Ambroise's *Estoire de la Guerre sainte* and the Development of a Genre

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Predating by less than two decades the earliest prose chronicles, the accounts of the fourth crusade which have been the focus of much of Peter Noble's recent research, the *Estoire de la guere sainte* is an eyewitness account of the Third Crusade, written towards the end of the twelfth century. Before looking at what the chronicler, Ambroise, adds to the young and developing genre of vernacular chronicle let us consider the 'state of the art', the development of chronicle writing in Old French up to the time of Ambroise.

Before the Norman Conquest there was in England a tradition of writing history in the vernacular; the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* continued to be written into the twelfth century. This is probably why the earliest Old French chronicles are all Anglo-Norman rather than continental French. Gaimar, Wace, and Benoit de Saint-Maure, the earliest practitioners, all worked on pre-existing material; they were by and large re-writing Latin texts for a lay readership. Then in the 1170s Jordan Fantosme, clerk to the Bishop of Winchester, wrote his well-known chronicle about contemporary events, largely about the wars Henry II fought in the North of England and the rebellion of Henry the Young King. This was something new. The models Fantosme and his predecessors had to work on, the established traditions for relating historical, or pseudo-historical, events, were, on the one hand, the Latin chronicles and, on the other, the Old French *Chansons de geste* which gave fictionalised accounts of history. R. C. Johnson, the editor of Fantosme’s chronicle, examined and questioned the historicity of elements of the narration by drawing parallels with *chanson de geste* narrative. More pertinently Philip Bennett has examined the language and structures of the chronicle in relation to the *chanson de geste* while at the same time highlighting the influence of the schools, particularly in the prologue. This combination, drawing on both the Latin culture of learning and the
popular culture of the *chanson de geste* is something that is also found, but in different ways and different proportions, in Ambroise’s text. There is no evidence that he knew Fantosme’s chronicle – though he may have done – but he is certainly working from the same literary models.

Ambroise’s *Estoire de la guerre sainte* was written shortly after the events it recounts and probably before the death of Richard I. For decades debate has raged over the status of, and relationship between, the *Estoire* and the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi*. This Latin text, probably compiled by the Augustinian Prior Richard de Templo, between 1217 and 1222, shares a considerable amount of material with Ambroise and many in the past considered that neither was in fact an eye-witness account but rather that both derived from a common source now lost. We now have a better understanding of the level of sophistication of some of the early chroniclers who, though eye-witnesses themselves, would also draw upon written sources. Helen Nicholson, in the introduction to her translation of the *Itinerarium*, argues convincingly that the Latin author drew on Ambroise’s *Estoire*, but that they were both, in all probability, participants in the Crusade.

Ambroise has in the past generally been considered to have been a jongleur. He presents himself as a non-combatant on the Crusade and Gaston Paris, the first editor of the text, argued that the only non-combatants on such an expedition would be priests and jongleurs, and that Ambroise did not display sufficient learning to be a priest. In fact the rhetorical structures used by Ambroise suggest a latinate education (see below). Paris goes on to describe his piety as only what might be expected from any pilgrim on crusade, but it is actually very deep-rooted; it shapes and informs his whole approach to his material. The words used by Anthony Lodge with reference to Fantosme could equally be used about Ambroise.

Jordan had recourse to a device widely used by medieval writers of history: the events narrated fall out as they do clearly in accordance with God’s plan for the world.

Direct evidence of Ambroise’s identity can be found. In the records pertaining to the coronation in 1200 of Queen Isabella, wife of King John, a payment can be found to *nobis clericici* Eustace and Ambroise for singing at the coronation. Ambroise was not a common name.
Ambroise’s *Estoire de la Guerre sainte* at the Norman Court. We have here a *clericus* at the royal court who is also a singer – and the Ambroise of our text shows signs of clerical training and a strong sense of rhythm and oral presentation. Moreover Ambroise tells us in the *Estoire* that he was present at Richard’s coronation – so it seems quite likely that this is our Ambroise.9 I suggest that we have here a writer who is more of a *clericus* than a *jongleur*.

