THE RHETORIC OF POWER IN THE BAYEUX TAPESTRY

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CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEMATICs
OF GENRE

A S A CELEBRATED "HISTORICAL DOCUMENT," the Bayeux Tapestry has often been measured against a number of narratives that tell the story of the Battle of Hastings, but the work has rarely been considered as a "text" in and of itself, one among many accounts belonging to a literary genre or class of text. When its status as "text" is recognized, however, the Bayeux Tapestry can be seen as a distinctive narrative, uniquely capable of creating a challenging horizon of multiple expectations that defined its purpose or project for late-eleventh-century audiences in ways that have not yet been considered. That the designer intended to claim the work's status as text is made abundantly clear by the profusion of Latin inscriptions, describing each event as well as identifying persons and places. As the Norman Conquest inaugurated a new era of written documents in England, the Bayeux Tapestry stands at the beginning of a gradual new confidence in the written record. Judging from their distinctive orthography and spelling, the inscriptions were formulated in England for an Anglo-Norman audience.

Within a new Norman bureaucracy of unprecedented scale, Latin replaced Old English as the only language of record. Although among the aristocracy the ability to read Latin became a necessity, most readers were literate only in a minimal or practical sense, in contrast to the fully developed literacy of "cultivated" readers. After the Normal Conquest, linguistic usage in England became extraordinarily complex, caused primarily by the introduction of French as the language spoken
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When the Latin inscriptions of the Bayeux Tapestry were read aloud, as was generally intended for such works, the style and register of the written words would have been most likely transformed into English or French, just as a Latin charter would have been customarily read aloud in the vernacular. As Clanchy remarks, literati evidently interchanged languages effortlessly, using whichever one was appropriate for the occasion. Latin simply served as a common medium of literacy in a multilingual and predominantly oral society.

Notwithstanding the profound effects of writing on the nature of evidence in the form of a durable and reliable record, medieval writing was still mediated by the persistent practice of reading aloud. Even educated readers preferred listening to a statement rather than silently decoding it in script. On one level at least, the inscriptions in the Bayeux Tapestry functioned like a musical score, specifying the essential properties of an audible performance and setting forth what was required by the text. Written Latin letters were a cue for speech, not a substitute for it. Throughout the Middle Ages, writing was speech written down, as in Augustine's oft-quoted formulation: "When a word is written, a sign is made in the eyes by which that sign which pertains to the ears comes into mind." In the Augustinian phonocentric hierarchy of speaking, gesturing, listening, writing, and reading, the letter is identified as a copy of prior speech, and writing must appeal to speaking for authentication.

In the words of the twelfth-century writer John of Salisbury, "Fundamentally letters are shapes indicating voices.... Frequently they speak voicelessly the utterances of the absent." In the Bayeux Tapestry this seems particularly obvious in the full stops signaled between each word, facilitating the reader's quick vocalization and translation of the script. As Michel Parisse suggests, the short, declarative statements of the inscriptions provided the script for a sound track in which a narrator "voices-over" the cinematic flow of a purely visual narrative. As Parisse and Brilliant suggest, the verbal "text" of the Bayeux Tapestry would have been mediated by a speaker or interlocutor who would perform it for an audience. But a critical disjunction prevailed between vernacular and script in performance, so that the Latin inscriptions can be compared to
the printed subtitles for a silent film to which a dubbed-in sound track has been added, a "voice over" giving an instant, audible translation in another language.\textsuperscript{13}

The voice over shifts the narrative into an assertive mode. Events are not simply revealed in a camera-eye style but are recounted by a narrator who explicates what is already implicated visually.\textsuperscript{14} The narrator creates a secondary discourse outside the visible "story," posterior in time. It is a voice that looks back but, literally speaking, cannot "see" anything in the other world of the past.\textsuperscript{15} The Bayeux Tapestry's inscriptions constitute a covert narratio. We hear a voice speaking of events, characters, and places, but its owner remains hidden in the discursive shadows. The voice is nonetheless authoritative. As he exerts a special power to make independent descriptive statements, the external narrator presents a strongly conceptual view. Knowing all but not necessarily telling all, the highly selective discourse of the concealed voice regularly withholds information from the audience in the form of terse summaries. Although concision is an inherent feature of the inscription as a kind of "lapidary charter,"\textsuperscript{16} such terse summary calls attention to itself as a solution to the problem of spanning a period of story-time that is unnecessary to detail. The truncated account declares the presence of its maker, as well as the pretension of the narrator's discourse to transmit remembered and presumably already written records.

In view of the complex maneuvers involved in making the Latin-inscribed images accessible to the contemporary viewing public, we are faced with a problematic confusion or redundancy of semiotic systems, not only verbal and visual, but linguistic as well.\textsuperscript{17} Writing about a similar but imaginary tapestry picturing the same events leading to William's Conquest, the Norman poet Baudri of Bourgueil sets a clear agenda for the Bayeux Tapestry's visual-verbal strategy: "In reading the writing in the inscriptions, the true and new histories could pass in review on the linen cloth" (emphasis added).\textsuperscript{18} Far from functioning as a "stripped-down chronicle," the sequence of terse descriptions of what is happening in each scene declares the Bayeux Tapestry's status as a historical text, written in a language appropriate to a commemorative genre whose truth-
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a dubbed-in sound track, audible translation in an assertive mode. Events are recounted by a narrator visually. The narrator is the "story," posterior in speaking, cannot "see" any Bayeux Tapestry's inscriptions of events, character in the discursive shadows. He exerts a special power to the external narrator presents not necessarily telling all, voice regularly withholding verse summaries. Although cion as a kind of "lapidary itself as a solution to the at is unnecessary to detail. of its maker, as well as the that remembered and pre-

