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'La geste des trois fils Guillaume'?

Henry I in Wace's *Roman de Rou*

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The final section of Wace's *Roman de Rou*, recounting the power struggles between William the Conqueror's three sons after his death, is (to say the least) unorthodox. Ostensibly, Wace is telling the tale of the collapse of Normandy as a proud and independent duchy, with the defeat and imprisonment of Robert Curthose; however, Wace's version of these relatively recent events is surprisingly lightweight in terms of specific details relating to alliances and the logistics of warfare. As pointed out by Matthew Bennett, the battle of Tinchebray, which effectively put an end to Robert Curthose's rule, is only 'briefly mentioned, almost as an afterthought'.[1] The account seems to lack a clear hero, or even an unambiguously central character, while the narrative itself appears to signal the possibility, if not the actual existence, not just of sub-narratives or co-narratives, but of a whole new literary construct arising from the material. Wace's reticence could be explained by the fact that these events were still sufficiently alive in Norman collective memory for the poet to feel the need for discretion; it has also been suggested that lack of detail may reflect the limitations of the sources used this section of the work, which appear to be centred on Caen and Bayeux.[2] Whatever its reasons, this choice results in a heightened importance of the anecdotal material present in the section. Moreover, the tone of these anecdotal passages is overwhelmingly epic in nature.

The epic overtones present in the *Roman de Rou* as a whole have been noted and studied before – most recently by Philip E. Bennett and Penny Eley.[3] The comparison of William the Conqueror after the battle of Hastings to Roland and Oliver (8935) is well-known, and confirms that the *chanson de geste* was very much part of Wace's cultural horizon. Within the 2200 odd lines that concern us here, the epic dimension is more diffuse; stylistically, the only episode comparable to the battle of Hastings is the account of the death in

single combat of Brun, a much-loved mercenary of King Henry I (10945–60). The epic flavour tends to be created indirectly, through parallels and contrasts with thematically-related passages in the *Rou* itself which have more obvious *chanson-de-geste* characteristics – in particular, in the rule of Duke Richard I. This procedure results in a narrative that has the hallmarks of an epic cycle, but is subsumed into historiographical discourse. Read as a 'geste des trois fils Guillaume', following what Wace himself terms the 'geste de Guillaume', the quirks of the final section of the *Rou* begin to make sense.

Like all good stories, this hypothetical 'geste' starts with an act of injustice: William the Conqueror's division of his estate among his three sons. His deathbed instructions are recounted by Wace at some length and in direct speech, thus indicating their importance:

'Normendie, mon eritage,
ou le plus est de mon lignage,
doins a Robert, mon filz l'ainzné,
e jo li ai posa graé
des anceis que jo fusse reis,
e or(e) li doins le Mans en creis;
le Mans e Normendie avra,
le rei de France servira.
[...]
Guilleme, qui ci est, mis filz,
qui mult est nobles e gentilz,
voldreie jo mult avancier
se Deus le voleit otreier;
Engletere a son oés coveit,
qu'il en fust reis, s'estre poeit.
[...]
a l'archevesque preierai
que la corone li otreit
se il le poet faire par dreit;
s'il le poet faire par raison
jo prié qu'il l'en face le don.
A Henri, mon filz le poisné,
ai .v. mile livres doné,
e a Guilleme ci comant

e a Robert l'autre filz mant,
que chascun en sa poësté,
issi com il m'a en chierté,
face Henri riche e manant
plus que home de lui tenant.'

'Normandy, my inheritance, where most of my lineage is, I give to Robert, my eldest son. I granted it to him a long time before I became king and now I give him Le Mans in addition. He will have Le Mans and Normandy and will serve the King of France in respect of them. [...] I would like, if God wished to grant it, to advance the cause of William, my son, who is here and who is very noble and well born. He desires England for himself and wants to become king of it, if this were possible. [...] I will beg the archbishop to grant him the crown, if he can do so by right. If he can do this by reason, I beg that he should give him this gift. To Henry, my youngest son, I have given five thousand pounds and to William here I command, and send word to my other son Robert, that each one in his power, as he holds me dear, should make Henry rich and wealthy, more than any man holding land from him.' [4]