Why does this matter? In recent years literary scholars have moved away from a positivist emphasis on the identity of the author to a more text-based approach. However, the identity of Ambroise matters because of the way Gaston Paris’s assumption that he was a *jongleur* has prejudiced thinking about the text, leading to an emphasis on what the text shares with the *chanson de geste* and undervaluing the more learned aspects of Ambroise’s discourse. It has been described as ‘almost unique, occupying a transitional position between the fiction of the heroic *chansons de geste* and the prose narratives of men such as Villehardouin and Joinville’ and ‘une oeuvre ambigue par sa double nature épique et historique’.10 While the *Estoire* is seen as part epic, Fantosme, writing in *laissses*, the generic marker of the *chanson de geste*, is generally described as a chronicler, albeit one who borrows from popular vernacular tradition; Antonio Gransden, for example, describes his chronicle as a text that ‘resembles the *chanson de geste* and has romance features’.11 The writing of history in the vernacular was still an unusual undertaking. The chroniclers who preceded Ambroise, including Fantosme, were clerically trained.12 Ambroise would have had the same training and the same models as his predecessors – what is different is how he exploits these models.

Before we look at the evidence of Latinate learning in Ambroise’s text let us then turn to the influence of the *chanson de geste*. As Bennett has shown the *chansons de geste* had input into the development of vernacular chronicles from the beginning13 – and Ambroise is no exception. There are several direct references to the *chanson de geste*. Messina is described as being situated at the extreme point of Sicily ‘across the straits from Reggio, which Agoland took in his expedition’ (II. 5115–16); Agoland is a Saracen king who invades Calabria in the *Chanson d’Aspremont*.

Geoffrey of Lusignan is compared to Roland and Oliver (ll. 4658–60). Richard is compared with the heroes of Roncevaux when he is praised for the deeds he had carried out (ll. 11175–78). There is a similar reference in Fantosme who describes Henry II
as ‘The most honourable and most victorious king who ever was anywhere on earth since the time of Moses, save only Charlemagne, whose might was immense through the deeds of the twelve peers amongst whom were Oliver and Roland’ (ll. 111–14). Later Ambroise rather turns this topos round to show up the crusaders in comparison to Charlemagne:

When the valiant King Charlemagne, who conquerered so many lands and countries, went to campaign in Spain, taking with him the noble band who were sold to Marsile by Ganelon to the dishonour of France, and when he, Charlemagne, had returned to Saxony, where he did many great deeds and defeated Guiteclin, bringing about the fall of the Saxons by the strength of many valiant men and when he led his army to Rome, when Agoland, through a great undertaking, had arrived at Reggio in the rich land of Calabria, when in another war Syria was lost and reconquered and Antioch besieged, in the great armies and the battles against the Turks and the pagan hordes, when many were killed and conquered, there was no bickering and quarreling, at that time and before; then there was neither Norman nor French, nor Poitevin...there was no malicious gossip nor insulting of one another; everyone came back with all honour ...

Here we have reference to the Chanson de Roland, the Chanson d'Aspremont, the Chanson des Saisnes – and possibly also to the Chanson d'Antioche.

The Chanson d'Aspremont is alluded to on four occasions in total (Paris p.ix). Ambroise also refers to Alexander (l. 2848, l. 4173), Hector (l. 2850) and Achilles (l. 2850) and to Paris and Helen of Troy (l. 4177) – all of whom figured in both the vernacular and the Latin literary tradition of the twelfth century – as well as to the vernacular tale of Tristan (l. 4176).