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the narrative surface as a constructed text, both the medieval and modern "reader" become increasingly aware of its status as a literary genre and of the necessity of locating its "text" within a larger literary context. What is sometimes perceived to be "the truly eclectic character of its narrative," might be seen more productively in terms of intertextuality and generic complexity. Although generic thinking in terms of conceptual models was comparatively rare in the Middle Ages, functional classes of texts can be seen to have shaped how writers produced and readers responded to literary works. In Jonathan Culler's formulation, "The function of genre conventions is essentially to establish a contract between writer and reader so as to make certain relevant expectations operative and thus to permit intelligibility." Just as genre serves as a powerful explanatory tool for modern readers, enabling us to locate a text within a concrete configuration of other texts, generic recognition enabled the medieval reader to experience the work in an intertextual world of prior readings. Rather than habitually concealing their sources, medieval texts exploited intertextual signals that could summon diffuse recollections, inviting the reader to place the text within the context of previous experiences. Medieval texts depend for their existence and meaning on other texts. Frequent, truth itself is conceived in terms of being true to literary tradition – to other texts rather than to facts. As we find ourselves caught
in an intertextual web woven of history and story in the Bayeux Tapestry, we are dealing not simply with a question of genre, but with a medieval understanding of the relation between truth and narrative, reality and art.28

Medieval texts presume knowledgeable audiences, they depend upon the recognition of a particular work as genre and the kinds of texts it resembles, from which the reader is then instructed how to read it.29 Distinctive narrative genres, such as epic, define a frame of reference, a narrative logic, a formal structure that possesses a greater power of containment, in the sense that generic rules function as part of the structuring of social memory. The past tends to be remembered on a social level through narrative conventions that are remarkably stable and implicitly recognized.30 But “genre” can also raise as many problems as it solves, since medieval definitions inherited from classical antiquity rarely fit the kinds of texts in current medieval use.31 The conventional patterns and styles offered by most medieval texts reveal an interpenetration of genres that offer diverse rhetorical registers and rich layers of nonliteral meaning. Such possibilities of generic manipulation take the text beyond imitation and pastiche, as they imply an audience with constructed expectations about how texts represent the past.32 As Ruth Morse rightly argues, medieval readers were neither stupid nor credulous.33 Given that the historian’s right of invention did not invalidate the truth of what he wrote, the alert interpreter was constantly on the lookout for what he was supposed to be reminded of and in which texts he had seen or heard it before, creating patterns of intertextual recognition capable of framing the reader’s understanding.

Although modern scholarship on the Bayeux Tapestry has focused much of its energy on determining the degree of “truth” or facticity that can be claimed for its striking account of the Norman Conquest of 1066, the question probably would have been a matter of indifference to medieval viewers. “Truth” about the past had a very different resonance and valence in the medieval experience. The Bayeux Tapestry is not a straightforward or reliable account of the events in the order in which they occurred.34 Consciously distancing itself from the extended
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chronological expanse and annalistic structure of monastic chronicles, 
the narrow focus on the single event of the Battle of Hastings provides 
a sustained theme and subject characteristic of "literary history." Indeed, 
the Bayeux Tapestry manipulates the narrative to alert the audience to 
recognizable literary conventions. Often overriding the 
chronological sequence of events, the author-designer worked the "facts" into a story (récit) on one level, interlaced with an interpretive 
discourse on the other.

Given the highly selective, often unreliable manipulation of historical material inherent within medieval representation — both word and 
image — it no longer seems useful or even feasible to measure the authenticity or assess the sources of the Bayeux Tapestry. We might take a 
more productive approach by exploring questions of rhetoric and agenda to assess its extraordinary power to move and compel audiences to 
become complicit in the visual argument. Beginning with a simple but striking linguistic shift in rejecting the vernacular of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, 
which had been promoted as part of an insular royal policy of 
cultural revival begun under Alfred the Great, the Bayeux Tapestry's Latin, however rudimentary, catapulted its audience into a new histori-
ographical regime following the Norman Conquest. By creating a recognizable "literary history," the designer of the Bayeux Tapestry aligned 
ímself with a class of writers common in France but rare in England, official or semiofficial historians writing at the command of a royal or aristocratic patron. Indeed, the Bayeux Tapestry's status as history in and 
of itself constituted a claim to the common intellectual stock of post-Conquest feudal society. However, as Marc Bloch pointed out, by a cu-
rious paradox, through the very fact of the new Anglo-Norman respect for the past, history came to be reconstructed as the new feudal society considered it ought to have been, that is, as a new and present "reality."

What is unclear today is what kind of "literary history" the Bayeux Tapestry was intended to represent to its literate and semiliterate court audiences. As its narrative strategies involve generic models in the 
contemporary Norman gestae composed for William the Conqueror, and epic 
chansons de geste, such as the Song of Roland, as well as older, more venera-
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ble traditions of Latin panegyric, the narrator seems tacitly to defer to some prior work or "pre-text." At the same time, he exploits the problematics of genre to construct a multilayered narrative frame and to create a space within which he can manipulate his "true" tales about the past. Diverse conventions of narrative implicate his representation in a complex series of displacements. Intertextual references create a dynamic relationship between present and prior texts, suggesting a parallel narrative, a dialogic commentary upon the text, sometimes subverting, sometimes reinforcing, but always intervening in its meaning. In the slippage between event and representation there is room for maneuver and invention, not only for the designer but for his audience as well. As we shall see, generic complexity and the narrative indeterminacy it creates in the Bayeux Tapestry can be seen as a way of mediating tensions created by a culture uncomfortable with the naked bias of propaganda, at one extreme, and the allegorical interpretation demanded of free-standing fiction, at the other.

