MS 493: The Workes of Thomas Oecleve

(zoelle egner)

beforewebegin

AWARNING

asitturnsout
imnotaverygoodscribe

Beinecke Manuscript 493 is a monster of a codex. It struggles with its constituent parts even as it pretends to be a whole, diving into seemingly irreconcilable dichotomies even as it affirms its identity as a unified text. It is presents works by the same author in both English and Latin, prose and poetry; it claims to represent texts by a single author but includes a poem by his rival; it was written by a single scribe, but in two different styles; even the support can't make up its mind, switching between paper and parchment in every quire. It is nothing if not a compilation. How then do we consider authorship, when confronted with a text with so many identity issues?

prose

membrane

poetry
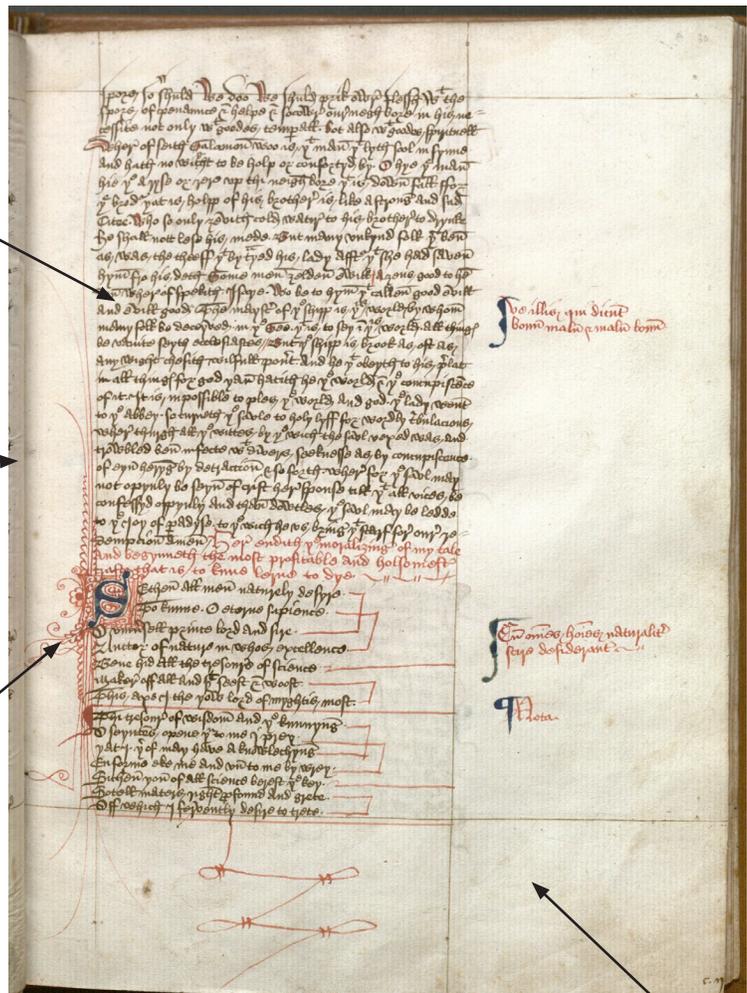
paper

Originally, I thought the best way to explore the idea of compilation as a form of authorship would be to close-read the table of contents.

After all, it demonstrates discrepancies in content and language!
On a single page!

A Minor Problem :

Apparently a flyleaf is not the same as a page.

When I requested a picture of ff.1v, I didn't request the right picture.

oops.

Not wanting to give into my despair, however, I decided to seize the opportunity offered by my stupidity: I would simply make a copy for myself! Maybe that way, I could better understand what my scribe had been thinking, making such a strange, strange book.

easier

said

than

done.

The Workes of Thomas Occleve of the Office of Privy Seale contained in this Vol:

His Complaint.
A Dialogue
The Tale of y̑ Good Woman Empress of Rome
To know how to learn to Die. with y̑ 9th Lesson on Allhallow Day.
The Tale of Jonathas and a Wicked Woman.
The Dance of Death. by Jon Lidgate Monk of Bury.

(the result)

Thomas Ocleve vel Okclefe, vir tam bonis Literis, quam Generis prosapia clarus, Exquisita quadam Anglici Sermonis Eloquentia, post Galfr: Chaucerum, cujus fuerat Discipulus, patriam Ornavit Linguam. Jo is Wicklevi e ipsius Berengarij in Religione doctrinam Sequebatur.

Tractatus hos fecit

Planctū proprīō
Dialogū ad Amicū.
De quada Imperatrice.
De Arte Moriendi.
De Cælesti Hierusalem.
De quoda Jonatha
De Regimine Principis.

(Charming how I can't write in straight lines, isn't it? I have new found respect for scribes.)

Ê Vitâ Chauceri.

The Workes of Thomas Occleue of the Office of Privy Seale contained in this Vol:

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The Dance of Death. by Jon Lidgate Monk of Bury.

My poor scribery aside, there's still something to be said about this page. We have here an English list (which leaves out two poems that appear in the manuscript, including, most notably, De Regimine Principis, perhaps Hoccleve's most famous work), a Latin biography of Thomas Hoccleve, and a more complete Latin table of contents (which excludes Lydgate's Danse Macabre.) To include both English and Latin on the same page seems to indicate a desire to appeal to a wide audience- or simply to reflect more accurately the contents of the manuscript, which switch between English and Latin depending on the section. Perhaps more interesting, however, is the English mention of Lydgate- and his inclusion in a volume entitled "The Workes of Thomas Occleve" at all.