Less direct is the way Ambroise presents his central characters as heroes, as though heroes of the chanson de geste. This is particularly true of the presentation of Richard I. From the beginning Richard is the focus of the account, even although his father is still alive when Richard takes up the cross. He is described throughout with such epithets as ‘the great’, ‘the noble’, ‘the valiant’ – as well as the lion-heart. He rides a horse called Fauvel, which he captures from
the emperor of Cyprus: this subtly evokes the *chanson de geste* heroes as Fauvel is a common name for a horse in the *chanson de geste*. More importantly he seems to share some of the characteristics of the best known of all Old French epic heroes, Roland. Richard is a little headstrong; he takes personal risks for which others rebuke him. Saladin describes him as 'one who rushes into things foolishly' (l. 12114); but this is expressed as a qualification to the praise that 'the king has great valour and boldness' (l. 12113). Saladin continues with a phrase which again recalls the epic – in fact explicitly recalls the *Chanson de Roland*, as he questions the value of heroism without moderation, 'I would prefer to exercise generosity and judgement with moderation than boldness without moderation' (ll. 12116–118). This can be compared to Oliver's advice to Roland in the *Chanson de Roland*: 'For a true vassal's act, in its wisdom, avoids folly; caution is better than great zeal. Franks are dead because of your recklessness; Charles will never again receive our service' (ll. 1724–27). Richard is even rebuked for his recklessness by his own men (ll. 7135–55).

In a slightly later incident Richard replies to his men trying to limit his activities that, 'I sent them here and asked them to go, if they die there without me then would I never again bear the title of king' (ll. 7332–35). Here we see that Richard could be reckless, but also that he enjoyed the special protection of God – and that his recklessness is also in a sense part of his commitment – the justification of the foolhardiness is put into the mouth of the king himself and he is shown to be a good guarantor of his men. In this way Ambroise uses his knowledge of how heroes are presented in the *chanson de geste* as part of the way he presents his hero.

Bancourt argues that his presentation of the enemy Saracens also owes a great deal to the *chanson de geste* tradition. However, the military historian Matthew Bennett has shown the presentation of Saracens in the *chanson de geste* is in many ways not dissimilar to their presentation in some contemporary Latin chronicles, such as the *Gesta Francorum*, so perhaps we are making a false distinction if we expect the chronicle tradition to differ radically from that of the *chanson de geste*.17

It is clear then that the moulding of the material, the presentation of the 'heroes' and of the enemy may owe something to the popular vernacular tradition of the *chanson de geste*, though in a way that is not discordant with conventional Latin chronicles – but what then of the structure and language of the text?
We expect chronicles to be written in fairly straightforward chronological order, and to some extent this is what we find in Ambroise; but in some respects his narrative sequence is more complex than this. Within a framework of a prologue and epilogue, quite normal for a piece of historical writing, the broad structure is indeed chronological – the diegetic sequence is the same as the narrative order. It begins with members of the royal house taking up the cross in 1187, proceeds by following the footsteps of Richard I to the end of his crusade and his departure from the Holy Land. However, part way into the narrative there is an extensive analepsis in the form of an explanatory flashback. When the poet reaches the point in his narration where the kings of England and France, Richard I and Philip Augustus, have arrived at the siege of Acre he signals the need for the reader to understand the background of the situation:

Now let us leave this for the moment (for he who bears with me a while will hear me return to it when the material lends itself to this); let us move on from the two kings and their arrival, about which I have said enough to bring them to Acre. Listen and pay attention, for I am going to break off my thread and interrupt the matter, but it will be picked up again and re-attached later. For the kings came last to the siege, not first. So Ambroise wants to tell and instruct those who wish to learn how it came about that the city of Acre was besieged. He did not see any of this and knows only what he has read. Now you will hear what men took part and how bold was the undertaking. (ll. 2382–2410)

Here we have a poet of relatively sophisticated historical sense, relating not only events, but what lay behind them. He picks up his metaphor of breaking the thread when he reaches the chronological point at which he had broken off:

But I must follow the story and rejoin the material to tell of the siege of Acre; so AMBROISE wishes to complete his tale here, charge on to his goal, re-tie the knot and join the tale of the two kings who came to the siege of Acre and what they did there and recall what he can remember of the story of how Acre was taken, as he saw it with his own eyes. (ll. 45551–62)
The analepse is necessary to understand the significance of the fall of Acre. Ambroise makes it clear that he is here relating events of which he has no direct experience. Within this long explanatory flashback Ambroise again goes outside the diegetic sequence with two series of sylleptic anecdotes. The first series relates tales of heroism and the protection of God and is introduced as such, while the choice of material shows that he intends to entertain as well as to instruct. There is, for example, the tale of a knight caught ‘with his trousers down’ relieving himself – and how he escapes (ll. 3578–3619). Throughout this sequence the same two lines are used to begin each of the anecdotes (see illustration below):

\[(\begin{align*}
\text{Issi com li tens aveneient,} \\
\text{E plusors choses aveneient.}
\end{align*}\)