These bequests are both conventional and unusual. Conventional, in that the hereditary family fief is given to the eldest son, lands gained by conquest (and therefore with less assured ownership rights) are granted to the second son, whilst the youngest son has what is left. But this is not just any aristocratic estate, and the division is arguably unjust, in that the second-born son receives an inheritance that is superior in both dignity and power to his two brothers. Moreover, these bequests run counter to the practice established in Normandy since the rule of Duke William Longsword of leaving all the lands of a dying duke to the eldest son (or eldest brother), intact.[5] The reasons for William's decisions are of course explained, and from a strictly practical point of view they make sense. He has long since granted Normandy to Robert. The crown of England is not rightfully his to transmit – a striking admission repeated three times in the deathbed speech (9139–48) – but since William Rufus wants it, he will ask the Archbishop of Canterbury to give it to him. As for Henry, in the absence of lands he is given treasure, and William asks his two other sons to make sure they look after the young man's interests.

It is thus clear from Wace's account that William is not being fair. His words betray his favouritism for William Rufus; it is clearly a

foregone conclusion that the Archbishop of Canterbury will agree to the Conqueror's request, and the statement that he is morally unable to transmit the crown directly is somewhat disingenuous. The desirability of Robert's fief of Normandy is undermined by a lengthy tirade against the Norman people, who according to William need to be maintained in a constant state of oppression in order to get anything out of them (9113–32). In other words, Normandy is hard work. The addition of Le Mans to Normandy cannot be said to compensate for the loss of the crown of England. Moreover, Robert is to be subject to the king of France (a difficult and untrustworthy overlord in the *Roman de Rou*), while his younger brother is to be an independent sovereign. Curthose's repeated attempts to wrest the throne of England from William Rufus, on the grounds of primogeniture, therefore come as no surprise. However, the true injustice does not lie so much in the Conqueror's passing over the head of his eldest son as in his disenfranchisement of his youngest son, Henry, who is in effect banished to the margins of aristocratic feudal society in that he has no land in his own right. He is given money – a lot of it, admittedly – but no fief that would give him status and authority. Wace makes no comment, and Henry's situation could simply be dismissed as the usual lot of a younger son; but Henry was born to a king, something his father has failed to take into account. The seeds for dissatisfaction are sown, and the ensuing strife between the brothers is the foreseeable consequence of their father's division of property.

While uprisings and revolts are by no means uncommon in the *Roman de Rou* – one need look no further than William the Conqueror's struggle as a youth to retain his dukedom against the pretensions of his own uncle – the final section of the work depicts a distinctive love/hate triangle on a backdrop of social injustice which gives it strong literary potential. Robert attempts to reclaim what he sees as being rightfully his by virtue of primogeniture, while Henry, caught between his two warring brothers, has to defend himself as best he can until he eventually takes the place of both of them thanks to his shrewdness, determination and noble character. This reading of events, one may note, implies a positive view of Henry, which some scholars have felt is precisely missing from the *Rou*.[6] However, there is no doubt that the figure of the future Henry I of England is at the heart of this story, and not just because he happened to be the winner in this very uneven contest of wills.

In order to appreciate fully the handling of the story of the three brothers by Wace, it is useful to bear in mind that the propaganda current under Henry I, with which the poet would have been familiar, put its own spin on the spectacular reversal of fortunes that led to Henry's accession to the throne of England and taking of power over Normandy. The key claim was that though Henry was the youngest of the three brothers, he was in fact their senior in dignity, because his father was a crowned king at the time of his birth, whereas William was only a duke when his two elder sons were born.[7] This means that Wace's medieval audience would certainly have perceived the measures taken by William the Conqueror as being wrong-headed in more than just the ignoring of Robert's seniority over William Rufus: the son who was born royal is the one with the least noble legacy. But for all that, all three brothers are depicted as potential heroes. William Rufus is shown as a brave, noble and generous king (9365–74) who inspires loyalty and love in his English barons (9435). Robert, though envious of William Rufus's crown and prone to act in an increasingly irresponsible manner as the narrative unfolds, has a strong enough sense of religious duty to go to the Holy Land on Crusade. Henry initially is a more ambiguous character, making the best of his money through wise investments (9359–64): the truth of his nature is only revealed gradually, going from quasi-mercantilistic speculator to king. The relatively muted moral tone of this section of the *Rou* lends a flavour of tragedy to the unfolding of events, as the brothers find themselves caught up in a web of distrust and violence that is not entirely of their making. The position of Henry at the beginning of the section is not unlike that of a young Havelok the Dane; admittedly, he is not reduced to being a kitchen scullion, but like Havelok he has to make the most of what he has – in his case, money – in order to survive and eventually regain his rightful place in society. The precariousness of Henry's position is apparent from the outset, as is the necessity for him to act decisively when threatened by his brothers.

