

The Battle of Hastings according to Gaimar, Wace and Benoît: rhetoric and politics

According to Jean Blacker, the Norman Conquest was 'the most visible cause of the upsurge in historical writing in twelfth-century England' and in the continental territories controlled by successive Anglo-Norman and Norman-Angevin rulers.¹ Her recent study of the historical writings of Gaimar, Wace, Benoît de Sainte-Maure and their Latin counterparts pays little attention, however, to the narration of the Conquest itself, focusing instead on the authors' conception of the role of the historian, techniques of characterisation, and the relationship between writer and patron. Given the importance of the events of 1066 in providing the impetus for Anglo-Norman historiography, it is interesting to consider in more detail how those events are mediated by texts commissioned to make the history of England and the Normans available to a vernacular audience. Our aim here is not to attempt to establish any more facts about the historical event, nor even, in a historian's sense, to add to interpretations of the battle. It is rather to explore the literary approaches adopted by three vernacular writers working between the late 1130s and the 1180s, and in particular to consider how rhetorical resources are deployed to produce three very different visions of the same event, and how the choice of those resources may have been shaped by the political context within which each writer was working.

Unlike Wace and Benoît, Gaimar did not base his *Estoire des Engleis* principally on Latin chronicles composed by Norman apologists intent on glorifying William of Normandy and justifying his invasion of England in 1066.² Gaimar, writing for an Anglo-Norman lady (Constance de Vertuz, wife of Ralf FitzGilbert) with family connections in both Hampshire and Lincolnshire, was essentially translating the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (ASC), which in itself gives his version a different slant from the other two. However, for the last 2,000 lines or so of his *Estoire*, which include the events of 1066, he incorporated much material not found in ASC. Although it is certain that Gaimar's ASC sources were not

1. *The Faces of Time: Portrayal of the Past in Old French and Latin Historical Narrative of the Anglo-Norman 'Regnum'* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1994), p. xii. While we find much of Blacker's argumentation persuasive, we are cautious about endorsing some of her conclusions in relation to the three vernacular historians since many of the translations she provides for the quotations used reveal misunderstandings (some of them quite serious) of the Old French texts. In addition to those identified in D. A. Trotter's review (*French Studies*, 50 (1996), 182-83), there are mistranslations on pp. 37, 39, 47, 85, 92, 94, 108, 122, 123, 124, 126, 127, 176, 177, 188 and 189. Blacker also places the Yorkshire market town of Helmsley in Lincolnshire on p.160.

2. Geoffrei Gaimar, *L'Estoire des Engleis*, ed. Alexander Bell, Anglo-Norman Text Society (Oxford, Blackwell, 1960).

any of the extant versions, it seems unlikely from a comparison of the entries for the Battle of Hastings found in the surviving MSS that his account could have been taken as it stands from a lost version of the Chronicle. We will need to look elsewhere for explanations of some of the key features of Gaimar's narrative, notably his brevity in dealing with the battle itself as compared with the events which immediately preceded it, and his marked anti-Norman stance.

It is generally supposed that one of the copies of *ASC* used by Gaimar shared a Winchester pedigree with the Parker Chronicle (Â) and that the other (his 'livre de Wassingburc', l. 6463) was related to the Peterborough chronicle (E).³ However, in his treatment of the comet which announced for contemporaries the momentous events of 1066, Gaimar is closest to Chronicles C and D, both of which have Worcester connections, although D also has connections with York. Most tellingly, Gaimar shares with these versions the date of the sighting of the comet ('Letaine majur', l. 5144; *ASC* C and D 'Letania maior'):

...une comete —
 Une esteile est dunt li prophete
 E li bon astronomien
 Sevent qu'espelt u mal u bien —
 Se demustrat al firmament,
 Asez la virent mainte gent;
 La nuit de Letaine majur
 Fist [tel] clarted cum se fust jur.
 Mult plusurs humes l'esgarderent,
 En meint endreit en devinerent,
 Chascun diseit sa devinaille.
 Mais tost survint la grant cuntraillie
 E la grant tribulatïun
 Qui puis avint [el] regiun.
 Dunc vint Tosti [...]

(5139-53)

3. Bell, *Estoire*, pp. liv-lv. For the redactions of *ASC* and their relationships see *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, translated by G. N. Garmonsway, Everyman's University Library (London, Dent, 1953), pp. xxxiii-xlii. All references to *ASC* are to this translation.

The first eleven lines of his account of the sighting read like a paraphrase of their entry: 'At that time, throughout all England, a portent such as men had never seen before was seen in the heavens. Some declared that the star was a comet, which some call "the long-haired star": it first appeared on the eve of *Letania maior*, that is on 24th April, and shone every night for a week' (ASC, p. 195, D - 1066; the text of C is identical). Allowing that Gaimar has no known connections with Worcester, and that C is therefore an unlikely source for him, but that D originated in a York chronicle, it is not beyond the bounds of probability that the mysterious 'livere de Wassingburc' was related to that northern recension of ASC.

Gaimar's treatment of Hastings cannot be separated from the broader context of the events of 1066 in which he places it. His account really opens with the reference to the comet, which is clearly seen as a portent of disaster for England, rather than a sign of an imminent change of ruler, as it is in the Latin historians. The articulation of the episode seems, like the comparable passage of ASC D, to imply that the invasion of Harald Hardrada and Tostig represents the real disaster for the kingdom, a reading supported by paratactic juxtaposition of an essentially epic kind in lines 5150-53.⁴ It might be tempting to see this use of parataxis as reflecting either the baldness of chronicle style or the lack of subtlety imposed by abridgement, rather than a deliberate rhetorical ploy designed to permit an alternative reading of the comet, were it not that Gaimar inserts his authorial prediction of disaster as an *amplificatio* of ASC's reference to the comet as a 'portent', giving it far more prominence than his presumed source. The importance of Harold's victory in the north, and the epic significance it appears to have for Gaimar, is further stressed by the repetition of the idea that Godwinson inflicted punishment on the Norse invaders:

Ço fud Harald le fiz Godwine
Qui des Norreis fist discipline (5219-20)

Mais ne pot gueres [*sc. troops*] aüner
Pur la grant gent [ki ert] ocise,
Quant des Noreis fist Deus justise (5252-54)

4. It is interesting that Gaimar calls Harald Hardrada 'Finehair', an error which is also found in D.

This 'epic' link assures the logical articulation of the narrative, and also facilitates a tragic reading of the story of Harold, since his difficulties at Hastings were caused by the losses incurred at Fulford and, particularly, at Stamford Bridge. The most important feature to note, however, is the way Gaimar stresses that Harold was the instrument of divine justice. This contradicts the accounts of the Norman apologists such as William of Jumièges and William of Poitiers, who present Hastings as a punishment for Harold's perfidy, and forces us to conclude that William's victory cannot be explained in terms of divine wrath directed against Harold.

The careful balance maintained by Gaimar between the events of Stamford Bridge and those of Hastings is clear from the amount of text devoted to each. The invasion of Harold Hardrada and Tostig is recounted in ninety-nine lines (1.5% of the 6,256 lines of the *Estoire*), while the invasion of William and the Battle of Hastings occupy ninety-eight lines. More significant than this bald statistic, though, is the way the events of the two sets of battles are presented. The first half of the Stamford Bridge campaign is devoted to Tostig's depredations, which clearly mark him out as a criminal aggressor. The date of the battle itself is heavily underlined by Gaimar ('Qui ço ne set, si se remembre: / Duze jurs fud dedenz Septembre', ll. 5215-16) and used as a point of reference for Harold's later battles. This suggests that for Gaimar, as perhaps for his ASC source, the devastation caused by Tostig and his allies represented the disaster foretold by the comet, a reading reinforced by the author's noting that even after Fulford the Norsemen (as they are consistently called despite the presence in the army of Tostig's Northumbrian supporters) are caught by Harold Godwinson committing further depredations. Gaimar credits Harold with personal responsibility for the victory at Stamford Bridge, and casts him once again in the mould of epic leader by attributing to him the deaths of the two enemy commanders:

Li reis Harald dunc les siwi,
 [Ireemnt] se cumbatit,
 Harald, l'autre, el champ ocist
 E de Tosti ensement fist. (5223-26)

In contrast to the emphasis placed on the criminal behaviour of the Norsemen in devastating the north, Gaimar says nothing of William's campaign of depredation against Harold's earldom in Sussex. This helps, initially at least, to create a more even-handed picture of the two armies at Hastings than was the case for Harold's previous battles, an impression reinforced by the epic valorisation of *both* sides in the conflict:

Quant les eschieles furent rengies
 E del ferir aparailies,
 Mult i ot gent d'ambes[dous] parz,
 de hardement semblent leuparz.⁵ (5261-64)

The refusal to distinguish English from Norman here clearly fits Gaimar's brief in writing for assimilated Anglo-Norman patrons, as opposed to producing propaganda for the successful ruling house. However, this cannot account for other, more surprising features of Gaimar's narrative which make his version of Hastings, like his account of Stamford Bridge, part of an anglocentric epic of Harold.⁶

On three occasions the invaders are simply referred to as 'Franceis' (ll. 5242, 5265, 5301),⁷ but in l. 5260 they are called 'la gent d'ultramarine', a term which is technically correct, but unknown to *ASC*. In the epic framework being established by Gaimar this formula clearly implies Saracen connotations for the Normans, which would make them the satanic forces in the conflict, and reinforce the image created for Harold in the Stamford Bridge episode as the instrument of God. The demonising of the Normans continues in the surprising emphasis placed on the role of Taillefer, the knight-jongleur who leads the Norman attack here as in Wace's account.⁸ Not only does the Taillefer incident occupy thirty-six out of the ninety-eight lines of the episode (36.7%), but he is also the only Norman described as individually killing an Englishman. However, it is not so much

5. Bell's punctuation is less than admirable here. His text seems to imply that there were several 'leopard-like' men in each army. In fact there should be a colon at the end of line 5263, giving the interpretation that both armies were numerous, and that both armies in their entirety resembled leopards in their bravery.