HISTORY

Writing in the twelfth century, Conrad of Hirsau defined history as "something seen . . . for the Greek historin is visio [sight] in Latin. The writer of history is said to write of events he has witnessed." Although the visual component of such eyewitnessed history was conventionally left to the medieval reader's imagination, the Bayeux Tapestry recounts its historical narrative as a dramatic material visualization of witnessed events. In a very real sense, the cyclical imaging of history defines the viewer along with the narrator as an "eyewitness," valorized since the time of Isidore of Seville as the most compelling guarantor of historical truth. The apparently straightforward truth-claims implied by medieval notions of eyewitnessed history, however, were by no means as simple or unproblematic as they might seem. Because history was defined throughout the Middle Ages as inherently allied to the literary constructions of fiction, writing and reading about past events were problematized and inevitably made more complex in ways that more
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For the Middle Ages, history was a literary genre, distinguished from

other narrative texts only by the presumed "truth" of its content. The

medieval expression of this idea can be seen in Isidore of Seville's inclu-

sion of history in the category of Grammar, the third component of the

trivium that embraced all literary studies. "History" thus comprises a

secular category of long, verisimilar narratives. But in the conceptual

space of the Middle Ages, where there was no exterior criterion of ver-

ifiability beyond the memory and judgment of the reader: "true" might

mean "in the main," "for the most part" true, or even "it could have hap-

pened like this." Since historical writing was openly practiced and per-

ceived to be a narrative imposed on the events, patent fictions were of-

ten presented as part of a true account. If problems of factuality cannot

be resolved to the satisfaction of modern readers, how did medieval

readers negotiate their way through literary history's constant elabora-

tion toward fiction?

If history was defined by its content of res gestae, understanding was

largely determined by the manner of its narratio as literary genre. Rhetor-

cically trained readers learned to understand by recognizing how to in-

terpret particular kinds of text; the eyes and ears of alert readers were at-

tuned to patterns of learned expectations. By the same token, medieval

authors depended on shared habits of reading. The meaning of a pas-

sage or even of a whole work might ultimately depend upon the reader's

recognition of its place in a familiar scheme of style, method, and organ-

ization. Within a given range of licensed invention, historical texts

were first read as eloquent and elegant representations before they were

judged to be true or false. Historical "content" thus referred to a com-

plex intersection of past events and their interpretations, intended to be

recognized and understood in accordance with rhetorically related

habits of understanding acquired in the course of a medieval Latin

education. Texts formed a meaningful context of conventional repre-
sentations, generated by subtle but recognizable colorations from
chronicle to prose legend to *chanson de geste*. As we explore medieval
history-as-story or "history-telling" and its progressive concern for
reaching and holding an audience, an inevitable intertextuality emerges
in the complex relationship between claims to be telling the truth about
the past and conventional patterns of fictional narrative.50

Although the Bayeux Tapestry's intersections with the Norman-
biased *Gestae* of William of Jumièges and William of Poitiers have been
demonstrated repeatedly and with compelling conviction, the nature of
the relationship that connects the Anglo-Norman work produced for
Odo of Bayeux with the continental historians writing for William the
Conqueror have been only vaguely defined. The ostensible overlap be-
longs exclusively to the realm of event description, such as Harold's jour-
ney to Normandy, William's Breton campaign against Conan, and the
centrality of Harold's oath.51 Notwithstanding the impressive number
of such intersections, we cannot legitimately speak of "borrowing" one
from the other. Rather, the Bayeux Tapestry and the Norman *Gestae* can
be seen as contemporary historical projects drawing upon the same pool
of oral and written accounts by eyewitnesses and secondhand observers.
In terms of genre, or "literary history," they emerge as following parallel
but independent and even unrelated tracks. In contrast to the ambitious
scope of the *Gestae*, which ground their projects in lengthy narratives
dealing with the origins of the Norman dukes, the Bayeux Tapestry in-
augurates its discourse by focusing on Harold of Wessex, William's rival
to the English throne, and his relationships with King Edward the Con-
fessor and the duke of Normandy in the years immediately prior to Has-
tings. Although all three accounts arguably defend William's claim, the
Norman sources adopt the characteristic biographical form of the Gesta,
dominated by the single major figure of the Conqueror rather than fo-
cusing on the event of the battle and its precipitating causes. All the ac-
counts are ostensibly centered on the problematic transmission of royal
power, but the Bayeux Tapestry's agenda becomes demonstrably more
complex through its digression to the role played by Odo in the un-
recognizable colorations from *de geste*. As we explore medieval novels and its progressive concern for inevitable intertextuality emerges, it aims to be telling the truth about fictional narrative. In several respects, however, the Bayeux Tapestry aligns itself with the enterprise of William of Jumièges. In contrast with the polished, self-conscious Latin of his contemporary William of Poitiers, William of Jumièges claims to be writing in a plain and intelligible style. Like the simple declarative Latin sentences that accompany the scenes of the Bayeux Tapestry, the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* makes itself accessible to the minimally literate reader through simple grammatical constructions and rudimentary vocabulary. Even William of Poitiers makes an ostentatiously declared rejection of the poetic embellishment for the bare facts of a "meager prose." On another level, the discursive change signals an ideological initiative. As Gabrielle Spiegel argues, prose histories emerge as a courtly literature of "fact" created for the new Anglo-Norman aristocracy to explore and valorize its post-Conquest hegemonic aspirations. The flatness and insistently prosaic character of the Bayeux Tapestry's inscriptions, as opposed to the early medieval convention of setting the *tituli* accompanying images in rhymed verses, seem calculated to create not only the effect of easy accessibility but a more forceful claim to veracity.