The anecdotes prior to Robert's departure for the Holy Land juxtapose behaviour on Henry's part that could have been construed as disloyal or undignified, with actions and decisions of William Rufus that reveal an identity of principle guiding both men. The first of these anecdotes relates to Henry's use of the money left to him, which, we are told, 'il sout mult bien aloer /bien empleier e bien garder' ('he was skilled at investing, using it well and looking after

it'; 9363–4). In need of funds to finance a campaign to England to wrest the crown from William Rufus, Robert Curthose asks Henry for a loan. In exchange, he offers the Cotentin as pledge. This is a step up from landless youth to landed lord, even if it is made quite clear that Henry's rights to the land were only temporary (9380–85). Wace emphasises the importance of this event by connecting the giving of the Cotentin in pledge to Henry with his acquisition of a companion who is also his first named feudal vassal in the *Rou*. In an episode that does not appear in any of Wace's extant sources, we see Henry asking his brother for Richard of Reviers as companion.[8] As Richard appears reluctant to leave the service of the duke, Robert orders him to attach himself to Henry in these terms:

'Richart,' dist li dus, 'si fereiz,
Henri mon frere servireiz,
vostre fieu e vos li otrei;
n'est pas mains gentilz hoem de mei.
Sis hoem seiez, jel vos comant,
servez le bien d'ore en avant,
vos n'avreiz ja de lui hontage,
nos somes andui d'un parage.' (9413–20)

'Richard', said the duke, 'you will do this and serve my brother Henry. I grant him your fief and yourself as well; he is no less noble a man than I. Be his vassal, I command you, serve him well from now on and you will never be shamed by him. We are from the same family.'

Robert appears here in a very positive light, and is seen to be respecting the wish of his father that the two elders should show favour to their young brother; however, it is also clear that Henry is very much at the bottom of the feudal pecking order. He does not have the wherewithal to acquire a retinue of vassals in his own right; before the transfer is possible, Robert formally has to make him Richard's overlord by handing over the fief as well as the services of the man ('vostre fieu e vos li otrei'). Robert's stress on his shared parentage with Henry underscores the abnormality of such a situation, while the statement that Henry is no less noble than himself is rife with ironic overtones, since Henry is arguably the more highly-born brother.

As we know, Robert's bid to seize the throne of England was not a success, in that he allowed himself to be bought off by the promise of

a yearly tribute; and the new-found harmony between William Rufus and Robert puts Henry in a difficult position. Robert takes back the Cotentin without repaying his loan, with the support of William Rufus, who blames Henry for having lent Robert the money to attack him in the first place. Henry is as good as destitute: 'Henri Costentin nen out / ne ses deniers aveir ne pout' ('Henry neither had the Cotentin nor could he get his money back'; 9461–2). A possible reaction on Henry's part could have been one of fear and submissiveness. He is isolated, has no protector to turn to, and is in serious danger; but he also has considerable personal charisma which has attracted a large number of well-born men to him: 'tuit volentiers le serveient / ker grant espeir en lui aveient' ('they all served him very willingly, for they put great hope in him'; 9477–48). The young man is clearly a natural leader who has attracted a sizeable and influential faction around him. He is also wise enough to listen to good advice, so that when Hugh of Avranches suggests that the Mont St Michel might be a good military base from which to organise armed resistance to Robert, Henry immediately acts on it.