6. Bell notes that this implies not only exploitation of *ASC* but also reliance on oral sources potentially originating on the battlefield (*Estoire*, p. lxxii), a view reinforced by Elisabeth van Houts, 'The Memory of 1066 in Written and Oral Traditions', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 19 (1997), 167-79.

7. Of all the extant versions of *ASC* only D calls the followers of William 'French' (*ASC*, p. 199). The other versions do not elaborate on the reference to 'William' (Â) or 'duke William' (E) equally found in D, which is also unique in calling him 'William the Bastard' (*ASC*, p. 197).

8. Since Gaimar predates Wace he must be exploiting William of Malmesbury, or a parallel oral source. Elisabeth van Houts emphasises the importance of Wace's use of orally transmitted family traditions for the establishment of the list of the Conqueror's companions at Hastings: see 'The Memory of 1066', pp. 178-79, and 'Wace as Historian', in *Family Trees and the Roots of Politics: the Prosopography of Britain and France from the tenth to the twelfth century*, ed. K. S. B. Keats-Rohan (Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 1997), pp. 103-32.

Taillefer himself who terrorises his enemies, despite his juggling with his weapons as he rides,⁹ as his horse, which appears intent on swallowing the English:

Le cheval [od] gule bae
 vers les Engleis vint esleissié;
 Alquant quident estre mangié
 Pur le cheval que si baiot; (5288-91)

This behaviour, we are told, was taught to the horse by the 'juglëur' (l. 5292). On the one hand this forms a link to medieval legends of Alexander's horse, Bucephalos, being anthropophagous;¹⁰ on the other it reminds us of the numerous demonic Saracens who threaten to swallow Frankish warriors in *chansons de geste*.¹¹

The most surprising feature of Gaimar's presentation of the battle must be the fact that the name of the victorious commander is suppressed until after the battle is over. Only at line 5338 are we told (by the implication of paratactic juxtaposition) that having won the battle 'Li [quens] Willame ot le païs'.¹² The first reference we have to the Norman leader is in line 5313, where he is called 'li reis', but without the addition of his personal name, a

9. This feat is reminiscent of several comic *gabs* in *Le Pèlerinage de Charlemagne* in which various peers boast of virtuosic dexterity in handling weapons. In particular Turpin boasts of his ability to juggle golden balls while riding one horse and controlling two others: *Le Voyage de Charlemagne à Jérusalem et à Constantinople*, ed. Paul Aebischer, Textes Littéraires Français, 115 (Geneva and Paris, Droz, 1965), ll. 493-506.

10. The legend of Bucephalos as an eater of human flesh derives from Pseudo-Callisthenes; see D. J. A. Ross, 'Funny Name for a Horse: Bucephalus in Antiquity and the Middle Ages', *Bien Dire et Bien Apprendre*, 7 (1989), 51-76 (p. 52).

11. For instance Tabur de Canaloine, in *La Chanson de Guillaume*, ed. François Suard, Les Classiques Garnier (Paris, Bordas, 1991), ll. 3170-201, or Flohart, in *Aliscans*, ed. Claude Régnier, CFMA, 110-111 (Paris, Champion, 1990), ll. 6710-87. Saracen horses could also be anthropophagous, as is the case with Gadifer's horse in *Le Moniage Rainoart*, see *Le Moniage Rainoart I*, ed G. Bertin, SATF (Paris, Picard, 1973), ll. 6831 and 6870.

12. Bell's base MS actually has 'li reis Willame' at this point, which from one perspective is correct, even if the coronation has not yet confirmed the conquest of the crown. Gaimar appears to be passing straight on into William's legitimate rule and glossing over the difficulties of the accession. The adoption of the incorrect title of 'count' rather than 'duke' for William in *L* appears to reflect the influence of the epics of Guillaume d'Orange on the scribe of that MS.

usage repeated in lines 5317 and 5322. The lines in which these references occur deal with the contribution of Count Alain Fergant of Brittany to the Norman army, and represent another departure from ASC source material which distracts the reader's attention away from the events of the battle itself. Fergant's significance to Gaimar's intended audience was that his tomb was in Bury St Edmunds, and this local hero is obliquely given the honour of the victory ('Il e les autres [tant] ferirent / Que la bataille bien venquirent', ll. 5327-28). This again deflects attention away from Norman achievement and so allows the description of the battle to rise to an epico-tragic climax in the fall of the Saxon princes:

En [l'avesprer] turnent (sc. the English) en fuie,
 Maint cors remaint de l'aneme voie.
 Haralt remist e ses dous freres,
 Par eus sunt morz e fiz e peres,
 [Uncles], nevoz, de tuz lignages.
 Engleis cumprerent lur ultrages.
 Lefwine e Gert furent ocis.
 Li [quens] Willame ot le païs. (5331-38)

There are several points of interest in this closing passage of the battle narrative. Firstly the use of 'ultrages' (l. 5336) seems to be the first and only allusion in Gaimar to the Norman apologists' doctrine of Harold's criminality in opposing the invasion. However, *ultrage* can also have the meaning of 'excessive courage', a reading which, while indicating a tragic flaw similar to the *estoltie* of Roland and other epic heroes, would not imply guilt. The word is at best ambiguous, and leaves open the possibility of seeing William's victory (or at least Harold's defeat) as part of the *grant cuntraillie* predicted by the comet, a pendant to the disaster of Fulford, which contributed by depleting Harold's forces to the loss at Hastings. A similar ambiguity hangs over the juxtaposition 'remaint-remist' and the prepositional phrase 'par eus' in lines 5332-34. The first interpretation has to be that Harold 'remained on the field' (i.e. died), as other bodies remained void of their souls, and that it was on account of him and his brothers that so many members of English families were killed. However, the imprecision of the verb *remaindre/remanoir*, combined with the fact that *par* can mean 'by the hand of' and that the nationality of the dead *lignages* is not clearly indicated, also allows us to read lines 5333-35 as a kind of parenthesis describing Harold and his brothers holding the field after the others had fled, and cutting a swathe through the advancing Normans.¹³ This would subtly invite the audience to identify them with Roland,

13. Line 5336 could then be taken to imply that the English later suffered because of the brothers' excessive valour as the victorious Normans took revenge for their dead relatives.

Oliver and Turpin at Roncevaux, or perhaps Vivien and Girard at l'Archamp. Another omission, which we would suggest is also deliberate, creates an intriguing parallel between Harold and king Arthur. Although the deaths of Gyrth and Leofwine are specifically mentioned in line 5337, there is no such explicit reference to the death of Harold, which would allow the last Saxon king to be represented as one of those cultural heroes destined to return from some state of immortal sleep, or as a figure like Roland, who was perceived as not dead but 'translated'.¹⁴

It is not entirely clear why Gaimar should have constructed his retelling of Hastings in the way he did, and why he should have brought it to such an ambiguous conclusion. If Wace's version is broadly neutral and that of Benoît distinctly pro-Norman, it has to be said that Gaimar's is anti-Norman, at least to the extent that it consistently deflects attention away from the victors of Hastings and makes subtle use of the rhetoric of the *chansons de geste* to demonise them when their presence is unavoidable. It is hard to establish an ideological basis for this reading of events by reference to an intended audience amongst the Anglo-Norman nobility. Certainly Gaimar's following *ASC* partly accounts for the feeling that conquest by the Normans is not an event of transcendental import in this work. What emerges most clearly from the presentation of the events of 1066 in the *Estoire des Engleis*, however, is Gaimar's concern to align his portrait of Harold with a certain French literary archetype, presenting his reign as an epico-tragic trajectory from portent-laden beginnings through disaster to triumph and a heroic fall resonant with mythical possibilities.

If Gaimar presents Harold as an epico-tragic figure without placing too much emphasis on the Battle of Hastings itself, in Wace's *Roman de Rou* we find those priorities reversed.¹⁵ Wace not only provides us with the longest account of the battle of any of our three chroniclers but also offers a narration which dominates his own chronicle of the Dukes of Normandy. The battle and its immediate context, from the landfall of the Norman army in Sussex to the burial of the Saxon dead, occupy 2,507 lines (ll. 6465-8972), while the whole 'Affair of England' including events of Edward the Confessor's reign and ending with William the Conqueror's coronation covers 3,597 lines (ll. 5413-9010). Equally prominent in the *Rou* as a whole is the ducal reign (and subsequent royal reign) of William

14. The opening of the *Estoire des Engleis* refers to the succession of Constantin, but reminds us (ll. 33-46) that we are in fact concerned with the legacy of Arthur's reign. The myth of Harold's survival is discussed further below, p. 77 and note 69.

15. *Le Roman de Rou*, ed. A. J. Holden, 3 vols, SATF (Paris, Picard, 1970-73). Unless otherwise specified, line numbers refer to Part III of the text (vols II and III).

the Bastard: his life fills 6,472 lines (ll. 2869-9340).¹⁶ Events of William's career, together with those of his adversary Harold, are carefully orchestrated into a crescendo which reaches its climax on the battlefield on Saturday, 14 October 1066. Hastings becomes the centre of gravity of the entire work, occupying a disproportionate amount of the space allotted to what purports to be the history of all the Norman dukes,¹⁷ and is deliberately marked off from all the other battles narrated by Wace in terms of both length and the degree of detail provided.¹⁸ No explanation has ever been offered for this startling imbalance in the structure of the *Rou*. Our intention, therefore, is not to revisit recent discussions of Wace as a historian in general and as a chronicler of the Conquest in particular,¹⁹ but to explore possible reasons for his emphatic foregrounding of Hastings and the Conqueror through an analysis of the rhetorical means he deploys to present events and protagonists.