In addition to espousing the ostensibly superior accuracy of prose, the terse brevity of the Bayeux Tapestry's narrative inscriptions shifts its rhetoric toward the purported facticity of a chronicle. As the chronicler Matthew of Westminster later admonished his readers in describing the much later battle of Lewes (1264), "Let a poet enumerate all the various occurrences of the day with more license or at greater length ... but brevity keeps us in by a much stricter law, and does not allow us to say how each thing happened, but only what took place." Strung together as a relentless series of episodes, the text acquires a "flattened out," unmediated texture that tends to obscure the more complex shape of its "story." Nonetheless, the narrative takes on the essential shape of the occasional genre of medieval chronicle that is limited, like the Bayeux Tapestry, to a single line of action in which the representation of event and
story is founded on the implied perception of a preexisting situation, an intrusive disturbance, and its consequence.56

Modes of perception fundamentally different from ours had a profound impact on the medieval historian's conception of causality. Since action and change inevitably disrupt the status quo, chroniclers were primarily engaged in reporting events that should not have happened. The universal aristocratic imperative to enlarge one's personal estate or kingdom obviously compelled men to create disturbances, while at the same time positing a stable order as the proper condition for the world outside the aggressively expanding individual self. Here we find ourselves entering Jameson's ideological subtext of "absent causes," the illusion of causality in history.57 As William Brandt argued, medieval history is shaped by a fundamental incoherence that resolves itself in a search for stability and order.58 The narrative of the secular or aristocratic chronicle thus owes its organization not primarily to a mode of preparation but to a value system or ideology.

Self-proclaimed "documentary" representations of the past create an effect of presence. Indeed, we might argue that one of the major projects that the Bayeux Tapestry shared with Anglo-Norman history was to make the past present in order to show that the past already belonged to a coherent new order of feudal values. As Paul Zumthor put it,

"History was only a more profound form of memory that added substance to the present and projected it into the future as a more intense form of being. It was conceived both as the milieu in which the social group existed and as one of the ways in which the group perceived and knew itself."59

Because virtue is found in specified status relationships within the feudal system,60 the Bayeux Tapestry's theatrical "staginess" and exaggerated gestures provide a totally "natural" narrative environment for protagonists who were basically conceived as actors in a scripted performance coded to give meaning to behavior within its very narrow range of human motivation and experience.61 "History" in the Bayeux Tapestry as-
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serts continuity, especially as a repository of rights and privileges, since
the precedent of ancestral deeds could be used to argue for or justify cur-
rent claims to rank, land, and prestige.62 One of the Bayeux Tapestry's
most powerful rhetorical strategies toward this end was to align itself
with the epic genre of the chanson de geste.

EPIC

In the Bayeux Tapestry, the text unfolds gradually, similar to an epic bear-
ing within itself its own sense of purpose.63 The most widely accepted
current opinion is that French epic appears in its earliest form toward the
middle of the eleventh century, that is, at roughly the same time as the
Bayeux Tapestry, and that its point of origin seems to lie in northern
France, particularly in Normandy.64 Within the new genre, events sup-
plied by history are subjected to profound distortion and deformation
caused by the text's internal requirements and the desire to introduce al-
lusions to the contemporary world.65 As a precisely controlled pro-
grammatic discourse, the chanson succeeds more powerfully than histo-
ry in dramatizing the agonistic struggles of its protagonists.66 However,
as Nichols and Zumthor have argued, the driving force of epic narrative
is not human character but the feudal order and its values.67 As the nar-
rative balance shifts from result to process, the discourse opens to greater
audience participation, inviting the viewer to take sides with and against
the characters. Like the epic gestes, the Bayeux Tapestry was not intend-
ed to be read but declaimed, but it was not a jongleur who made the rounds
from castle to castle but the visual narrative itself.68

Notwithstanding the critical differences in the perception of "truth"
in prose as opposed to epic poetry,69 it might be useful to compare the
Bayeux Tapestry with the only other surviving "text" that centers as nar-
rowly on the Norman Conquest. Written by Guy, bishop of Amiens,
shortly after 1066 and perhaps dedicated to Lanfranc,70 the Carmen de
Hastingae Proelio is a literary work in the well-known genre of Latin epic
written in verse for a contemporary audience.71 Unlike the Bayeux Tap-
estry, the Carmen begins in medias res with William en route to England. Perhaps more transparent than its historical prose counterparts in the Latin gestae are obvious displays of rhetoric designed to locate the work in the classical epic tradition in praise of a hero. As the Carmen opens, William, weatherbound, despairs and weeps, but the poet assures the reader that, in the same way that the English could not deter him from claiming his ancestral kingdom, neither the sea nor rocky shore could stop his voyage across the Channel. Just as Orderic Vitalis, writing ca. 1125, readily recognized the epic cast of the Carmen de Hastingae, similar rhetorical strategies have been recognized in the Bayeux Tapestry by modern critics who relate its narrative structure to the chanson de geste. Twelfth-century writers, such as Wace and William of Malmesbury, even assert that the Song of Roland was sung or recited to the Norman troops at Hastings. What is significant here lies not in the historical accuracy of their claim but in the twelfth-century idea that William's mission in England could be framed within the same ethical and political structure valorized in Roland's account of the epic struggle between Charlemagne's most loyal and traitorous vassals. Indeed, the secular setting of the baronial hall for the display of the Bayeux Tapestry and the open battlefield space for the recitation of Roland address the same warrior audience in contrasting pre- and post-Conquest circumstances.