The moral justification for Henry's pillaging and guerrilla warfare against his brother is not presented in very chivalric terms. The issue is described, rather unglamorously, as a case of energetic debt collection ('ja mais, ço dist, sa pais n'avreit / se son aveir ne li rendeit', 'never, he said, would he have any peace with him unless he gave him back his money'; 9525–26). However, it is clear that Henry has been the victim of gross injustice and that he is pursuing the only means he has to seek redress. What is at stake here is Henry's entire patrimony; confronted with a situation where his two natural allies are estranged from him, he has to resort to desperate measures. The anecdote of William Rufus and his saddle during the siege of the Mont St Michel sheds further, more positive, light on Henry's actions. William is unhorsed during a skirmish, and the straps attaching his saddle to his horse are cut. Rather than leave the saddle in order to defend himself more efficiently, the king fights on encumbered with it. When he is eventually rescued, he is teased about his attachment to a mere saddle:

> e li reis diseit en riant
> qu'il deveit estre al soen garant,
> honte est del soen perdre e guerpir
> tant com l'en le poet garantir. (9567–70)

The king said with a laugh that he had to be the protector of what was his; it is shameful to lose and abandon one's belongings as long as one can protect them.

William's foolhardy rescue of his saddle causes him to be mocked by his retainers, but the justification he gives – even if it is ostensibly in jest – spells out an important rule of good governance which happens to be highly relevant to Henry's own situation. A matter of principle is involved. The young man's armed rebellion is therefore not treacherous or base, but an indication of his noble, and indeed royal, character.

By contrast, Robert Curthose seems lacking in perspective and single-mindedness. This aspect comes to the fore when the besieged Henry runs out of drink, and sends a secret message to Robert asking for some wine. Robert then sends him a barrel of his best wine, much to the disgust of his brother William Rufus. The reason put forward is one of moral duty:

torné me fust a felonie
e jo feïsse vilanie
de neer li beivre e viande
quant il meïsme le demande. (9609–12)

'I would have been accused of felony and would have acted basely to deny him food and drink when he himself asked for it.'

Robert thus shows himself to be an upright, principled and merciful man; however, the words Wace puts in his mouth suggest that he was acting primarily out of concern for his reputation, rather than because of a heartfelt sense of duty or genuine affection for young Henry. The incident, the way the sequence of events is described in the *Rou*, is directly linked to William Rufus's shift from Robert's ally and Henry's bitter foe to peace broker. Henry is granted the Cotentin until Robert has refunded the loan, and William returns to England. But Henry is still extremely vulnerable, and before long he finds himself prisoner in Rouen.

The Rouen incident is one of the more interesting passages of the final section of the *Rou* from our perspective, in that Wace accumulates rhetorical effects in order to build up an implied narrative that is highly literary in nature. It is worth quoting in full:

Ne voil avant conter ne dire
par quel coroz ne par quel ire
Henri fu pois a Roem pris
e en la tor a garder mis;
ne coment il fu delivrez
e de la terre congeez,
e coment il ala al rei,
qui en France l'out pois od sei;
ne coment Haschier le trova
a Paris donc il l'amena,
qui se fist un des oilz peier,
que l'en ne peüst entercier.
Ne voil dire par quel saveir
Haschier li fist Danfront aveir,
ne coment il fu receüz
quant il fu a Danfront venuz,
ne coment il conquist Passeis
e toli tot as Belesmeis,
ne coment Robert la le quist
e de Danfront partie assist.
Ne voil dire coment li dus
s'en repaira, qu'il n'i fist plus,
e coment guerpi son herneis
as chevaliers a as borgeis,
nïent por ço qu'il lor donast
ne de son gré lor graantast;
de son herneis laissa partie,
pois s'en revint en Normendie. (9629–56)

I do not wish to recount or say any more about how anger or wrath caused Henry to be captured in Rouen and imprisoned in the tower, nor about how he was freed and sent away from that land, and about how he went to the king, who then retained him in France, nor about how Haschier, who had one of his eyes covered with a plaster, so that no one could recognise him, found him in Paris and then took him away. I do not wish to say how cleverly Haschier caused him to have Domfront, nor how he conquered the Passais and took everything away from the inhabitants of Bellême, nor how Robert attacked him there and besieged part of Domfront. I do not wish to relate how the duke went back home without doing anything further and how he

abandoned his equipment to the knights and the burgesses, not because he wanted to make them a present of it or grant it to them willingly; he left part of his equipment behind, then returned to Normandy.