It is notable that Wace abandons the strict use of the Norman Latin chroniclers at the start of his account of the ducal reign of William the Conqueror and begins to exploit alongside them a number of insular sources, including some (possibly oral) that have

16. Given that the whole octosyllabic *Rou* is just 11,440 lines long, this means that the life of the Conqueror occupies 56.57% of the total text, the 'Affair of England' 31.44% and the Battle of Hastings 21.91%. Equally instructive is the fact that the Hastings campaign of October 1066 occupies 38.74% of the narrative of the life of the Conqueror. We have restricted our count to the octosyllabic part of the chronicle since Wace clearly signals a new 'programme' at the end of the 'Deuxième Partie' not only by changing the verse-form of his composition, abandoning dodecasyllabic *laissez*, but by including a new 'Prologue' starting with the famous lines 'Pur remembrer des ancesurs / les feiz e les diz e les murs' (ll. 1-2). It is also inappropriate to include in the count the prefatory material of the 'Chronique ascendante', which acts as a sort of 'Table des matières raisonnée' for the whole work. Our statistics are slightly different from those of Matthew Bennett, 'Poetry as History? The *Roman de Rou* of Wace as a Source for the Norman conquest', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, v (1983), 21-39 (p. 25), but we come to the same conclusion about Wace's perception of where the centre of gravity of his narrative lay.

17. Holden twice describes the conquest as the 'épisode central' or 'culminant' of the poem (III, 107 and 156). That Wace always intended Hastings to be the central focus of his work is clear from the fact that it is the only event included in the *Chronique Ascendante* for which a precise date is given (ll. 175-79; *Rou*, I, 9). According to Holden, the *Chronique* represents the original prologue to the work (III, 12); the foregrounding of the battle by means of a unique chronological reference invites the audience to see it as the single most important event in the whole narrative which is to follow.

18. The three other battles used as points of comparison for Benoît's account (see pp. 69-70 below) occupy 244, 187 and 425 lines respectively in Wace (ll. 808-1051, 3183-3369 and 3801-4226).

19. See Blacker, *The Faces of Time*, passim, and Jean Blacker-Knight, 'Wace's craft and his audience: historical truth, bias and patronage in the *Roman de Rou*', *Romance Quarterly*, xxxi (1984), 355-62; Matthew Bennett, 'Poetry as History?'; Elisabeth M. C. van Houts, 'The Adaptation of the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* by Wace and Benoît', in *Non Nova Sed Nove: Mélanges de civilisation médiévale dédiés à Willem Noomen*, ed. Martin Gosman and Jaap van Os (Groningen, Bouma's Boekhuis, 1984), pp. 115-25; Stephen Morillo, ed., *The Battle of Hastings, Sources and Interpretations* (Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 1996). Morillo rather unfairly dismisses Wace as derivative and unreliable (p. xxiii).

remained unidentified.²⁰ It is also notable that, as in his account of the reign of Richard I of Normandy, he blends rhetoric drawn from the vernacular epic with the Latin scholastic rhetoric which is more frequently the mark of his writing.²¹ The systematic exploitation of doubling — insular contrasted with continental views, popular opposed to clerical versions, epic balancing classical rhetoric — is the principal device that Wace uses to amplify his version of the Conquest.²² All aspects of this *amplificatio* are announced in the lengthy narratorial intervention (ll. 5827-332) which follows the account of King Robert of France's second abortive invasion of Normandy, and which forms an inscribed prologue to the narration of how Duke William of Normandy became a king himself. Wace introduces a complex *abreviatio* formula with a repetition *cum gradatione* into which he also weaves firstly the literary equivalent of an 'author portrait',²³ and then a balancing portrait of his subject:

20. *Rou*, III, 140-41. Cf van Houts, 'The Memory of 1066' and 'Wace as Historian'. R. H. C. Davis and Marjorie Chibnall point out that William of Poitiers acts as a channel of transmission of oral traditions from Hastings to both Wace and Benoît; see *The Gesta Guillelmi of William of Poitiers* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. xxxii and xliii.

21. For Wace's change of rhetorical stance and a possible explanation of it during the section of the *Rou* dealing with Richard I see Philip E. Bennett, 'L'épique dans l'historiographie anglo-normande: Gaimar, Wace, Jordan Fantosme', in *Aspects de l'épopée romane: mentalités, idéologies, intertextualités*, ed. Hans van Dijk and Willem Noomen (Groningen, Egbert Forsten, 1995), pp. 321-29 (especially pp. 327-28).

22. Wace's use of repetition is discussed by Laurie Scott Tomchak, 'Wace's Work: Patronage, Repetition and Translation in the *Roman de Rou*' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of California, Irvine, 1983), but doubling as a structuring principle is not explored.

23. The term, borrowed from codicology, is clearly inappropriate in terms of manuscript production in the twelfth, or even in the early thirteenth, century, despite isolated examples such as the portrait of Marie de France at the beginning of the *Fables* in MS Arsenal 3142. However, the role of Wace's excursus into autobiography, equally anomalous in the mid-twelfth century, functions in the same way as the portraits of authors regularly inserted at the start of works or sections of works in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. See, for example, the double miniature of Christine de Pizan composing and building the 'City of Ladies' in MS BN fr 607 (described in Christine de Pizan, *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames*, ed. Maureen Cheyney Curnow, PhD, Vanderbilt University, 2 Vols (UMI, 1975) I, pp. 354-57), Gaston Phébus seated surrounded by his huntsmen at the start of *Le Livre de la chasse* (see Gaston Phébus, *Le Livre de la chasse*, ed. Gunnar Tilander (Kurlshahm, 1971) p. 47), and Froissart collecting material on his journey to Béarn (F.S. Shears, *Froissart, Chronicler and Poet* (London, 1930) frontispiece).

Longue est la geste des Normanz
 e a metre grieve en romanz.
 Se l'on demande qui ço dist,
 qui ceste estoire en romanz fist,
 jo di e dirai que jo sui
 Wace de l'isle de Gersui. (5297-302)

Longue est l'estoire ainz qu'ele fint,
 comme Guillaume reis devint,
 e de l'enor qui(l) li avint,
 e qui sa terre enprés lui tint. (5319-22)

Chevalier fu proz e corteis,
 par ses terres mist bones leis,
 justise e pais tint fermement,
 ou que il pout, a povre gent;
 onques ne pout amer larron
 ne compaignie de felon. (5327-32)

The move from 'geste' in l. 5297 (with its connotations of ancestral legend or founding myth) to 'estoire' in l. 5319 (implying authenticity in the 'Classical', clerical, tradition) is doubled by the progression from 'Normanz' to 'Guillaume', while the repetition of the formula 'Longue est' introducing each section underlines the chronological manipulation whereby the events leading to the duke's elevation to royalty are given as much weight as the rest of the whole story of the Normans.

At the beginning of the 'Affair of England' section, immediately following this passage, Wace presents as a diptych the founding of two abbeys by William in Caen and the founding of Westminster by Edward the Confessor (ll. 5333-542). The initial link between two rulers engaged in specific spiritual enterprises is strengthened by the reference to William establishing the Truce of God in his domains through oaths sworn by his vassals at his foundation in Caen, which recalls the terms in which Edward was introduced into the narration some six hundred lines earlier: 'Ewart fu gentilz et corteis,/ pais establi e bones leis' (ll. 4739-40). Wace also notes that as a result of the swearing of the Truce, the church was popularly known as 'Sainte Pais' (ll. 5386-89), or as 'Toz Sainz' on account of the large number of relics William assembled for the occasion (ll. 5383-85). The 'hinge' of the diptych is provided by a portrait of Earl Godwin, enemy of the Normans and a constant

threat to Edward, who died choking on bread blessed by the Confessor (ll. 5413-56). This reminder of Godwin's treachery reinforces the parallel between the two pious and peace-loving men whose activities frame the résumé of his life and death. Thus, at the outset of this capital episode in his history, Wace establishes a method which invokes popular tradition alongside canonical truth and uses parallel and contrastive echoes to invite an interpretation of the text by the audience.

This use of doubling is most prominent, and most frequently commented on, in the context of Harold's visit to Normandy and his swearing of an oath. Wace intercalates the 'orthodox' Norman version that Edward sent Harold to promise William the throne into an 'Anglo-Saxon' version of the event, in which Harold travels to Normandy against Edward's advice, is manoeuvred into swearing an oath and tricked into swearing on more solemn relics than he had bargained for.²⁴ The effect of introducing this alternative testimony would seem at first blush to be to undermine the credibility of William's claim to the throne of England, and yet it can also be seen to continue the doubling of the abbey scenes by underlining the astuteness shared by Edward and William. Edward advises Harold not to go to Normandy because he realises that Harold is no match for William diplomatically, and is likely to be manipulated by him (ll. 5589-94). The 'trick' itself, which is often seen as negating Harold's oath and turning William into a villain, also permits of an alternative reading. Harold agrees to swear the oath on a 'filatiere', which would itself have contained some kind of relic. All William does is to place this reliquary above a hidden container holding many more relics, of whose presence Harold is not aware, in an attempt to make the oath more binding.²⁵ The implication may be no more than that William knew that Harold would try to renege on his oath (which he does), and was shrewdly trying to forestall him. Moreover, by recalling the oath-taking at Caen, the reference to the great mass of relics assembled by William reminds the equally astute reader that William stands for peace,

24. In strict terms no such version exists: *ASC* simply does not record such a trip in any of its recensions, and all the twelfth-century insular versions (including Eadmer and Simeon of Durham) should strictly be considered Anglo-Norman. This is, of course, not to say that they did not transmit 'English' traditions otherwise not consigned to writing or which have been lost to us.