The reality of epic depends almost entirely on its social function in a lived world. It is important, therefore, to consider the imaged narrative as a semiotic system, a sign and carrier of meaning that exploits a generic structure into which "everything comes to insert itself in order to arrive at a particular meaning." Within the descriptive framework of epic, we can then ask how the designer structured the work by playing out a limited number of possibilities defined by the genre in such a way that the viewer's perception and understanding are registered in a conventional trajectory of expectations. Within Jauss's suggested "norms" of the epic genre, the Bayeux Tapestry's "author" can be seen retreating behind the material, so that the events seem to narrate themselves. The simple declarative statements of the Latin inscriptions, such as "Here the messenger comes to Duke William (HIC VENIT ANNUNTIVS
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William en route to England. Critical prose counterparts in the epic designed to locate the work of a hero. As the Carmen opens, the poet assures the English could not deter him from the sea nor rocky shore could as Orderic Vitalis, writing ca. of the Carmen de Hastingae,72 similarized in the Bayeux Tapestry by structure to the chanson de geste.73

and William of Malmesbury, even recited to the Norman troops es not in the historical accuracy idea that William's mission ections not in the historical accuracy idea that William's mission is known, and the events belong wholly to the past, however recent. The suspense centers not on the story itself but upon its telling, its rhetorical strategies, its interpretive discourse. As we have seen, the impact of the deviation from epic verse to prose and from vernacular to Latin, as well as the shift to a plain, paratactic style, alert the reader-viewer to more insistent claims of "facticity" and truth. They create expectations of the unbiased reporting of events encountered in historical genres (gestae, chronicles) as opposed to those embedded in the quasi-fictive world of epic. In its temporal and spatial breadth, however, the Bayeux Tapestry clearly belongs to the realm of epic. The action centers upon the single archetypal event of the epic battle, and the plot line is carefully constructed so that events, generated by a seemingly minimal cause, are seen to grow into a catastrophe. Thus, the first part of the Bayeux Tapestry's narrative, concerned with Harold's journey to Normandy, is by no means a simple chronicle of events, but an explication of Harold's feudal obligation to William, so that when the English earl accepts the crown after Edward's death, the full depth of his treachery can be measured by the medieval spectator.79 Within such a generic framework, Harold's coronation and Halley's comet can be perceived as epic signs intersecting at a dramatic juncture to become the turning point of the narrative. The inevitable consequences are then played out in the Norman invasion, the battle, Harold's death, and William's victory. With the outcome never in question, the entire story is raised above the level of simple narration.
The ramifications of the Battle of Hastings encompass a world order, and the protagonists represent the respective fates of the Anglo-Saxons and Normans within a newly configured England. As in Roland, characters function almost exclusively as agents of the larger discourse. At the same time, they discover and predicate for themselves the valence of their actions. They are permitted to question, as when William takes counsel with his vassals, and to make mistakes, as when Harold accepts the crown. Such ambiguities and errors become evident only in retrospect as their consequences unfold. In epic, the narrative strategy derives from the intention not simply to represent what was known of the event but, serving a more subtle and exemplary purpose, to enable the text to overcome the foreknowledge of the audience and to reveal problems of knowing or recognition posed for the characters.

Among the exclusively aristocratic and royal characters required by the genre, a symmetry of power is contrived between the two protagonists by elevating Harold to William's rank of "dux," although he was in reality only earl of Wessex, not "duke of England," as he is insistently styled in the tapestry's captions prior to his becoming "rex." Further epic symmetries in the delineation of character have been observed in stressing Harold's bravery and generosity in rescuing one of William's knights from the quicksand near Mont-Saint-Michel, thus making him a worthy opponent in the eyes of the audience. But it is William who emerges as the larger-than-life epic hero at Hastings, when he exhorts his men to fight "valiantly but sensibly" (viriliter et sapienter), and the duke himself triumphs as a paradigm of feudal virtue, sage et preu, taking counsel with his vassals before taking a course of brave action.

Although incidents and details are determined by the memory of eyewitnesses and other "historical" accounts, the representation of the reality of the outer, physical world is minimally evoked by a few signposts (pine or olive trees). The densely twisting trees that appear in the Bayeux Tapestry, however, do not seem to serve the same function of "epic markers" as those in Roland, but, like the Latin inscriptions, play a grammatic-
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The Bayeux Tapestry encompasses a world order, and the fates of the Anglo-Saxons and the Franks. The tapestry is permitted to question, as the rassals, and to make mistakes, as the ambiguous and errors become sequences unfold. In epic, the narrator not simply to represent what is more subtle and exemplary pure foreknowledge of the audience recognition posed for the characters and royal characters required by the trived between the two protagonist-rank of “dux,” although he was in of England,” as he is insistently to his becoming “rex.” Further epic iter have been observed in stress-rescuing one of William’s knights—Michael, thus making him a worthy But it is William who emerges kings, when he exhorts his men to apienter), and the duke himself trisage et preu, taking counsel with his action.