One may note that what Wace thrice professes not to want to tell us amounts to quite a detailed account and reads as the summary of an epic narrative. Henry comes over as a wronged youthful hero, imprisoned then reduced to exile until Haschier, thought to be his tutor, seeks him out and helps him to embark on a successful military campaign culminating in the shameful retreat of his adversary. The detail of Robert having to abandon his equipment to the burgesses of Domfront looks back to the anecdote of William Rufus and his saddle: not only is he unable to defend his property, he apparently does not even care much about it. The episode of the *Rou* evoked most strongly by this passage, however, occurs much earlier in the narrative: the childhood adventures of Duke Richard I in the 'Deuxième Partie'.

The parallels between Henry and his ancestor are immediate. Richard is kept prisoner at Laon by the murderously treacherous king and queen of France ('Deuxième partie', 2052–461): Henry, we are told, is 'en la tor mis a garder' by his brother before being sent in exile to the King of France. Like Duke Richard, young Henry is 'rescued' by a retainer, who has to make use of trickery to do so – it will be recalled that young Richard was smuggled out of Laon in a bundle of hay by his bodyguard, Osmund, who had faked the child's death. These parallels take on particular significance due to the fact that Duke Richard's rule, as recounted in the 'Deuxième partie', is not only reminiscent of the tone and diction of *chanson de geste*, it is actually composed in assonanced *laisses* that point to an epic intent on the part of the poet. The default literary template for the hypothetical fuller account of Henry's adventures in Rouen, Paris and Domfront hinted at to the reader is therefore not that of romance, hagiography or annalistic history, but the rousing 'chanson' celebrating the past deeds of forebears.

The character of Haschier has another layer of significance within the wider narrative horizon of the *Roman de Rou*, in that he is not only a trickster, he is also a consummate actor; a feature which aligns him with another Norman – or perhaps I should say, proto-Norman – the Viking, Hasting. Both Haschier and Hasting resort to special effects to modify their physical appearance in order to trick their way into

places where they would not otherwise be admitted. Haschier has his one eye covered by a sort of plaster, whereas Hasting

> sa chiere et son viaire taint,
> mout plaint le cors, moult plaint le chief,
> dist que par tout li estoit grief;
> sovent iert palle, sovent ert pers. (Appendix, 574–7)
>
> *he had stained his face and countenance and was complaining bitterly about pains in his body and his head, saying he was hurting all over. His skin was constantly pale and livid.*

Haschier's aim is entirely positive, as is Osmund's, but the underlying parallel with the vicious, unprincipled and sacrilegious Hasting (who gains access to the town of Luni under the prētence of a deathbed conversion, then indulges in a bloodbath) may also be seen as a note of caution. Richard, the innocent child rescued by Osmund, will prove to be dangerously close to the pagan Hasting when, on attaining adulthood, he blithely unleashes his as-yet unconverted Scandinavian allies on the Christian populations of France ('Deuxième partie', 4169–443). Weakness in childhood does not mean that the young lord will turn into a gentle, forbearing ruler. He might well develop some of the traits of a hero of romance (as Richard does in the 'Troisième Partie'), but under the veneer is a ruthless warrior. This, as we know, will prove to be as true of Henry as it was of Duke Richard the Old. The imprisoned youth will eventually destroy his brother and condemn him to imprisonment for the rest of his life.

The epic flavour underlying lines 9629–56 of the 'Troisième Partie' is all the more significant for the muted treatment granted to material that held real potential for a 'chanson'-style narrative, foremost among which is the half-hearted report of Robert Curthose's deeds in Holy Land. He mortgages Normandy and Maine to his brother William Rufus in order to raise the funds to go on Crusade, where he distinguishes himself:

> Robert Jerusalem requist,
> bel se contint, maint bien i fist;
> ad Antioche prendre fu,
> d'armes i a grant priés eü,

pois fu a Jerusalem prendre,
ne s'i porent paiens deffendre. (9685–90).