25. The importance which people attributed to the sheer number of relics in validating an oath is illustrated by King Mark's assembling all the relics of Cornwall for his wife, Iseut, to swear her disculpating oath on in Beroul's *Tristan* (*The Roman de Tristan by Beroul*, ed. A. Ewert (Oxford, Blackwell, 1939, repr. 1967) ll. 4130-36). This episode also famously demonstrates that manipulating such rituals to personal advantage was not considered criminal provided the ends were justified.

while Harold, like his father, does not.²⁶ This technique of creating a space in which alternative interpretations of the same event can co-exist within a single narrative is also applied in the description of Edward the Confessor's death. Wace includes a scene, probably derived from the tradition represented by Eadmer and Simeon of Durham, in which the dying king agrees to his barons' request to name Harold as his successor, but presents it in such a way as to open up the possibility that the death-bed grant did not reflect Edward's true wishes:

Donc se torna li reis, si dist
 — ne sai se par boen coer le fist —
 «Or(e) facent Engleis duc ou rei,
 Heraut ou altre, jo l'otrei.» (5819-22)

The doubling of classically-derived modes of composition with allusions to vernacular epic occurs at several points in the presentation of the battle of Hastings and its prelude. A particularly complex passage concerns the double scouting expedition (ll. 6985-776 and 7077-110) which is intercalated into the double set of negotiations between William and Harold (ll. 6741-895 and 7131-312). While the negotiations form a frame for the rest of the preliminaries of the battle, this frame is itself hinged round an episode in which Harold and Gyrth assess the Norman forces (ll. 6973-7054). The idea of both armies trying to estimate each other's strength during the night is present in most of Wace's sources, but the long development in which the two brothers set out at daybreak to view the enemy forces for themselves is almost certainly an invention of Wace.²⁷ It is this development which makes explicit use of material borrowed from the *chanson de geste*.

26. This is underlined by Harold's offering to give battle on a Saturday (ll. 1. 6837-38), which marks him out as a breaker of the Truce of God, and exculpates William, who is thus cast as fighting a justified, defensive, action. None the less, on the night before the battle the Normans make a specific vow to fast on all future Saturdays in penance for giving battle on that day (ll. 7343-48), so that their innocence in the matter of breaking the Truce is equally double marked. David Rollo adopts a much more univocal reading of Harold's oath in Wace, whom he sees as privileging Eadmer over the Norman historians, thereby subverting the Norman/Angevin claim to legitimate dominion; see *Historical Fabrication, Ethnic Fable and French Romance in Twelfth-Century England*, The Edward C. Armstrong Monographs on Medieval Literature, 9 (Lexington, French Forum, Publishers, 1998), pp. 155-61. His reading does not take account of the implications of doubling and internal echoes such as this; moreover, the Anglo-Saxon bias which he detects is itself subverted by Wace's equivocal presentation of the deathbed grant (see below).

27. *Rou*, III, 153, although Holden's preference is for a lost source.

The scouting expedition itself is not necessarily epic, although the motif of the commander (or his lieutenant) surveying the enemy army does occur in a number of poems;²⁸ rather, it is the way the episode is constructed and linked to surrounding passages that makes this unhistorical interpolation such a clearly epic feature. Already in London Harold has clashed with his brother Gyrrh over who should command the army against William, declaring that he must do it himself, in terms which recall the boast of Tedbalt de Burges in *La Chanson de Guillaume* that he will confront Deramed's army and equal Guillaume in prowess (ll. 6951-58).²⁹ The end of the scouting expedition re-inforces this parallel:

«Frere, » dist [Heraut], «mult a ci gent . . .
 Ker me dites, que me loez
 de si grant gent com vos veez . . .
 jo voil a Londres retourner
 e graignor gent voil assenbler.
 — Heraut, » dist Guert, «malvais coart! . . .
 quant jol vos dis vos nel volsistes,
 ne mei ne altre en creïstes,
 or le volez e jo nel voil,
 trop tost avez perdu l'orgueil;
 d'iço que vos avez veü
 avez le hardement perdu.
 Se vos arriere torniez
 l'en direit que vos fuiriez ...» (7010-36)

28. See, for example, *La Chanson de Roland*, ed I. Short, *Lettres Gothiques 4524* (Paris, Librairie Générale Française, 1990, ll. 1017-38 (Oliver surveys the enemy); ll. 2977-86 (scouts bring Charles news of Baligant's army); *La Chanson de Guillaume*, ed. cit., ll. 160-91 (Tedbalt surveys the enemy); *Girart de Roussillon*, ed. Mary Hackett, trans. Micheline de Combarieu du Grés and Gérard Gouiran, *Lettres Gothiques 4534* (Paris, Librairie Générale Française, 1993), ll. 5797-810 (Aenri and Auberic survey Girart's army and report to Charles Martel).

29. The boast occurs in *La Chanson de Guillaume*, ll. 89-93; it is actually Esturmi who urges his uncle 'Al pris Willame te poez faire tenir' (l. 69).

The epic allusion is itself double, for while the reference to a boast made the previous day in another town, to the commander's cowardice in the face of the enemy and its effect on the army all belong to the dispute between Tedbald and Vivien at the start of the *Chanson de Guillaume*,³⁰ there are also parallels with the 'Horn Scenes' in *La Chanson de Roland*,³¹ particularly with the second of the confrontations between Roland and Oliver, in which Oliver specifically uses the argument that Roland had rejected his advice on the earlier occasion.³²

One result of Wace's epic structuring is to create a dual portrait of Harold, who is associated simultaneously with the ignominy of Tedbald and the doomed heroism of Roland. For the rest of the episode he and Gyrth (to the detriment of the third historical brother, Leofwine, who is all but expunged from Wace's version in the interests of artistic re-alignment) act as a regular pair of heroic companions from the *chanson de geste*, inviting comparison with Vivien and Girart, Raoul and Bernier, Roland and Oliver. Nevertheless, the impression remains of Harold as a flawed leader, an impression reinforced at the very end of the episode where his death is recorded before that of Gyrth (in the epic warriors usually die in strict hierarchical order, with the hero, or main antagonist, dying last). Harold's demotion is also implicit in the fact that his brother's death is attributed personally to the enemy leader (ll. 8819-28).³³

30. *La Chanson de Guillaume*, ll. 150-201.

31. *La Chanson de Roland*, ll. 1017-1123 and 1691-1752.

32. *La Chanson de Roland*, ll. 1708 and 1716.

33. It is doubtless significant that the only other source for Hastings to mention this is the *Carmen de Hastingæ Prælio* (see *Rou*, III, 159-60). Wace actually blurs chronology again in reporting Gyrth's death, which is generally believed to have occurred early in the battle (see Stephen Morillo, *Warfare under the Anglo-Norman Kings* (Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 1994), pp. 166-67), by framing his reference to it with two references to Harold's death and the fall of the English standard. It is also notable that his assertion that Gyrth sees the massacre of the English, and of his kin, and 'fuir s'en volt, mais ne poeit, / ker la presse tos tens creisseit' (ll. 8823-24) blends possible reminiscences of the *Roland* with a quite specific reference to the situation of Vivien and his last handful of warriors (*La Chanson de Guillaume*, ll. 606-20).

This use of epic structuring provides us with one protagonist, Harold, who carries some ambiguous markers, so that it is difficult to tell whether he is to be perceived as hero or villain. Wace adopts similar strategies, but this time without the ambiguities, to identify his other protagonist William. Doubling can be seen here, too, in that a number of subtle parallels with the classical epic, in the form of the *Aeneid* (probably filtered through the vernacular *Eneas*), can be found alongside more obvious allusions to the *chanson de geste*.³⁴ These latter include passages which clearly depend on vernacular epic technique, such as the harangue given by William to his troops before the battle (although examples of this are also common in Classical epic and historiography); their reply 'in chorus' of 'Ja n'en verrez un coarder' (l. 7452), which recalls *Roland* l. 1107, and the sequence of 'unités similaires' in which the exploits of Norman warriors are recounted (ll. 8295-668), leading into a pair of 'unités parallèles' announcing William's personal valour (ll. 8669-788).³⁵ Wace's account also reads like a *Chanson de Hastings* in that it focuses on the fate of collectivities, and presents the events of 1066 as a conflict between nations rather than the pursuing of an individual's claim to an inheritance which has been denied him (which is how Benoît will choose to deal with them).³⁶ Terms which denote national groupings ('Engleis', 'Normant', 'Franceis') occur with astonishing regularity throughout the description of the battle (on average, every 9.8 lines), and the two sides are never referred to by paraphrases such as 'li home al duc' or 'cels al rei' which would identify them as supporters of individuals and not as nations. The foregrounding of the concept of collective

34. These include the unexplained loss of two boats from the Duke's fleet (ll. 6461-64), which appears to be a reminiscence of *Eneas* ll. 242-56 and 663-70; the destruction by William of his ships as soon as he lands in England 'que li coart ne revertissent / ne par les nes ne s'en foissent' (ll. 6597-98), which recalls the episode in *Eneas* in which Turnus orders the Trojans' boats to be burned so that 'Ja li coart . . . ne nos porront par mer foïr' (ll. 4872-74), and Harold's offer to rebuild William's ships (ll. 6831-34), although nothing in the text suggests that he knows of their destruction, and to give William an unspecified amount of his own treasure, which echoes the offer made by Latinus to replace Eneas's ships burnt by Turnus and to provide the Trojans with considerable riches should they wish to go elsewhere (*Eneas*, ll. 6596-607). All line references are to *Eneas, roman du XII^e siècle*, ed. J.J. Salverda de Grave, CFMA (Paris, Champion, 1925). On the importance of Aeneas as an archetype for the structuring of both historiography and romance, see Francine Mora-Lebrun, *L'Enéide médiévale et la naissance du roman* (Paris, PUF, 1994).

