean axis, to the francophone communities of the Latin East. Chiara Concina's essay, which treats a late 13th-century translation of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* (now housed as the Vatican manuscript Vat. Lat. 4788), relies upon literary, historical, and art-historical methodologies to explore the circumstances of its production. In searching for the text's creator(s), Concina brings to the surface the distinct yet often overlapping micro-communities of French-language users in the Latin East, including but not limited to brethren of the Hospitaller Order, members of wealthy Italian merchant companies who often worked confidently in French, or language professionals based permanently in the Levant. The unresolved status of the essay's central inquiry in turn exposes a system of interrelated francophone communities whose members were frequently on the move, yet who were part of a nexus of mutual intelligibility via the texts they created and circulated. On the other end of the spectrum, Marisa Galvez brings one of these communities, the Western-oriented nobility of Crusader Cyprus, into sharp focus. In her reading of the late thirteenth-century *Disme de Penitanche*, Galvez argues convincingly for a specific political and religious meaning to the word *franchise*, which signaled the need for personal piety on the part of Latin Christians in the East while at the same time demanding support from their social counterparts in the West. The dual resonance and receptivity expected from a francophone text produced in Latin East speaks especially to the transcultural position of French for these users.

However, as the collection switches its focus from the southern to the northern axis, so too does the perceived value of French alter within these language communities. Whereas French-language use along the southern axis emphasized the language's utility as a medium of easy and outward-facing exchange, studies from the north instead stress its usefulness as a marker of status and in-group belonging. Adrian Stevens' article, "Wolfram von Eschenbach, Gottfried von Strassburg, and the Politics of Literary Adaptions," reveals how claims of kinship and nobility were imported and perpetuated through the intertwining genres of chronicle and chivalric fiction (p. 219), a claim which in turn decentralizes the geographic proximity of the kingdom of France as the prime mover of francophone literary production in the Low Countries. Frank Brandsma's essay brings this into further relief, first by tracking the kinds of French-language motifs brought into the Middle Dutch environment, then profiling their outright rejection by certain authors as local literatures matured.

Marjolein Hogenbirk's article on the *Mort le Roi Artu* in the Low Countries suggests that class played an important role in language choice. Members of the noble elite, she contends, were the most likely to commission works in French, while those further down the social scale preferred the local vernacular, even if they could also read and understand French (p. 273). Florent Norfalise reveals the sophisticated workings and reworkings of textual sources in the compilation of the French-language *Chronique de Boudouin d'Avesnes* and in doing so, highlights the textual ingenuity of the Flemish author while at the same time revealing the compiler's access to a large multilingual library of sources.

The ensuing nine contributions step away from a strictly geographic orientation, and as they do, several critical inflection points emerge. Victor Jante's essay examines the reading practices of one family of Italian anglophiles, the Villas, who were well established in fifteenth-century Bruges and whose francophone practice bypassed any connection to France whatsoever.

Similarly, Marilyn Desmond's analysis of the French-language re-clothing of the Trojan myth, used to promote the idea of *Magna Graecia* as the prototype for a Naples-based Mediterranean empire, suggests no rearview glance towards a French *patria* at all. Rather, Desmond's sources uncover the eastward orientation of the fourteenth-century Angevins, one that relied upon the transregional status of French and that grew out of earlier pretensions to a francophone empire as first envisioned by the dynasty's thirteenth-century founder, Charles of Anjou.

Turning back toward linguistic matters, Eliza Zingesser's contribution on the assimilation and diffusion of Occitan lyric through francophone appropriation forces the reader to come to terms with the meaning of the word "French," yet another critical component of the project's stated topic. Zingesser demonstrates how, in an effort to profit from the prestige of Occitan literary traditions by way of wholesale ingestion, the meaning of Occitan lyric was often sacrificed by francophone adapters who opted instead to maintain the formal conventions that gave the poetry its luster (p. 375). In a similar effort to draw lines of linguistic and literary difference among commingling languages with shared histories, Laura Chuhan Campbell's "Roman de la Rose and its Tuscan Adaptations" looks to the Italian verse works, the *Fiore* and *Detto d'Amore*. Her article deftly isolates elements within both texts that are distinctly Italian or inherently French, which in turn suggests medieval writers themselves recognized that language existed within a set of generic and linguistic boundaries, rather than somewhere along the line of an uninterrupted romance continuum.

The volume closes with a retrospective from William Burgwinkle, who gives voice to the idea of medieval French as a "cosmopolitan vernacular" (p. 537), but then quickly qualifies this statement with reference to the local contexts and literary characteristics that emerge in so many of the volume's interventions. He reminds the reader that much of the evidence put forth in the volume is first and foremost situated within the material realities of each manuscript version, which stand as witnesses to the individual circumstances of textual and language diffusion and are all too often theorized out of the discussion.

The qualitative differences that emerge between how French was used along the southern as opposed to the northern axis was one of the most revealing discoveries of the collection for me and has added an unexpected and useful nuance to my understanding of the subject. Like all good collections, however, this one left me with more questions than answers, and I began to wonder whether, as the last sections imply, we might rethink the repertoire in terms that are not *de facto* geographic. I will now be on the lookout, for example, for an international francophone bestsellers list, a corpus of texts on the move, common among the medieval "jet set," but which yielded to local practice in the hands of scribes and language practitioners working on their own terms. Moreover, the discussion of class and the examples of individualized, tailored language use have led me to an unexpected, though somewhat obvious realization that people themselves—rather than some primordial national spirit—dictated the parameters of medieval French language exchange. Brunetto Latini had his own rationale for choosing to write in French, but his was not the only logic, and this volume unearths but a part of that whole. Now it is up to volume's readers to take up the corpus and move forward with our own questions about the workings of medieval French-language literature outside of France, knowing that with the work of Morato, Schoenaers and their contributing authors, our inquiries are founded *en terre solide*.

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Laura Chuhan Campbell, “French Literary Identity in Translation: The *Roman de la Rose* and Its Tuscan Adaptations”

Bill Burgwinkle, “Afterword”

NOTES

[1] Brunetto Latini, *Tresor*, ed. P. G. Beltrami (Torino: Einaudi, 2007), p. 6.

[2] Gaston Paris, *La littérature française au moyen âge (XIe-XIVe siècle)* (Paris: Hachette, 1888), pp. 4-8.

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