Robert set out for Jerusalem, conducted himself well and performed many fine deeds there; he was there when Antioch was taken and won great renown as a result of his exploits. Then he was present at the capture of Jerusalem; the pagans could not withstand them.

The absence of anecdotes or colourful stories contrasts strongly with the account of the other duke of Normandy to have gone to Jerusalem, Duke Robert the Magnificent, Robert Curthose's grandfather. The various stages in the journey, the alms and piety of the duke, his natural authority and flamboyance, and his peaceful securing of access to the holy shrines for impoverished pilgrims free of charge, make the pilgrimage of the older duke both memorable and admirable; Robert Curthose's crusade is mentioned in the baldest of terms, with the accent purely on the military dimension of the expedition. Robert the Magnificent humbled the very Emperor of Constantinople by his nobility and independence of spirit; Robert Curthose is presented as a crusader among many others, who was indeed present at the capture of Antioch and present at the capture of Jerusalem, but more as a distinguished warrior than as an outstanding leader. Even the memento Robert Curthose brings back from the Holy Land – a standard won from the enemy and placed in L'Abbaye aux Dames at Caen – falls short of the holy relics Robert the Magnificent sent to the abbey of Cerisy through his chamberlain Turstin. Admittedly, the great honour enjoyed by Curthose on his return to Normandy, is explicitly mentioned by Wace ('out il grant priés e grant onur / e mult en parlerent plusor', 'he received great renown and great honour; many people spoke of him'; 9697–8), but with little sense of enthusiasm on the narrator's part.

The death of William Rufus in a hunting accident while Robert is in the Holy Land provides Wace with the opportunity to enhance the figure of Henry with the sort of anecdotal material that is so signally missing from the account of Robert's crusade. It is preceded by a military campaign by William Rufus to subdue Le Mans, where the king is shown to be flamboyantly single-minded (demolishing buildings that were in his way rather than marching around them), but also weakened by the presence at his side of the treacherous Robert of Bellême, of whom we are told:

Robert de Belesme fu faus,
felonies sout mult e mals,
de felons gieus ert coneüz
e de mal faire esteit cremuz. (9923–6).

Robert of Bellême was a traitor and knew many forms of treachery and evil; he was an expert in treacherous games and feared on account of the harm he did.

In the event, Robert of Bellême's malice only expresses itself through a bad joke that leads to the collapse of William's siege of the fort of Mayet; but his very name evokes the motif of the evil lineage present in the *chanson de geste*, as William the Conqueror, as an infant, was cursed by another lord of Bellême, William Talvas (2885–922). Though the events recounted are not overtly epic in nature, Wace thus ensures that the reader remains aware that his material has all the elements required for an epic interpretation.

The hunting scene itself, where the king is killed by a stray arrow while Henry is some distance away in a peasant's cottage repairing his broken bow, has strong providential overtones, with an old woman prophesying the young man's imminent accession to his brother's throne:

Henris iert reis hastivement
se mis augures ne me ment.
Remembre tei de ço qu'ai dit,
que cist iert reis jusqu'a petit. (10093–6)

Henry will soon be king if my ability to see into the future does not let me down. Remember what I have said, that this man will be king in a little while.

Because Robert Curthose is in the Holy Land, possibly never to return, Henry is indeed made king on William Rufus's death. However, unlike William, who actively desired the throne, Wace makes a point of stating that Henry 's'en fist assez preier' ('had to be begged a great deal'; 10127), asking for the barons to wait for Robert's return from Jerusalem, but allowing himself to be convinced that this was not in the best interests of the country.[9] The account of Henry's noble marriage, his children, and his fortitude when he

lost his son and heir in the wreck of the White Ship is strategically placed to vindicate the decision of the English barons. But the crown of England has once again slipped through Robert's hands, in circumstances not dissimilar (in Wace's narrative at least) to those surrounding Harold's elevation to the throne against the claims of Duke William of Normandy.