Determined by the memory of events, the representation of the realistically evoked by a few signposts, trees that appear in the Bayeux are the same function of “epic markers” inscriptions, play a grammatical, punctuating role by marking the boundaries between episodes in the narrative. Place markers for important events in the Bayeux Tapestry are signaled by architectural frames rather than trees. As in all medieval narratives, acts are differentiated through symbolic gestures and underlined by familiar topoi, such as the dramatic portent of the darkness at noon in Roland and the comet following Harold’s coronation in the Bayeux Tapestry.

As Auerbach pointed out, all events are types enclosing their own interpretations within themselves. The Bayeux Tapestry contains a rich sequence of topoi, where set pieces, such as the dangerous crossing of a river near Mont-Saint-Michel, form the basis for the audience’s participation in a text that can be directly felt as part of a common heritage. Such topoi as the ruler taking counsel, the embassy, or the horrors of death in battle operate as referents, and thus have allusive rather than descriptive power. Unlike the modern cliché, they achieve a concentration of meaning through an almost limitless range of imaginative displacements, so that, for example, for the medieval viewer, the mutilation of Harold’s corpse will take on a stunning chain of resonances.

The Bayeux Tapestry’s insistent litany of inscribed names of known persons and places invokes a reality that belongs to the realms of both res gestae (history) and epic. Although the events of the Norman Conquest had already become legendary within living memory of 1066, the Bayeux Tapestry’s narrative lays an epic claim to historical truth and the presentation of past acts for enduring memory. In its representation of an heroic ideality, the visual narrative offers elite court audiences on both sides of the Channel an interpretation of history intended to be experienced and understood as a mémoire collective, capable of defining political and social identity within the present social reality. In its epic guise, the Bayeux Tapestry is designed as a primary form of historical transmission in which a medieval version of Ranke’s notion of national history of an ideal past (le passé tel qu’il eût dû être) is elevated and projected onto a mythic screen so that it can be transformed into a system of ideological explanation.
THE RHETORIC OF POWER IN THE BAYEUX TAPESTRY

PANEGRYIC

Because medieval literary genre can be limited not by a fixed protocol of narrative strategies alone but rather by a horizon of expectations constructed for the reader, paradigmatic shifts and mergers of genre signal paths of new meaning for the same targeted reader. Just as the Bayeux Tapestry's prose form and plain style consciously divert its epic character from "fictive" connotations, the narrative is structured on the model of another important and accessible genre of "literary history," the encomium, or Latin panegyric. Closer than the Carolingian examples usually cited, the so-called Encomium Emmae Reginæ, written by a Saint-Omer cleric during the reign of Harthacnut (1040–1),90 constitutes a singular generic incarnation that not only offers internal and external links between England and Normandy in the generation before Hastings, but also reveals compelling rhetorical and ideological parallels with the Bayeux Tapestry. Whereas the work clearly belongs within a genre defined by its embellishment and hyperbole, the poet nonetheless begins with a rhetorical truth-claim by declaring that, when writing the deeds of anyone man, the author would never run the risk of inserting a fiction.91

Commissioned by Queen Emma, sister of Duke Richard II of Normandy, first widow of the Anglo-Saxon King Æthelred, then of King Cnut the Dane (d. 1035), the Latin prose work gives a continuous, almost contemporary account intended to promote the legitimacy of her son, Harthacnut, as heir to the English throne. Following his military victory over Harold Harefoot, Emma's son supplanted Cnut's illegitimate older son by his Anglo-Saxon concubine Ælfgyfa. Like Odo's tapestry representation of the Norman Conquest, the panegyric does not locate the personage of its patron at the center of the narrative, but focuses instead on figures legitimating the royal power upon which he or she depends. Directed against Edward, Emma's son by Æthelred and then pretender to the throne,92 the Encomium engages in a series of egregious distortions to construct a moral tale of how an unjustly seized kingdom is restored to its true ruler, a struggle cast in Augustinian terms of the per-
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itasor iustus conquered by the righteous rex iustus. As in the Bayeux Tapestry’s account of William’s conquest of England, the Encomium’s dramatic personae function exclusively within roles narrowly defined by the problematics of the English succession. In contrast to Latin panegyrics aimed at preserving the memory of their subjects for posterity, the Encomium pursues an openly political agenda in addressing a state of ongoing crisis. As in the Bayeux Tapestry, the centerpiece of the narrative is located in an oath excluding all other pretenders to the throne. Just as the appearance of the comet is treated in the Bayeux Tapestry as a portent of Harold Godwinson’s doom, a similar epic topos appears in the encomium in the guise of a sudden and terrible storm. Harold Harefoot dies, and messengers arrive with the news that the English nobles wish Emma’s son Harthacnut to take back the kingdom that was his hereditary right. Like the Bayeux Tapestry, the Encomium Emmae was written with a defensive purpose at a time when it was necessary to fortify a threatened position. It is important to remember that the years immediately following 1066 were equally marked by violent unrest and threat of insurrection by an insubordinate, vanquished English population.