35. The notion of 'unités similaires' is derived from Jean Rychner's concept of 'laisses similaires'; see *La Chanson de geste, essai sur l'art épique des jongleurs* (Genève, Droz, 1955) pp. 93-107.

36. Cf Matthew Bennett, 'Poetry as History?', p. 25: 'clearly Hastings represents to Wace the greatest of the Norman 'gestes' about which he wrote'.

vengeance just before the battle extends this epic perspective still further. William's decision to invade England is initially presented as a simple act of revenge for Harold's perjury (ll. 5959-62), but by the time the duke addresses his troops on the morning of 14 October, he and they have become the instruments of a broader desire for justice, avenging all the wrongs committed by the English against Normans past and present, their allies, and even the Danes (ll. 7403-41).

Parallels are also established with specific *chansons de geste*. When William tries to find someone to carry the standard which the pope has given him, he is met with repeated refusals in a scene which is uncannily similar to the opening episode of *Aymeri de Narbonne*.³⁷ However, the real exploitation of *chanson de geste* to valorise William involves the specific invocation of Roland and the Battle of Roncevaux. The account of Hastings proper is doubly framed, firstly by the accounts of William's arming and disarming, and then by references to Roland. The narration of William's arming is intended to demonstrate that the duke relies on faith in God and his own rightful cause, and is not subject to superstition.³⁸ The scene of his disarming, while drawing attention to his personal valour as revealed in the extent of the damage to his armour, helmet and shield, is principally designed to provide a context for the reference to Roland contained in the exclamation of his admiring barons:

«Tel bier ne fu,
qui si poinsist ne si ferist
ne qui d'armes tel fais soffrist;
pois Roland ne pois Olivier
n'out en terre tel chevalier.» (8932-36)

37. The extant version of the poem by Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube dates from the early 13th century, but both Gaston Paris and the poem's editor were convinced that it was based, probably quite closely, on a much earlier *chanson*: see *Aymeri de Narbonne*, ed. Louis Demaison, 2 vols, SATF (Paris, Firmin Didot, 1887), I, xciii-xcv. There is another curious link between the two texts in the story of a nobleman and his entourage who use their cloaks to sit on at a foreign court and then leave them behind when they depart, declaring proudly that they are not in the habit of taking their seats with them. In *Aymeri* this story is associated with the hero; Wace attributes it to Robert the Magnificent. This may suggest that the anecdote figured in an earlier (oral?) version of the *chanson*, from which Wace borrowed it. It does not figure in any of the written sources of the *Rou* (see Holden, III, 139).

38. This is the 'omen' of the hauberk presented back-to-front, which is widely reported by chroniclers; see *Rou*, III, 155.

If this motif, commonly found in twelfth-century epic and romance,³⁹ links the Duke to the epic hero by explicit reference, the description of Taillefer singing of the Battle of Roncevaux at the beginning of the engagement does so by symbolic association. The most significant feature of Wace's rewriting of the Taillefer incident is not just that it links the name of the warrior who claimed the first blow (and who displays great dexterity in juggling with his spear) with the singing of a version of the *Roland* before the battle, but that he has Taillefer sing the poem specifically for the Duke, not for the army as a whole:⁴⁰

Taillefer, qui mult bien chantout,
 sor un cheval qui tost alout,
 devant le duc alout chantant
 de Karlemaigne e de Rollant,
 e d'Olivier e des vassals
 qui morurent en Rencesvals. (8013-18)

This actually endows the Duke with a double epic heritage, since he is associated not only with the heroes of Roncevaux and the victorious emperor who avenged treachery and perjury, but also, by having a personal jongleur to sing before him of his illustrious predecessors, with his near namesake Guillaume d'Orange.⁴¹

To what, though, does this complex construction of doublings and framings tend, with its mix of learned and vernacular epic sources, its blend of exploited chronicle and personal invention? Is it merely the well-worn process of *amplificatio* taken to extremes? The consistent use of doubling at all levels of composition suggests rather that we should adopt a 'dualist' reading of Wace's account of the Battle of Hastings, and see it as an exercise in typological writing, in which William the Conqueror's reign as Duke and King prefigures Henry II's reign as Count, Duke and King, and the Conquest of 1066 prefigures

39. See, for example, *Raoul de Cambrai*, ed. Sarah Kay (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992), ll. 3370-73; Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier au Lion (Yvain)*, ed. Mario Roques, CFMA, 89 (Paris, Champion, nd, repr. 1965), ll. 3229-33; Renaut de Beaujeu, *Le Bel Inconnu*, ed. G. Perrie Williams, CFMA, 38 (Paris, Champion, 1929), ll. 3036-42.

40. For more details of the way in which Wace's account differs from that found in other sources, see Holden, *Rou*, III, 156-57.

41. *La Chanson de Guillaume*, ll. 1257-74.

the accession of Henry in 1154. Such a reading is in fact signposted in the 'author portrait' discussed above, which ends with an account of how the king had helped to secure a prebend at Bayeux for the author. The final couplet leaves readers in no doubt as to which king should be in their minds at this point:

Del rei Henri segont vos di,
nevo Henri, pere Henri. (5317-18)⁴²

The triple invocation of the name of Henry clearly puts the Conqueror's biography which immediately follows it under the aegis of the Plantagenet.

Such figural composition was not difficult to maintain while Wace was dealing with William's ducal career: contrasting William's virtues with the vicious perfidy of rebels and enemies, particularly the King of France, provided a ready vehicle for suggesting parallels with the political and personal situation of Henry II.⁴³ Difficulties arose, however, with the conflict between William and Harold Godwinson. Since Harold was half Anglo-Saxon, and the last Anglo-Saxon king of England, and since Henry himself had Saxon blood and wished to be seen as the legitimate successor to the throne of England, Wace might have risked alienating his patron if he had simply demonised Harold, as his predecessors the Norman apologists had done.⁴⁴ He seems instead to have opted for a strategy of presenting Harold in a double light, which explains why he was defeated by William, but at the same time allows us to see him as perhaps only slightly less worthy, and only slightly less in the right, than the Conqueror.⁴⁵ Unfortunately such figural ambiguity leaves open the possibil-

42. 'Nevo' is here used in the Latin sense of 'nepos' = 'grandson'.

43. See Matthew Bennett, 'Poetry as History?', pp. 32-33 for a detailed list of the parallels between the two men's careers.

44. Henry's great-grandmother Margaret, wife of Malcolm Canmore King of Scots, was a kinswoman of Edward the Confessor's half-brother Edmund Ironside, and claimed to be able to trace her ancestry back to the legendary West Saxon king Cerdic.

45. This strategy can also be seen at work in the passage in which Wace introduces Harold for the first time (ll. 5566-82). Whereas other sources stress that Harold was the son of the legendary traitor Earl Godwin, Wace actually names Godwin only as Harold's mother's husband, in a passage designed to emphasise Harold's links with the Danish royal family. These links are themselves subject to a little judicious polishing: Wace presents Harold's mother Gytha as the sister of Swein Forkbeard and aunt of King Cnut, whereas in reality she was the sister of Cnut's sister's husband Wulf.

ity that Henry's claim to be legitimate King of England may be seen as not proven and not beyond challenge. Wace's decision to include Edward the Confessor's deathbed grant, for instance, could have angered Henry because of the parallels which might have been drawn between Harold and his own predecessor King Stephen. Henry I had made it clear during his lifetime that he wanted the succession to pass to his daughter Matilda, Henry's mother. When Stephen had himself anointed and crowned with almost indecent haste after Henry's death, he justified his actions by saying that the king had changed his mind on his deathbed, and had appointed him as monarch instead.⁴⁶ Any hint that Harold's seizing the throne in similar circumstances might have been legitimate could only have played into the hands of the rival house of Blois, who continued to regard Henry as a usurper.

Wace tells us at the end of the *Roman de Rou* that he did not complete the work because the task of writing a vernacular history of the dukes of Normandy was taken away from him and given to 'Maistre Beneeit' (ll. 11419-24). He does not say why the king changed his mind, and his reticence has led to much speculation as to what lay behind Henry's decision.⁴⁷ The suggestion that Wace was simply taking too long to fulfil the commission does not explain why the king asked Benoît to start the whole project again from scratch, rather than to take up from where Wace had got to and provide a speedy conclusion.⁴⁸ The real causes were undoubtedly political, and our analysis suggests that the unforeseen political implications of typological writing should be added to the list of potential explanations. We have also highlighted two other aspects of Wace's compositional strategy which should be considered as possible factors contributing to the monarch's displeasure.