*Time passed and many an incident happened.*

This repetition recalls the use of formulaic repetition and the structuring of *laisse parallèles* characteristic of the *chanson de geste*. The second set of sylleptic anecdotes stresses the suffering of the ordinary soldiers in the siege – and puts the blame on one of the local leaders, the Marquis of Montferrat. Here the last two lines of each anecdote are the same:

\[(\begin{align*}
\text{4221 Qu’il maldiseient le marchis} \\
\text{4222 Par qu[i] il esteient si aquis.}
\end{align*}\)

*They cursed the marquis, who brought them to this sorry pass.*

Again the repetition recalls the parallelism of the *chanson de geste*. But Ambroise is not writing in *laisse* nor are there any parallels outside the two opening or closing lines. What is really significant here is the way the structure cuts these anecdotes off from the rest of the narration and indicates a common link between them. Separating these tales from the rest of the text may be an indication that these anecdotes, not witnessed by Ambroise, are to be read differently: that they contain a different kind of truth.

The scribe copying the manuscript has highlighted the structure by using a large capital letter at the beginning of the series of anecdotes and a paragraph marker at the beginning of each anecdote (see illustration next page).
This is not dissimilar to how a scribe might lay out a *chanson de geste* with a large capital at the beginning of a *laisse*. In the use of the paragraph marker, however, it resembles rather the lay-out of a *romance*. Here we notice a major difference between Ambroise’s
structure and that of Fantosme. For Fantosme the base unit of composition is, arguably, the hemistich, and he writes in laisses, rather like the chanson de geste. Ambroise, on the other hand, does not actually turn his paragraphs into laisses – he continues to write in rhyming couplets.

Turning from structure to language we can pick out features that come from both the vernacular chanson de geste tradition and from the more learned scholastic tradition. In his study of chanson de geste elements in Fantosme Bennett looks first at oralising elements. Of these the clearest is the use of apostrophe – not unusual in Old French literature as nearly all our earliest texts were performative. What we find in Fantosme is very close to the pattern of the chanson de geste in which the audience is typically encouraged to 'listen': 'oyez'. In Ambroise we are not instructed to listen, but told that 'there we might have seen' or 'there we might have heard'. Ambroise also tells us he is telling the truth – and reinforces this by admitting when he does not know something. Fantosme similarly asserts that he is telling the truth, and does on one occasion tell us when he did not personally witness the events he is recounting. Peter Damian-Grint, in his study of early vernacular historiography, sees this determined insistence that the truth is being told as a characteristic of the developing discourse of historical writing. It is not unknown in other genres, where often we are told that this is the true version of the story and any jongleur who tells you a different version is not telling the truth. But there the appeal is to what might be termed 'relative truth' – one version being better than another. In historical literature we are looking more at absolute truth: this is a factually true account of events.

Most striking in Ambroise's language is a notable lack of formulaic expression – although we do find the use of single epithets – similar to the sort of phrase we might find in the chanson de geste, though these are not repeated: 'Li cuens de Peiters li vallanz' (the valiant Count of Poitiers; l. 59); 'Guion le poigneur' (Gui the warrior; l. 2085).

The use of formulaic discourse is another distinguishing feature of the chanson de geste, and a feature that Fantosme does not neglect to exploit. In Ambroise we find instead extensive use of scholarly rhetoric. A key point here (and one of the ways in which Sarah Kay distinguished 'rhetorique scolaire' from 'rhetorique populaire') is that Ambroise sometimes seems to indulge in rhetorical devices for
their own sake. In the following example given he is being witty for the sake of wit:

Si fu Guillemes de l’Estanc,
Qui ot un cheval estanc (ll. 1398–99)

*There was William de l’Estanc, on an exhausted horse.*

Most characters are presented by Ambroise with a brief two line introduction; here he just takes advantage of the name of the knight to make a pun (one I was unable to render with a pun in the translation). The exigencies of rhyme obviously play a large role in the choice of words, yet Ambroise also conveys enjoyment of language in such descriptions. The following example could be seen as rhetoric for its own sake or as serving the narrative as Ambroise wants to stress the ferocity of the assault:

1482 *En la vile de Limeçon,*
    *Ou mut l’assalt e la tençon,*
    *N’aveit remis huis ne fenestre,*
    *Ne riens que nuisance puisse estre,*
    *Tone ne tunel, escu ne targe,*
    *Ne vielz galee, ne vielz barge,*

1488 *Ne fust, ne planche, ne degré,*
    *Qu’il i apartoient de gré ...*

*In the town of Limassol, where the battle and fighting began, they had left intact nothing which could be used as a weapon: neither door nor window, barrel nor cask, round shields nor long shield, old galley nor old boats, plan nor beam, nor step.*

This example uses the accumulation of objects to stress the ferocity of the assault, while at the same time taking the opportunity to play with the rhyme in *adnomination*.

Ambroise’s most effective use of punning *adnomination* is perhaps in his treatment of the Emperor of Cyprus. Ambroise puns on *empeor* (emperor) and *empirer* (to make worse):

*Issi se fist emperetur –*
*Nel fist pas – mais empireur,*
*Car sei meîmes empeiroû*
So he had made himself emperor, not truly imperial but imperilor, for he did much harm. He never ceased to commit evil and pursue evil ends, as far as he was able, and to pursue the Christians of God.

He creates a neologism to characterise the emperor as someone whose essence is to cause harm. Here the rhetoric is used for propaganda purposes — but there is also a wit to be admired in the way he does it.

His use of simile is not particularly sophisticated — but can be effective. The image of Richard, so pierced with arrows that he resembles a hedgehog, is hyperbolic and conveys the sense of his heroic battle. Some similes are, however, not so apt. The following example from early in the text describes the effect of the arrival of the king of England:

The Lombards left off their threats as soon as they saw him and turned and fled and the noble king pursued them. Ambroise witnessed this when it happened, for when they saw the king come they would have reminded you of sheep fleeing the wolf; as the oxen strain against the yoke so did they strain to reach the postern on the Palermo side.

The second simile of the oxen straining against the yoke does not work as an image, but it provides an opportunity for punning word-play with traire, and this punning seems to be more important
to him than the image. Such contrived word-play is part of the craftsmanship on show.

His most extensive ‘set-piece’ of rhetoric is placed in the mouth of a priest, persuading Richard to stay in the Holy Land, despite disturbing news of his brother John’s behaviour in England:

\[
\text{Cil li dist, ‘Sire, l’em vos blame,} \\
\text{E par cest ost vait la fame} \\
\text{Partut de vostre retournee [...]}
\]

\[
\text{Reis, remembre tei des granz honors,} \\
\text{Que Deus t[ë] at en tanz lius faits,} \\
\text{Qui serunt mes tozjorz retraites,} \\
\text{Que onques a rei de ton eage} \\
\text{Ne fist a mains de damage.} \\
\text{Reis, recorde tei que l’en conte,} \\
[9600]
\text{Quant jo te vi de Peitiers conte} \\
\text{C’onques [n’ot] nul si esveisié} \\
\text{Veisin ne si halt ne si preisié,} \\
\text{Si de guere te venist sus,} \\
\text{Que ne l’allasses en desus.} \\
\text{Reis, remenbre des granz tençons [...]}
\]

\[
\text{Reis, remenbre tei de l’aventure} \\
\text{De la riche descomfiture,} \\
\text{De Haltfort [...]}
\]

\[
\text{Reis, remenbre tei de ton realme} \\
\text{Que sanz porter escu ne hiaume} \\
\text{Eüs en pais e en quité,} \\
\text{Que nuls n’i aveit abité.} \\
\text{Reis, remenbre tei de granz emprises} \\
\text{De tantes genz que as prises,} \\
\text{De Meschines que tu preïs,} \\
\text{Des prüesces que tu feïs} \\
\text{Quant tu matas la grifonaille,} \\
\text{Qui te quidot prendre en bataille,} \\
\text{Dont Dampnedeus te delivra,} \\
\text{E els a grant honte livra.} \\
\text{Reis, remenbre tei de la prüesc,} \\
\text{Dont Deus t’estendi sa largesce,} \\
\text{Que tu feïs de Cypre prendre}
\]
Ço que nuls hom valeit enprendre,
K[e] en quinze jorz eüs prise,
Fors que de Deu [ne] vint l'empri se,