The ethos of Emma’s Encomium represents the foundation of an elitist ideology of a military ruling class that gloried in its battle prowess. The panegyric text both inaugurates and celebrates the ethos of the Norman ducal family that triumphed through predation, expansion, and conquest only twenty-five years later. To evoke the full flavor of the situation in which Emma lived out her second marriage, as well as its relevance to the post-Conquest context of the Bayeux Tapestry, it should be pointed out that Cnut the Dane had become English King as the result of a massive and ghastly campaign that culminated in the bloody battle of Ashingdon. As if it were a harbinger of the Anglo-Saxon fate following the Battle of Hastings, the Abingdon Chronicle reports that all the nobility of England were destroyed. As Eric John remarks, the Encomium was written for contemporaries in a political crisis that would take another generation to resolve. Addressed to the last generation in England before the Conquest, the encomiast’s rhetoric can still be seen to resonate after 1066 in the visual narrative of the Bayeux Tapestry.
Closer in date to the Bayeux Tapestry is the *Battle of Maldon*, an Old English poem celebrating an important turning point in the reign of Æthelred in which contenders for royal power fight to the death with dignity and honor. Like the Bayeux Tapestry, the story is written as a series of vignettes. As David Wilson argues, a prototype for the Bayeux Tapestry can also be seen in the tendency of English heroic poetry to see both sides of the story. Like the *Battle of Maldon*, the narrative presents a choice between two courses of action, both wrong but one inevitable — Harold's choice between breaking an oath to William or disobeying the command of the dying King Edward.

On the post-Conquest side, another Latin panegyric provides a bracketing closure to the generic framing of Odo's project by situating the Bayeux Tapestry itself at the center of its narrative. Written between 1099 and 1102 by Baudri of Bourgueil for Adela, countess of Blois and daughter of William the Conqueror, the *Adelae Comitissae* describes an imaginary hanging very like the Bayeux Tapestry. Indeed, it has been argued that Baudri had probably seen it and edited its narrative to focus on William, filling out details with borrowings from other accounts, such as the *Carmen de Hastingae* and William of Poitier's *Gesta*. In constructing an imaginary work of art associated with the ruler as a vehicle for his praise, Baudri uses a familiar *topos* belonging to the conventions of earlier Latin panegyric. Just as Adela's pleasurable recognition of the Bayeux original in Baudri's literary fabrication formed a critical component of the poem's intended reception, we might imagine the Bayeux Tapestry's audiences experiencing a similar recognition in the troping of the same familiar literary *topos*, as the entire work of art itself could be construed as panegyric.

Adela's *velum* was imagined to be more truly a tapestry than the Bayeux version's embroidered representation. The striking contrasts that can be drawn with Baudri's hanging — woven of gold, silver, and silk, studded with pearls, and destined for the privacy of the countess's bedroom — bring into sharp focus the utilitarian and public character of the Bayeux Tapestry. Baudri's most provocative and radical departure from his public paradigm, however, is his insertion of full-fledged speeches into a nar-
The Bayeux Tapestry is the Battle of Maldon, an Old English turning point in the reign of Edward the Confessor. In the tapestry, the story is written as a sequence of sequaces, a prototype for the Bayeux Tapestry. The narrative presents a project of English heroic poetry to see both wrongs but one inevitable oath to William or disobeying the other Latin panegyric provides a turning of Odo's project by situating warrior of Adela, countess of Blois and Normandy, the Adela Comitissae describes an Adelae Comitissae. Written between 1066 and 1067, the Adela Comitissae begins with the council called by William to gain support for the invasion of England, the first of several heroically proportioned speeches that now constitute a major component of the new discourse. Indeed, it can be argued that the first third of the Bayeux Tapestry's narrative, extending from Harold's mission to Normandy to his coronation following the death of Edward, has now been recast into the content of William's justifying speech. The text is introduced by a prologue first referring to Duke William's difficulties in establishing and then maintaining the power of his duchy in Normandy, followed by a long description of the comet in the spring of 1066 and the people's dumb-founded reaction to it.

Baudri's maneuver allows us to conjecture about the kind of spectator involvement demanded by the Bayeux Tapestry, for the visual narrative is almost meaningless without the voices and speeches imagined by the encomiast. Adela's participation has been rendered totally passive by Baudri's translation of a visual narrative into pure text, now supplied with set speeches and dialogue that not only clarify but interpret the action. In contrast, the Bayeux Tapestry's viewer is virtually pulled into the story. As we shall see, he or she is required to perform a kind of imaginary ventriloquism, animating the mute protagonists into patterns of meaningful utterance. At each juncture of dialogic silence the viewer is required to enter actively the lists of political controversy, to make critical choices and decisions, to imagine, construct, and thus endorse resolutions to conflicted issues still festering between partisans of the English and those of the Normans in the tense years following 1066.
NOTES

24. For extended arguments on the place of production, see Brooks and Walker, "Authority and Interpretation," pp. 10, 13, 17–18; Bernstein, Mystery, pp. 37–50.
27. Loyn, Norman Conquest, p. 102; Barlow, Feudal Kingdom, p. 85.
28. Barlow, Feudal Kingdom, p. 117.
30. See Bertrand, La Tapisserie, p. 313; Grape, Bayeux Tapestry, p. 78.
31. Bernstein, Mystery, pp. 105, 212, n. 46. The great tower at Chepstow (100 X 40 feet) was clearly large enough to accommodate the Bayeux Tapestry's 232-foot length, J. C. Perks, Chepstow Castle, 2nd ed. (London, 1967).
33. See ibid., pp. 104–107, fig. 65; Brilliant, "Bayeux Tapestry," p. 99.
34. See Cowdrey, "Towards an Interpretation," pp. 64–8; Grape, Bayeux Tapestry, p. 80. On the itinerant Anglo-Norman courts, see Hollister, Monarchy, p. 24.
35. See Zumthor, Towards a Medieval Poetics, pp. 45–6, see also Nichols, "Philology," pp. 1–10.
38. Ibid., p. 92.