One of Henry's aims in supporting the writing of a history of the dukes of Normandy was surely to create an authoritative vernacular narrative which would culminate in a glorious account of his own achievements. However, as we have seen, Wace makes the conquest of England so unmistakably the high point of Norman history that Henry's reign — if Wace had been allowed to get that far — could only ever have appeared as an anti-climax. The borrowed glory of the monarch who prefigured him would have been no compensation for the overshadowing of events of Henry's own life. But there is an even more disconcerting aspect to Wace's poem than this. His doubling of written testimonies and his refusal to give precedence to written sources over oral ones works to undermine the

46. See R. H. C. Davis, *King Stephen* (London, Longman, 1977), pp. 15-18.

47. Some of the possibilities are summarised by Jean-Guy Gouttebroze, 'Pourquoi congédier un historiographe? Henri II Plantagenêt et Wace', *Romania*, cxii (1991), 289-311, but his list is not complete, as he does not appear to have read Matthew Bennett's article, which makes further plausible suggestions.

48. According to Holden, Wace had begun work on the *Rou* as early as 1160, but was still writing the third part after 1174.

concept of scriptural authority which sanctions his own project and that of other chroniclers and *romanciers* who take the past as their subject matter. The Prologue to Part III of the *Rou* repeatedly emphasises the importance of written records, without which events and personalities of the past would be lost:

Si escripture ne fust feite
 e puis par clers litte e retraite,
 mult fussent choses ubliées
 ki de viez tens sunt trespassees. (7-10)

Bien entend e cunuis e sai
 que tuit murrunt e clerc e lai,
 e que mult ad curte duree
 enprés la mort lur renumee
 si par clerc nen est mis en livre;
 ne poet par el durer ne vivre. (137-42)

This profession of faith in written records reflects developments in Chancery practice under Henry II,⁴⁹ but contradicts Wace's own use of oral material to construct his history. It also sets him in opposition to Walter Map, who advocated oral witness as a source for historical composition.⁵⁰ None the less, if writing is the only guarantor of continuity and truth, what is the audience to make of a text which refuses to tell them where the truth lies about certain aspects of the Norman Conquest? Wace's intention may well have been partly, as Blacker implies, to establish his credibility as an impartial historian by drawing attention to the problems posed by dealing with a multiplicity of sources.⁵¹ In practice,

49. See M.T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, Blackwell, 1993).

50. Van Houts, 'The Memory of 1066', p. 178.

51. See *The Faces of Time*, pp. 35 and 102-04. On one occasion, Wace demonstrates the interpretive reasoning by means of which such problems can be resolved. Noting that some sources say that Harold's forces were less numerous than William's, he suggests that this view derives from a desire to provide a simple explanation for the king's defeat; his own view, based on other sources, is that William's forces were not superior in number, but the combination of better trained men, mounted knights and archers proved decisive (ll. 7781-90).

however, the doubling of sources and repeated professions of ignorance by the author/narrator have the effect of subverting his own authority as clerkly mediator between the Latin tradition and the vernacular courtly audience.⁵² If the borrowing of elements from the *chansons de geste* allows Wace to create a compelling narrative of the battle itself, his exposition of the reasons why the battle took place is marked by a fundamental ambiguity which leaves the reader unsure what to believe.⁵³ This, taken with the fact that Wace had experimented with two different compositional modes, flirting alternately with vernacular epic and classicising styles, may have led Henry to realise that he had a better chance of an ideologically acceptable, and stylistically coherent, history from the pen of the author of the *Roman de Troie*.

Benoît de Sainte Maure proved to be more than capable of providing the revisionist history which Henry needed in the form of his massive *Chronique des Ducs de Normandie*,⁵⁴ although he, too, ultimately failed to bring the narrative up to his own day. His enthusiastically partisan account of the character and achievements of the earliest dukes clearly indicates that he saw his brief in terms of panegyric rather than impartial historiography.⁵⁵ The sheer length of the *Chronique* (44,544 lines in the Fahlin edition) also suggests that he was determined to leave no stone unturned in setting a true (i.e. flattering) picture of the Normans before the lay public. Given that overall he expands similar material to Wace into a work nearly three times as long as his predecessor's, we might reasonably expect his account of the battle to rival Wace's in comprehensiveness and detail, without there being

52. Statements beginning 'ne sai' are the commonest form of authorial/narratorial intervention in the *Rou* as a whole.

53. Blacker goes so far as to describe his composite version of events leading up to Hastings as a 'distressing jumble' (*The Faces of Time*, p. 104), and comments elsewhere that 'Wace's fellow historians might have found it useful to know that there were at least two versions of [...] events, but his non-scholarly lay audience would most likely have appreciated a single, straightforward version, preferably the Norman one': see Jean Blacker, "'La geste est grande, longue et grieve a translater': History for Henry II", *Romance Quarterly*, 37 (1990), 387-96 (p. 391).

54. *Chronique des Ducs de Normandie par Benoît*, ed. Carin Fahlin, 3 vols (Uppsala and Geneva, Almqvist & Wiksells and Droz, 1951-1967). The phrase 'revisionist history' is taken from Blacker, *The Faces of Time*, p. 185. Benoît based his account of Hastings on 'politically correct' sources, principally Robert of Torigni's interpolated edition of William of Jumièges (see *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis, and Robert of Torigni*, ed. and trans. Elisabeth M. C. van Houts, 2 vols (Oxford, Clarendon, 1992 & 1995), I, xciv), and William of Poitiers. Benoît's preference for Robert's version of the *Gesta* over that of Orderic (the version probably used by Wace) may be another indication of his desire to please his patron: Henry had known Robert personally since 1147 at least, and followed his career with interest, eventually being presented with a copy of the final edition of the *Gesta* by the author himself in 1184. See Elisabeth M. C. van Houts, 'Le roi et son historien: Henri II Plantagenêt et Robert de Torigni', *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale*, 37 (1994), 115-118.

55. *The Faces of Time*, pp. 120-21.

the same danger of its displacing interest away from other significant moments in the story. The reality is rather different, however. Benoît's narration of the Battle of Hastings certainly has a much more emphatically pro-Norman slant to it than Wace's, but it is nowhere near as prominent nor as extensive as the account in the *Roman de Rou*.

In the *Chronique* the Battle of Hastings is clearly defined as an episode, using the same techniques which Benoît adopts to mark out other divisions of the narrative.⁵⁶ The previous episode (the establishment of the Norman Kingdoms in Italy and Sicily) ends with a precise dating (ll. 38720-24) and an authorial/narratorial intervention (ll. 38725-32) indicating the intention to return to the main thread of the narrative — the careers of the dukes of Normandy proper — and recount how William the Conqueror won 'la terre e le reiaume' from Harold. This phrase stresses the completeness of William's victory: he won both land *and* sovereignty. The transitional passage is entirely characteristic of Benoît's use of interventions to signpost structural divisions in both the *Chronique* and the *Roman de Troie*. It ends with a truth statement ('J'en retrairai la verité' l. 38732) which could be seen as entirely conventional; on the other hand, the existence of a rival vernacular version which is markedly different from his own might suggest that Benoît is making a particular claim here to be seen as presenting the authentic story of the battle.⁵⁷ The closure of the episode is marked again by a precise chronological reference (ll. 39905-10) plus a reiteration of the completeness of the Conqueror's victory ('...le rei Heraut fu ocis/ E le renne pris e conquis', ll. 39909-10).

The episode of the Battle of Hastings thus consists of 1,188 lines (2.7% of the total length of the *Chronique*), and is only just over a third of the length of Wace's account of the same events. It can be subdivided into two main sections: the preliminaries (ll. 38733-39334), which include the death of Edward the Confessor, Harold's usurpation of the crown, Tostig's alliance with William the Conqueror, the Breton rebellion and William's arrival in England; and the battle itself (ll. 39336-39910), preceded by Harold's return to London and mustering of his army. The battle scene itself therefore occupies only 575 lines (1.3% of the total work). It is interesting to compare this with some of the other big battle scenes in the *Chronique*: Rollo's siege of Chartres occupies 864 lines (ll. 7339-8202); the battle of Rouen which pits Richard I against Louis of France and his ally Othon of Germany occupies 662 lines (ll. 20751-21412); the battle of Val-ès-Dunes between William the Conqueror and rebels led by his cousin Gui occupies 684 lines (ll. 35465-

56. There is a division in the MSS at l.38733; MS B has the rubric 'Si cum li dux Guillaume conquest le reiaume d'Engleterre contre le rei Heraut'.

57. Benoît certainly knew the *Rou*, and may well have had a copy to hand when he was writing parts of the *Chronique*, at least: see Blacker, *The Faces of Time*, p.119 note 103 for some of the evidence.

36148). In terms of the space allocated to descriptions of battles, there is no attempt here to distinguish William's conquest of England from other important campaigns to defend or extend Norman territory. The framing of the battle with authorial interventions and/or chronological references identical in form to those used in other episodes also works against its being perceived as either pivotal or climactic. Hastings is presented here as one event among many within the flow of history, in a compartmentalised narrative which is much closer in structural terms to the episodic chronicle of Gaimar than it is to the neo-epic of Wace.

This difference of approach to the structuring of the Battle of Hastings raises further questions about Wace's and Benoît's respective perceptions of the event in relation to the political context in which they were working. Although Wace's account is not entirely pro-Norman, and may have fallen wide of the mark in another respect by being disproportionately long, we can still see evidence of a desire to flatter Henry II in the decision to make his ancestor's conquest of England the centrepiece of the work. Benoît's approach is more puzzling, particularly for an author who is clearly not averse to eulogy. Why should a writer so notoriously prolix as he give so little space to one of the most important battles the Normans ever fought? One answer might be that Benoît's account involves a more subtle form of flattery than Wace's, and one more closely attuned to the literary-political aspirations of his patron.