If Henry is implicitly depicted in the *Rou* as the child of destiny who attains the highest dignity against all odds, Robert is presented as a noble but luckless man, who lacks the essential qualities of self-control and shrewdness. His first reaction is to mount an invasion of England, as his father had done; but he is swayed by the moral pressure of the Anglo-Norman barons, who put forward the argument that as a Crusader he should be giving the example of fraternal peacefulness. Robert accepts to be bought off with a yearly tribute, but the peace is short-lived as his partisans, including the devious Robert of Bellême, are punished by confiscation of their English lands. Robert Curthose foolishly crosses the Channel with a small force without due thought or preparation and is tricked into releasing Henry from his financial commitment towards him, ostensibly as a gift to the Queen. This passage is the first time we see Henry considering the possibility of throwing his brother in prison for the rest of his life: Robert Curthose's fate is thus grimly foreshadowed. The key difference between Henry and Robert in this part of the narrative resides in the models of behaviour chosen by each brother to determine their choices and actions. Robert Curthose may be seen as an idealist as opposed to Henry's hard-nosed realism; he can be swayed by appeals to abstract concepts such as brotherly love and seems to be blinded by the conventions of courtliness, which actually interfere with his ability to rule his dukedom. To some extent Wace appears to have chosen to depict the two brothers as representatives of two distinct literary paradigms, Henry being the epic, strong ruler, and Robert trying to embody the ideals of romance.

From the outset, despite the historical fact that the conflict between the brothers was drawn-out and difficult, it is clear that Henry has the advantage. He has the resources that come with being King of England; is a Norman, so can count on at least some local support during his Norman campaigns; and is ruthless in defending his own interests. Robert lacks foresight and strategic thought, is prone to spur-of-the-moment decisions, and has no idea of how to manage his finances. He revives bad feelings with his brother by

harming his interests in the Cotentin and the Passais, the situation is made worse 'par felons e par mal parliers / par graiers e par losengiers' ('traitors and slanderers, flatterers and deceivers'; 10843–4) who are unnamed here but have already been emblematized in the person of Robert of Bellême. The outcome is clearly announced before the hostilities start in earnest:

> Eis vos la guerre comencie,
> qui ne pot pois estre apaisie,
> de si la que li dux fu pris
> et que li roys out tout conquis. (10839–42)
>
> *So there suddenly began the war which could not be ended peacefully until the duke was captured and the king had won a complete victory.*

There is a sense that events have overtaken the two protagonists; they are engaged in a spiral of violence and resentment from which they cannot break loose. The duke is out of touch with reality – Wace gives a damning portrait of Robert's 'peresce', which alienates his followers, and his tendency to promise much but deliver little (10923–34). Any residual feelings of generosity on Henry's part towards his brother, which could have put an end to the conflict, disappear early on in the campaign, when a favourite soldier of his is killed in a skirmish outside Bayeux: an episode recounted at length and which results in Henry hardening his stance even more. Because of Robert's shortcomings his supporters betray him, a fact severely condemned by Wace whose tale of the garden in Caen (11297–308) graphically illustrates the trauma experienced by Norman society. The consequence of treachery is loss of fruitfulness; literally, since the trees in the garden where the burgesses of Caen decided to change sides never again bear fruit, but also metaphorically, as Wace's comments show that the wounds of the past had not healed completely by the 1170s. The events have left a scar on the communal consciousness, in the same manner, arguably, as the uprising of a Raoul of Cambrai or the massacre at Roncevaux.

The decisive battle at Tinchebray put an end to both the rule of Robert Curthose and an epoch in the history of Normandy. The final note chosen by Wace, however, is neither military nor political in nature, but constitutes a return to the motif of treachery. The blame for Robert's defeat is squarely put on the shoulders of his vassals, who

shamefully abandoned him (11375–80). And one man in particular is singled for opprobrium, 'cil de Belesme' (11391), the lord of Bellême who had done so much to poison the relationship between the two brothers in the first place. He flees without attempting to engage in battle:

> colp n'i reçut, colp n'i dona,
> od sa compaigne s'en parti,
> n'i gaaigna ne n'i perdi. (11392–4)
>
> *He received no blow and gave no blow. He left with his troops, with neither loss nor gain.*

Robert thus ends his life in Cardiff castle, a prisoner and an exile, as his brother had once been.