9608 E que l'empereür prison
Preïs e meïs en prison.
Reis, garde tei qu'engin ne te fiere.
Membre tei de la grant nef fiere

9612 Quë en Acre ne pot entrer [...]  
9617 Reis, remembre tei tantes feiees
Deus t'ad soliegié e soliege.
Reis, remembre tei de Acre e del siege,

9620 Ou tu venis a tens al prendre,
Ou Deus te fist del tuen desprendre
Tant que la citë fud rendue.
Bons reis, don n'as tu entendue

9624 L'espargne de la maladie
Quë au siegé [ert] l'enmaudie,
Dont li autre prince mureient,
Dont nuls mires nes sucureient?

9628 Reis, remembre tei, e si garde
La terre dont Deus t'at feit garde,
Ke tote sor tei l'atorna,
Quant l'autre rei s'en torna.

9632 Reis, membre tei des cristïens
Que tu getas hors des liens[...]

9637 Reis, bien deësses retenir
Que Deus t'at fait tantes bontez
Dont tu ies en tel pris montez

9640 Que tu ne criems rei ne baron.
Reis, car te membre del Daron
Que tu preïs en quatre jorz.
Onc n'i fud plus longs tis sujorz.

9644 Reis, remembre tei de la grant presse
Ou tu fus de la gent engresse
Quant tu t'en dormis par pechïé.
Membre tei, reis bien [en]techié,

9648 Cum Deus t'en ot tost delivré.
Or sumes tuit a mort livré,
Or dient tuit, grant e menor,
Cil qui voleient vostre enor,
He said to him, 'My lord, you are criticised and throughout the army there is spreading the rumour of your return....'

King, remember the great honour God has accorded you in many places, which will always be spoken off, for never has a king of your time suffered so little loss.

King, remember what was said of you when I saw you as count of Poitiers, that there was no neighbour, however bold, however great, however renowned that you would not defeat if he were to come in battle against you.

Remember the great quarrels [....]

Remember that great defeat [you inflicted] and the adventure of Hautefort [....].

Remember your kingdom, which you took over in peace and freely, as no-one else ever had, without bearing shield and helmet.

Remember your great undertakings, the people you have taken, Messina which you took, the deeds of valour which you accomplished when you defeated the Grifon, who thought to take you in battle, but God delivered you and gave them up to great shame.

Remember your valour at the taking of Cyprus, where God showed great generosity to you, when you took it in two weeks, when no-one had wanted to attempt this – apart from God the deed would have been impossible – and you took the emperor prisoner and put him in prison. King, take care you are not deceived.

Remember the great noble ship, which was unable to enter Acre [....].

Remember how many times God had comforted you and comforts you still.

Remember Acre and the siege in which you finally took [the town], where God caused you to expend your resources until the city surrendered. Good king, did you not understand why you were spared the illness during the siege, the arnaldia which killed the other princes, whom no doctor could help?

King, remember and take good care of the land of which God has made you guardian, for he entrusted everything to you when the other king left.
Remember the Christians whom you released from bondage at Darum

[...]

King, you should well remember all God's goodness to you which has
brought you such renown that you fear no king nor baron.

King remember Darum, which you took in four days – it took you no
longer.

Remember when you were in a great crowd of the infidel race, when
you had through sin fallen asleep, remember, gifted king, how God
speedily delivered you. Now are we all given over to death. Now
everyone, great and small, everyone who wished to honour you all
say that you were always the father and the brother of Christianity
and that if you leave her without help now then is she dead and
betrayed'.