As we have seen, there was ample justification in the two men's careers for Henry II's contemporaries to view him as a second William the Conqueror. There was, however, one crucial difference between them. Whereas William enforced his claim to the English throne by invasion and conquest, Henry's accession was finally achieved through negotiation rather than by force, and without the dethroning of a reigning monarch.⁵⁸ In this context, glorifying the Battle of Hastings could have been politically counter-productive, in the sense that it might have focused attention on William's status as a conqueror rather than as the legitimate ruler of England, and so have encouraged some members of the audience to view his great-grandson in the same light. Benoît's strategy of not foregrounding the

58. He did cross the Channel with an army in January 1153 and encountered Stephen's forces at Wallingford, but a truce was brokered before any fighting could take place. The timely death of Stephen's son and heir Eustace in August of that year paved the way for an agreement according to which Stephen recognised Henry's hereditary right to the throne, and appointed him as his successor. Fortunately for Henry, Stephen himself died in October the following year. The circumstances of Henry's accession provided another curious parallel between himself and his great-grandfather: William's crossing of the Channel in 1066 had been delayed for six weeks by contrary winds which kept his fleet landlocked at Dives-sur-Mer and St. Valéry-sur-Somme; when Henry attempted the same crossing in 1154 to claim his kingdom, he had to spend four weeks in Barfleur waiting for a favourable wind (see Richard Mortimer, *Angevin England 1154-1258* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1994), p. 6).

Battle of Hastings in relation to other episodes in the *Chronique* may well represent a deliberate attempt to present the Conquest (and its twelfth-century sequel) as one non-controversial succession among many in the evolution of a successful dynasty, and, as such, a part of the natural order of things.

There are other ways, too, in which Benoît's Battle of Hastings is made to blend into the overall story of the dukes of Normandy, and to appear as an inevitable part of a pre-ordained plan. The account of events leading up to the battle is marked by an insistent rhetoric of loyalty, in which Harold's perfidy and William's 'just cause' are emphasised through repetition of lexical items from the two opposing semantic groupings of truth/fidelity/justice and untruth/treachery/injustice.⁵⁹ In the 1,188 lines occupied by the narration of the battle, these terms occur singly or in clusters on thirty-seven separate occasions; in ten instances the positive terms are associated with Duke William and his supporters, while there are no less than eleven passages in which the negative vocabulary is applied to Harold. At one point Harold's defeat is explicitly linked to his failure to keep his word to William, as the author-narrator pauses to comment on Harold's leaving his young brother with William as a hostage:

Ce ne sai pas ne ne vei mie
 S'il pensoct ja la felonie,
 Quant il le laissa en tenance,
 Quer unc ne li tint convenance
 Ne fei ne serement ne lei.
 Por tel l'em mescharra, ce crei. (38879-84)

The moral message is hammered home in a speech attributed to William shortly before the fateful battle, when he anticipates victory as the reward for his faith in God and the justice of his cause:

59. It is interesting that Wace never refers to Harold as a traitor: in the *Rou*, the only crime of which Godwinson is accused is perjury, which accords with the picture of him as 'a man forsworn' painted by William of Jumièges (see van Houts, *Gesta*, I, xlvi). Benoît explicitly labels him a 'traïtor' in l. 39019, and in his account the word 'parjur' is almost always coupled with other terms such as 'faus' (e.g. ll. 38894 and 38900) which locate Harold's actions in a broader moral context than that of verbal crime alone.

«Qui juste cause a, dreite e saine
 En Lui d'aveir honor e gloire,
 Valor e puissance e victoire
 Deit bien aveir, s'en Lui a fei.
 Tot issi le cuit je de mei,
 Quer j'ai dreit e mun dreit demant
 E Lui trai par tot a garant.» (39324-30)⁶⁰

This appropriation of the pre-battle rhetoric of the *chansons de geste* fits into an overall pattern which is established in the earliest episodes of the work, and consistently maintained thereafter, whereby loyalty and integrity are shown to be the key virtues of the Norman dukes and their allies, while treachery and disloyalty (rather than, say, cruelty, greed or ambition) are the defining characteristics of those who oppose them.⁶¹ The king of Denmark's treachery towards the first duke, Rollo, is mentioned eight times, and the king himself is described as being

Plein de venin, plein d'amertor
 Com orible, vil traïtor. (2859-60)

Likewise, there are six references in under four hundred lines to the disloyalty of the English who rebel against Rollo's ally Athelstan, who characterises his enemies as 'parjur e feimentie e faus' (ll. 6711). The same thematics is still in operation at the end of the text: after the death of William the Conqueror, the narrator laments the transience of human loyalty as the king's lieutenants appropriate his possessions (ll. 41917-22), and praises Henry I for being a 'leiaus reis [...] e dreituriers' (ll. 43162) whose principal virtues were his support for the church and his hatred of treachery:

60. Our punctuation. There are numerous passages in the Fahlin edition where the punctuation of the text needs to be corrected.

61. If there is a defining sin in Wace, it is pride rather than treachery: *orgueil* is associated with the Bellême family, enemies of Robert the Magnificent (ll. 2517-20); with Gui of Burgundy (ll. 3609-12) and his ally Haimon as Denz (l. 4032); with Geoffrey Martel's forces (ll.4245-46), the French (l. 4859), Earl Godwin (l. 5415), and with Harold himself (l. 6797).

Nus ne maintint, que nos sachons,
 Plus jor saintes religions,
 Ne traïson ne felonie
 Ne haï nul plus a sa vie. (43151-54)

Underlying the whole massive construction of the *Chronique* is a consistent moral subtext which transforms the history of the Anglo-Normans into a political psychomachia, a conflict between the forces of loyalty and treachery played out over succeeding generations. Viewed from this perspective, Harold is only one of a long line of *feimentis* destined to be overcome by the Normans, and not even the worst of them at that.

Just as insistent as the rhetoric of loyalty are the authorial/narratorial interventions which punctuate the whole text, and which are found in profusion in the account of the Battle of Hastings (a total of thirty-seven in this one episode, of which seventeen consist of direct or indirect references to sources). The persona of the author/narrator is constantly being interposed between the audience and the events being narrated, and his role as mediator is emphasised both positively through references to his privileged position as story-teller, and negatively through occasional comments on the limitations of the sources to which he has access:

Ne s'en savreit pas pro aidier
 N'egart prendre ne conseilier,
 Quant Dex l'en deigna delivrer,
 Eissi cum je vos sai conter.
 Un chastelain, riche Breton
 — Mais ne truis pas escrit son non —
 Qui au duc e au conte Alain
 Jura feeuté de sa main,
 Cist, sage e cointe e arteillos,
 Portoct la parole entr'os dos. (39169-78)

As in the *Roman de Troie*, the proliferation of interventions is symptomatic of a desire to control audience response and impose a particular interpretation of events.⁶² Unlike Wace, Benoît rarely admits his ignorance and presents a univocal narrative which carefully avoids calling his written sources into question: the constant appeals to their authority (which is taken as read, rather than problematised) are designed to reinforce the impression that this is the authentic version of the story of the Battle of Hastings and Harold's role in it.⁶³

In Benoît's account, Hastings is much less an armed struggle between two nations than the resolution of a moral conflict between two individuals, who occupy the centre stage.⁶⁴ The picture of Harold in this episode is designed to provide a foil to the picture of William, and makes much more straightforward use of established literary conventions than Wace's mixing of echoes of the *Chanson de Roland* and the *Chanson de Guillaume*. Benoît's portrait of Harold contains both positive and negative elements, but the combination of the two is not intended to generate ambiguity as it does in Wace. Instead, it is part of the technique of identifying Harold as the enemy, and as such complements rather than

62. See Penny Eley, 'Author and Audience in the *Roman de Troie*', in *Courtly Literature: Culture and Context. Proceedings of the 5th Triennial Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society, Dalfsen, 1986*, ed. Keith Busby and Erik Kooper, Utrecht Publications in General and Comparative Literature 25 (Amsterdam, John Benjamins, 1990), pp. 179-90 (pp.185-86).

63. We disagree here with David Rollo, who sees signs of equivocation in Benoît's translation of William of Poitiers' account of Harold's oath (*Historical Fabrication*, pp. 232-41). Rollo argues that Benoît's decision to present the oath in indirect speech creates ambiguity as to the referent of the pronoun *li* in ll. 38834 and 34439, with the result that these lines could also be read as Harold swearing to protect his own interests rather than duke William's. However, the referent of *li* in l. 38842 can only be William, and this forces an unambiguous re-reading of the previous lines. Benoît is frequently lax, in terms of modern practice, in his use of personal and relative pronouns, which very commonly refer back to the principal actor in an episode rather than to the proper noun which immediately precedes them (there is a good example of this in l. 34477, where the pronoun *il* refers back some 36 lines to *li dus* of l. 34441). In the case of Harold's oath, all the indirect object pronouns refer back to 'li dus' of l. 38827 (Rollo does not quote the three lines which precede the oath, and which set the geographical and grammatical context for what follows). It is possible that this apparent lack of precision results from composing for oral recitation: when the text was read aloud, the inflections of the speaker's voice would have removed any possible ambiguity about who promised what to whom.