In conclusion, while Wace's account of William the Conqueror's three sons is historically accurate, there is no doubt that he selected the material for inclusion in his work with an eye to narrative effect. He was not composing a *chanson de geste*, but appears to have conceived of his *Roman de Rou* as a stylistic hybrid with a strong epic component. The rule of Richard the Old, for example, can be read as a *chanson de geste* (the 'Deuxième Partie' part) followed by a commentary (in the 'Troisième Partie') that combines historical detail and local traditions. Similarly, the different phases of Henry I's rise in the world appear to have been planned as a series of vignettes which in conjunction conjure up an alternative narrative, told with the verve of the jongleuresque narrator of the 'Deuxième partie' rather than the cautious scholar of the 'Troisième partie'. The carefully placed parallels and contrasts between William the Conqueror's three sons and their illustrious forebears give special prominence to passages with an epic 'echo' and encourage the reader to see the history of the dukes of Normandy as a narrative cycle. Whether there already was such a body of *chansons de geste* in Normandy when Wace was writing is a moot point; but what is certain is that if they did not already exist, Wace did his utmost to encourage someone to compose them.

Notes

1 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. 26.

2 See Matthew Bennett, 'Poetry as History', p. 26.

3 Philip E. Bennett, 'L'épique dans l'historiographie anglo-normande: Gaimar, Wace, Jordan Fantosme' pp. 321–330 in *Aspects de l'épopée romane. Mentalités, Idéologies, Intertextualités*, ed. Hans van Dijk and Willem Noomen, Groningen, Egbert Forsten, 1995; also Penny Eley and Philip E. Bennett, 'The Battle of Hastings according to Gaimar, Wace and Benoît: rhetoric and politics', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* xliii (1999): 47–78; esp. pp. 54–68.

4 'Troisième Partie', lines 9105–112, 9133–38; 9150–62. All quotes from Anthony J. Holden ed., *Le Roman de Rou de Wace*, 3 vols., Société des Anciens Textes Français, Paris, Picard, 1970–73 ; all translations from Glyn S. Burgess, *The History of the Norman People. Wace's Roman de Rou*, Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 2004.

5 On the subject of the Conqueror's succession, see C. Warren Hollister, *Henry I*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2001, pp. 38–41; also John S. Beckerman, 'Succession in Normandy, 1087, and in England, 1066: The Role of Testamentary Custom', *Speculum* 47 (1972): 258–260 and Barbara English, 'William the Conqueror and the Anglo-Norman succession', *Historical Research* 64 (1991): 221–236.

6 See in particular Urban Tigner Holmes, Jr, 'Norman literature and Wace', in Medieval; Secular Literature: Four Essays, ed. W. Matthews, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967, pp. 46–67; esp. p. 66. His main argument is countered by Matthew Bennett, 'Poetry as History', pp. 37–38 (note 86).

7 Henry's justification of his claim to the throne by right of 'porphyrogeniture' was probably more convincing to Wace and his contemporaries than Hollister allows (see his *Henry I*, esp. 104–106). As Professor Peter S. Noble pointed out (in a private exchange), the principle was quite well established in the Byzantine Empire. During Wace's lifetime, the Emperor Manuel (c.1140) succeeded his father John at least in part because he had been born after John's accession to the throne whereas his older brothers had not. Manuel's daughter Maria was always called Porphyrogenita and certainly hoped that that would strengthen her claim to the throne. These eastern precedents would have helped shape responses and afforded additional credibility to similar claims in the West.

8 Richard of Reviers (or Redvers) was one of Henry's more faithful supporters, and one of his 'four wise counsellors' when he acceded to the throne. See Hollister, pp. 52–54 and 344.

9 This does not tally with what other Norman historians say. Orderic Vitalis actually states that Henry was eager to succeed his brother on the throne (*Historia Ecclesiastica*, Book x. 15).