This is in some ways a mise-en-abyme of the whole narrative: the
narrative being repeated within the text, structured and presented
for Richard, and, therefore, also for the reader, as the work of God,
protecting and prospering Richard's crusade. The narration itself is
economic, summarising much of what has gone before, and giving
only a few lines to events narrated extensively earlier; yet Ambroise
still manages to embellish the account with his favourite devices. If
we take a moment to look at the passage we find that there are in
particular a number of homophonic and homonymic rhymes, some
using punning (ll. 9575–6), a large number depending on words
from the same root (polyptoton: ll. 9595–96, 9604–5, 9606–7, 9608–9)
while others depend on antithesis (ll. 9578–79, 9600–1, 9648–49).
Each successive 'reis, menbre ...' reminds the reader of what has
gone before. The direct speech invites the reader to listen, with the
king in the text, and to be persuaded that this is the right course of
action. Interestingly, the manuscript again indicates the structure at
this point. The whole section begins with a two-line initial and goes
on uninterrupted to the end of the priest's speech; then, the next
section again has a two-line initial.

There is no doubt that this speech is a literary construct. Direct
speech was often used in chronicles, not as a verbatim report of
what a particular character said, but as a dramatic and rhetorical
device to enliven the bald narrative. Sophie Marnette in her analysis
of different forms of discourse, direct and indirect, in the chronicle
and the chanson de geste, indicates a number of differences between
the genres, first of all in proportion – a smaller proportion of the text
will be direct discourse in chronicles – and secondly in the nature of the direct discourse. For Marnette the direct discourse of the chronicle is secondary to the action, while in the chansons de geste it is action. This distinction is more valid for prose chronicle than it is for verse chronicle where a higher proportion of direct discourse is found. Nonetheless it remains of a different nature to the direct discourse of the chanson de geste; this speech – by far the longest in Ambroise’s text – is a rhetorical set-piece. It does not purport to be the exact words of the priest – no-one would consider it to be so. Even supposing a priest did harangue Richard in such a way it would not have been in highly rhetorical rhyming couplets, and it is highly unlikely that a reporting chronicler would have overheard the harangue. What we see here in the use of language is something we might find in a piece of scholastic writing in Latin, but which we would not find in a chanson de geste. Nor do find we anything similar in Fantosme.

Conclusion

What we find overall is that the chanson de geste input in the language of Ambroise’s text is minimal. There is some influence in the moulding of the material – the presentation of hero and of enemy, and in the parallelism and the structuring of the anecdotes – but it is very thoroughly adapted to suit Ambroise’s purpose. His narrative is shaped not by the need to tell a heroic story, but the need to tell God’s story. Unlike both Fantosme and Wace, Ambroise does not use the basic structures of the laisse to tell his tale, but prefers the straightforward rhyming couplet, the normal form for any other story apart from the chanson de geste. The language he uses shares much more with the Latin chronicle, or the romances of such clerical writers as Chretien de Troyes, than it does with the chanson de geste. The epic has been stressed in analyses of Ambroise’s work and the learned played down. It is time for that to be reversed and the real influence of more learned discourse to be highlighted. This is at least in part what Ambroise contributed to the development of the genre. It is possible to argue that what Ambroise is doing here is very typical of Anglo-Norman literature. Bennett sees a similar combination of learned and popular in his analysis of Fantosme, and I argue that the same combination is to be found in the Anglo-Norman chanson de geste, in particular in Boeves de Hamtonne, but
also in the Anglo-Norman version of Fierabras.25 It is perhaps then not surprising that we find it in the work of this Norman chronicler at the Angevin court. In Ambroise the popular is more thoroughly adapted than it is in Fantosme. The vernacular verse chronicle was soon to be superseded by the prose chronicle – though some verse chronicles would continue to be written – but it is arguable that historical discourse attained its greatest riches in these texts from the latter part of the twelfth century: in Fantosme, with its chanson de geste formulae, its laisse and its admixture of more learned forms; and in Ambroise, in which the popular chanson de geste discourse is little more than an echo, thoroughly appropriated and at the service of the more learned polemic of this apologist for the Third Crusade.

Notes


8 Lodge, ‘Literature and History’, p. 262.
9 The History of the Holy War ed. Ailes and Barber, p. 2.
13 P. E. Bennett, ‘L’Épique dans l’historiographie anglo-normande’.
Ambroise’s *Estoire de la Guerre sainte* 19