CHAPTER 1

1. See Clanchy, From Memory to Written Record, pp. 6–7.
3. Clanchy, From Memory to Written Record, pp. 18–19, 27; M. Bloch, Feudal Society, pp. 75–81.
4. Clanchy, From Memory to Written Record, pp. 224–52.
5. Ibid., p. 206.
6. Ibid., p. 186.
NOTES

10. John of Salisbury, Metalogicon I.13, p. 32: "Littere autem, id est figure, primo vocum indices sunt . . . et frequentem absentium dicta sine voce loquentur."
11. Parisse, La Tapisserie, p. 79.
12. Ibid., p. 53; Brilliant, "Bayeux Tapestry," pp. 102, 113.
15. For the theoretical basis of this and what follows, see Chatman, Story and Discourse, pp. 146–223; see also Bordwell, Narration in the Fiction Film, Branigan, Narrative Comprehension.
18. Quoted by Parisse, La Tapisserie, p. 37.
21. See Chatman, Story and Discourse, p. 64.
24. Culler, Structuralist Poetics, p. 147.
27. Vitz, Medieval Narrative, p. 113.
28. Ibid., p. 111.
29. Morse, Truth and Convention, p. 5.
30. Fentress and Wickham, Social Memory, pp. 161–3; Zumthor, Toward a Medieval Poetics, p. 50.
31. Morse, Truth and Convention, p. 6.
32. Ibid., pp. 3, 6.
33. Ibid., p. 89.
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38. Ibid., p. 94.
40. See Morse, Truth and Convention, pp. 231–3.
41. Quoted from Accessus ad auctores by Minnis and Scott, Medieval Literary Theory, p. 43.
42. Isidore of Seville, Etymologiae 1.44.5: "... for what was seen was recounted without lies (quae enim videntur, sine mendacio proferuntur)." See Beer, Narrative Conventions, pp. 10, 23.
43. See Kellner, "As Real as It Gets," p. 50.
44. Isidore of Seville, Etymologiae 1.40–44. Isidore then distinguishes historia from fabula as the narration of things that have actually taken place as opposed to fictional happenings. See Partner, Serious Entertainments, p. 195.
45. See Morse, Truth and Convention, pp. 6, 86. As Zumthor, Toward a Medieval Poetics, p. 12, observed, history does not mean veracity. Historicity is the attribute of that which asks or desires to be believed.
46. Morse, Truth and Convention, pp. 80, 82.
47. Nichols, Romanesque Signs, p. xiii; Morse, Truth and Convention, pp. 5, 17.
48. Morse, Truth and Convention, p. 17.
49. Ibid., p. 87.
50. Ibid., pp. 2–3.
51. These events and their Norman sources are discussed in detail by S. A. Brown, "Bayeux Tapestry, History or Propaganda?" pp. 16–25.
54. Spiegel, "History," pp. 81–2; Morse, Truth and Convention, p. 98, who notes that the ostensibly superior accuracy of prose had become an accepted topos for the Middle Ages.
56. See Brandt, Shape of Medieval History, pp. 71, 76.
57. See Jameson, Political Unconscious, pp. 23–41; also Patterson, Negotiating the Past, p. 50.
58. See Brandt, Shape of Medieval History, pp. 79–80.
59. Zumthor, Toward a Medieval Poetics, p. 16.
60. Brandt, Shape of Medieval History, pp. 88–90, 109.
61. See Brandt, Shape of Medieval History, pp. 130, 138.
62. See Morse, Truth and Convention, p. 106.
3. Zimbar, Medieval Literary Theory, for what was seen was recounted (rendacio proferuntur)." See Beer, Nar-

sidore then distinguishes historia from veracity. Historicity is the attribute 

6. As Zumthor, Toward a Medieval Poetics, p. 5.


8. See supra, p. 6.

9. Zumthor, Toward a Medieval Poetics, p. 5.


15. Jauss, Toward an Aesthetic of Reception, p. 100.


20. Nichols, Romanesque Signs, pp. 149, 164.


25. Zumthor, Toward a Medieval Poetics, p. 65.


27. See infra, pp. 125–8.

28. For an analysis of the use of fictional strategies in Ranke's historical writing, see Hans Robert Jauss, Question and Answer: Forms of Dialogic Understanding (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), pp. 28–9, 34–8.

29. Encomium Emmae, see also Morse, Truth and Convention, pp. 127–30.
NOTES

91. Encomium Emmae, p. 5; see Morse, Truth and Convention, p. 139.
92. See Körner, Battle of Hastings, p. 68.
93. Ibid., p. 51.
95. Cnut swears an oath to Emma that he would never set up a son by any other wife to rule after him.
97. Encomium Emmae, pp. 49–51.
100. Ibid., p. 94.
104. Ibid., p. 58, who quote vv. 233–4: "Porro recenseres titulorum scripta legendo / In velo veras historiasque novas."

CHAPTER 2

1. See Brandt, Shape of Medieval History, pp. 98–9, 103.
3. Morse, Truth and Convention, pp. 64–6; Beer, Narrative Conventions, p. 41; Sturges, Medieval Interpretation, p. 5.
4. Morse, Truth and Convention, p. 56.
5. Ibid., p. 73.
6. Quintilian, Institutio Oratio 2.1.10, 2.4.1–4, 4.2.116–20.
7. See Morse, Truth and Convention, p. 60.
8. Ibid., p. 113.
10. See Sturges, Medieval Interpretation, pp. 2–5.