64. Given that Henry II had Saxon blood, he might not have been entirely happy with an account of the Battle of Hastings which dwelt at length on the defeat of one group of his kinsmen by another. Henry's descent from the 'veteri reges Anglie' through both his grandfather Henry I and his grandmother Matilda is emphasised by Robert of Torigni (viii, 25; Van Houts pp. 240-243), whose concern with genealogy no doubt influenced his translator's approach to his subject matter. Benoît demonstrates greater diplomacy than Wace by keeping his account of the battle short, and by not inviting awkward questions about national loyalties. The terms 'Engleis' and 'Normant' only occur a handful of times each in Benoît's description of the battle, on average once every 41 lines (or every 30 lines if 'li nostre' is counted as synonymous with 'Normant'; this is still three times less frequently than in Wace).

contradicts the foregrounding of his disloyalty noted above. Enemy figures in *chansons de geste* and romance are frequently characterised as fine warriors, who provide worthy opposition for the hero, but are destined to be defeated because of one key failing: ignorance of the true faith in the case of Saracens, a moral flaw in the case of Christians.⁶⁵ Harold is presented before the final battle as a superlative fighter and leader of men:

Proz ert Herauz e vertuos
 E enprenanz e corajos.
 N'estoveit pas en nule terre
 Sos cel meillor chevaler querre:
 Beiaus esteit trop e buens parlers,
 Donnerre e lages vianders. (39354-60)

Having established his credentials as an appropriate opponent for William, Benoît then reinforces the idea of a fatal flaw in Harold's character by describing how he treated his brother Gyrrh and his mother when they came to plead with him not to do battle with the Normans. He rejects his brother's advice in a blind fury, and sends his mother flying with a kick in the stomach (ll. 39425-37).⁶⁶ After this, it is clear that Harold deserves to lose: there are no echoes of Roncevaux to redeem him. By contrast, Benoît highlights William's compassion, particularly after the fighting is over, when he is described as being moved by pity for all the fine English knights who have met their deaths on account of the tyrant who

65. The most obvious example of the former is Baligant in the *Chanson de Roland* (ed. cit., ll. 3155-64); as an example of the latter, Hoel in *Gautier d'Arras's Ille et Galeron* is described in terms which could equally well be applied to Benoît's Harold: 'En Hoel a bon chevalier./ Hardi et combatant et fier./ En lui n'a autre mesproison/ Mais que trop aime traïson.' (ed. and trans. Penny Eley, *King's College London Medieval Studies XIII* (London, King's College London Centre for Late Antique & Medieval Studies, 1996), ll. 670-73.)

66. This incident first appears in one of Orderic Vitalis's interpolations in William of Jumièges, and is then repeated in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Chibnall notes of this passage that 'the original source is unknown, but it reads like a popular romance' (*The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis Volume II*, ed. and trans. Marjorie Chibnall, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, Clarendon, 1969), pp. 170-73). Chibnall's 'romance' might conceivably have been an early version of *Raoul de Cambrai*, which contains an account of the hero abusing his mother when she attempts to dissuade him from invading the Vermandois, but the parallels between the two scenes are not close enough to support any firm conclusions. The story is subtly dramatised in the *Chronique*. Whereas Robert of Torigni, following Orderic, does not specify where, or how hard, Harold kicked his mother ('matremque suam [...] pede procaciter percussit', vii.35; van Houts, *Gesta*, II, 168-69), Benoît's Harold symbolically rejects his family, and with them any claim to legitimacy, by aiming a violent blow at the womb which bore him.

led them into battle (ll. 39820-24). William's superiority is further emphasised by the fact that we are given a picture of him in battle, slicing his opponents in half in true epic fashion (ll. 39664-68). Harold, on the other hand, is only picked out from the *mêlée* at the moment of his death, which Benoît, like William of Jumièges, places early in the account of the fighting, rather than at the end. Unlike both the *Gesta* and William of Poitiers, however, he does provide details of the manner in which Harold was killed:

Ainz que partist icil tooiz,
 Fu reis Herauz morz abatuz,
 Parmi les dous costez feruz
 De treis granz lances acerees
 E par le chef de deus espees,
 Qui entrerent jusqu' as oreilles
 Que les plantes en oct vermeilles. (39680-86)

This picture has little in common with any of the other surviving Hastings narratives, and probably represents Benoît's own amplification of the *Gesta*'s brief assertion that 'Heroldus etiam ipse in primo militum congressu occubuit vulneribus letaliter confossus' (vii.15).⁶⁷ The addition of these details fits in with the pattern of literary and symbolic development which we have noted elsewhere in the *Chronique*'s treatment of Hastings. The reduplication of mortal blows here is a metaphor for the comprehensive nature of Harold's defeat;⁶⁸ moreover, the fact that he is fatally wounded in the head and the area of the heart carries the implication that his enterprise was both intellectually and morally

67. William of Poitiers merely notes that English resistance waned towards the end of the day because the army knew that the king and his brothers were dead. The only other text to elaborate on the detail of Harold's wounds is the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* attributed to Guy of Amiens (ll. 545-50; see *The Carmen de Hastingae Proelio of Guy Bishop of Amiens*, ed. Catherine Morton & Hope Muntz (Oxford, Clarendon, 1972), pp. 34-37). Whether or not the attribution is genuine, the *Carmen* was almost certainly in circulation by Benoît's day, but the number and type of wounds described in the *Chronique* are so different from those in the *Carmen* (in which Harold receives a wound in the chest, a lance in the abdomen, and has his head and one leg cut off) that it seems very unlikely that our author was inspired by the latter. Wace describes Harold as having been wounded by an arrow in the right eye (ll. 8161-68), and subsequently being knocked from his horse and wounded in the thigh (ll. 8805-18), but denies any knowledge of how he was actually killed, or by whom (ll. 8851-58). The account of his wounding in the *Rou* appears to be a conflation of the two figures in the well-known scene from the Bayeux Tapestry.

reprehensible. His death serves as an emphatic demonstration that a *feiment* cannot escape retribution, human or divine.

There may also be another reason for Benoît's describing Harold's death in such emphatic terms, which is suggested by our earlier reading of the ambiguities in Gaimar's account of the end of the battle. Legends apparently began to circulate soon after Hastings that Harold (and indeed Gyrth) had not in fact been killed on the battlefield, but survived and lived on. The last thing the Norman conquerors and their descendants wanted was for doubts about Harold's fate to encourage his transformation into an Anglo-Saxon Arthur, the myth of whose return could act as a focus for political dissatisfaction with their rule. That this was still a matter of concern in Benoît's time is demonstrated by the *Vita Haroldi* associated with Waltham Abbey, which was probably compiled around 1205 (apparently from much earlier sources). The *Vita* relates that in the days of Henry II a very old man said to be Harold's younger brother Gyrth appeared at the royal court in Woodstock and claimed enigmatically that Harold was not in the tomb erected in his name at Waltham.⁶⁹ Benoît may have felt that it was politically, as well as symbolically, necessary to present a vernacular audience with graphic evidence that the last English king was well and truly dead.

While the three accounts of the Battle of Hastings analysed here cannot strictly be said to have been intended for the same audience (two of them being royal commissions, the other addressed to a provincial noble family), they were composed within approximately forty years of each other for what we would be inclined to view as the same French-speaking 'colonial' aristocracy. The fundamental differences of tone and approach we have noted between the three narratives of the battle which established that aristocracy in England are therefore all the more surprising. Equally surprising may be the apparent lack of popularity of the three texts: Gaimar's *Estoire* exists in only four manuscripts, Wace's *Rou* in four and Benoît's *Chronique* in just two.⁷⁰ This lack of popularity must derive to

68. There is further evidence for this interpretation in the fact that the number of wounds increases to more than thirteen in the description of the finding of Harold's body after the Norman victory is complete (ll. 39825-26).

69. *Three Lives of the Last Englishmen*, trans. Michael Swanton, Garland Library of Medieval Literature B.10 (New York & London, Garland, 1984), pp. 34-35; see also the Introduction, p. xviii. As Henry II was a patron of Waltham, it may be supposed that he was not unaware of stories circulating in that particular milieu. It has even been suggested that the myth of Harold's survival was deliberately fostered under Henry to prevent his presumed tomb at Waltham Abbey from becoming a popular focus for pilgrimage. For the arguments surrounding the various accounts of Harold's burial and supposed survival see *The Waltham Chronicle: an account of the discovery of our holy cross at Montacute and its conveyance to Waltham*, ed. and trans. Leslie Watkiss and Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. xliii-xlviii and 51-57.

some extent from problems inherent in the presentation of the works (such as the sheer length of Benoît's *Chronique*), but also from cultural and political changes, particularly the growing irrelevance of the Norman Conquest to an insular aristocracy which increasingly viewed itself as English after 1204. The changing political situation may well have militated against any lasting popularity for Benoît's humanist-propagandist account, which sought to put a sharp full-stop to English aspirations with the heavily underscored death of Harold at Hastings. Similarly, on the cultural front, Gaimar's rather laconic rendering of the entries of *ASC*, enlivened though it was by the introduction of elements derived from oral tradition and saga, such as the interpolated tales of Havelok, Buerne Bucecarle and Elftroed, probably did not appeal to later generations brought up on romance. The same audience may well have found it equally difficult to relate to Wace's historiographic scrupulousness in citing contradictory sources without reconciling them. The other handicap shared by these two authors is that by choosing to adopt the epic mode for one episode within a framework of historiographic or chronicle writing, they imposed on their accounts of the Battle of Hastings an ambivalence which must have raised problems even for their target audiences in the twelfth century, and which surely became even more puzzling for succeeding generations. Until very recently, the three texts which we have studied have seldom been read either as literature or as history, and yet in their conflicting treatments of this key event they not only demonstrate how history is constructed rhetorically within a certain political context, but also reveal the wealth of cultural allusion and compositional skill which their authors brought to bear on the task assigned them, and which calls into question the general disregard from which they have suffered.

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