Thomas Occleue vel Okclefe, vir tam bonis Literis, quam Generis prosapia clarus, exquisita quadam Anglici Sermonis Eloquentia, post Galfr: Chaucerum, cujus fuerat Discipulus, patriam Ornauit Linguam. Jo is Wicklevi & ipsius Berengarij in Religione doctrinam sequebatur.

Tractatus hos fecit

Planctũ propriũ
Dialogũ ad Amicũ.
De quada Imperatrice.
De Arte Moriendi.
De Cælesti Hierusalem.
De quodã Jonatha
De Regimine Principis.

Ê Vitâ Chauceri.

The Compiler

Consider the power of the compiler to affect a reader's experience of the text. Separating the compiler and the scribe for a moment, we must think of the compiler as an individual with the ability to affect not only a single copy of a work, but many- after all, at least two other manuscripts still exist with identical content and configuration as MS 493, probably created at the same scriptorium (though not by the same scribe.) In this case, the compiler chooses to combine the semi-autobiographical "Series" of poems in Middle English by Hoccleve with the more well-known, Latin poem "Regimen Principis" and the wholly unrelated "Danse Macabre" by Jon Lydgate. The choice to insert Lydgate, Hoccleve's more successful contemporary, into the middle of what has been clearly labeled a collection of Hoccleve's work seems an odd one. In fact, only the English table of contents lists its presence in the manuscript- the Latin version at the bottom of the page fails to list it. The intrusion of Lydgate into the collection could indicate a number of things, but two in particular come to mind: the first, that perhaps, as has been suggested in some scholarship, the book was hastily compiled (hence the inconsistent and incomplete tables of contents); the second, and more interesting, that such an inclusion indicates a devaluation of the author of the text by the compiler in favor of an emphasis on its style. That is to say, both Lydgate and Hoccleve were known as and considered themselves disciples of Chaucer, attempting to carry on his literary legacy. This stylistic debt is openly noted in the brief Latin biography of Hoccleve written in the table of contents. In fact, the final words on the flyleaf before the text begins are "Ê Vitâ Chauceri" - from the life of Chaucer. Although by no means conclusive evidence, the privileging of Chaucer, whose work does not appear anywhere in the manuscript, implies a level of deference that makes such a conclusion more feasible.

In any case, by inserting the work of another Chaucerian into the collection of Hoccleve's work, the compiler troubles the question of Hoccleve's authority, and of the true connection between the texts presented in the manuscript.This power is surprisingly strong- the choice to include anything within a collection or series is one that indicates some relationship between that item and the others it joins. Although manuscripts certainly did not always contain works that were related to one another, it seems unlikely that an inscription like the one that accompanies the table of contents would be used to describe a miscellany thrown together in order not to waste valuable pages in a book. Thus, the inclusion must be deliberate, and as such, must force the reader to consider the relationships between sections in otherwise unexpected ways. Just as a poet deliberately selects and arranges individual works in a collection in order to tell a particular story or enable a particular experience of the text, so the compiler imposes deliberate sequence and contextuality on the manuscript- and deliberate manipulation of elements in order to alter the meaning of a text is an unequivocably authorial act.

SPEAKING OF COMPILERS

I've done some compiling of my own. The following physical description represents the careful work of many hours with source material and scissors. That is to say, I've shown the parts of the Beinecke catalog that I've quoted directly by literally cutting them out and reassembling them in the format requested. I've chosen to leave the evidence of this labor completely conspicuous, primarily because I felt while producing it that I was assembling my own manuscript, and much of that sensation came from the labor of literally building it. Additional portions, addendums and musings have been added in my own hand (barely legible as it may be) as a means of pointing to the materiality of authoring words in response to a preexisting text. If the kindle disapproves of my handwriting so much that it renders the technology of the pen obsolete (or at least impenetrable) know that transcriptions of any and all handwriting are available upon request.

Written in England in the third quarter of the 15th century (we thank M. B.
Parkes for his assistance in dating the manuscript)

1
1. ff. 1r-6v[Prologue:] Affter th^^t hervest ynned had his sheves/ And
th^^t th^^e broune sesoun of mighelmesse/...Her endith my Prolog. And ffolwith
my compleynt. [text, f. 1v:] Almighty god as liketh his goodnes/ visitith
folk all day as men may se/...ffor thy gefftys, and thy benefices all/ And vn
to thy mercy and grace I call. Here endith my compleynt and beginneth a
dialogg.

    Thomas Hoccleve, Complaint; J. Mitchell and A. I. Doyle, eds., The
Minor Poems EETS (1970): the revised edition of EETS Extra series 61 (1892),
73 (1925) ed. by F. J. Furnivall and I. Gollancz, pp. 96-110.

2. ff. 6v-16vAnd endid my compleynt in this maner/ One knokkid at my
chaumbre dore sore/...Wole I translate and th^^t my gilt I hoope/ Schall purge
as clene as kercheses doth soop. Explicit dialogus et incipit quedam fabula
de quadam et nobile imperatrice Romana. Ca.^^o iij^^o.

    Thomas Hoccleve, Dialogue with a Friend; Mitchell and Doyle, op.
cit., pp. 110-39.

3. ff. 16v-28vIn the roman actus wryttyn is this/ Sometyme an emperour in
the Citee/...Wich th^^t no wight eshewe may ne flee/ And whan god lift also dye
shull wee. Here endith th^^e [changed from my] tale of a good woman
which was In tyme Emprice of Rome and now fewyth a prologg th^^e moralizasion of
th^^e same tale.

    Thomas Hoccleve, Tale of Jereslaus' Wife; Mitchell and Doyle, op.
cit., pp. 140-73.

4. ff. 28v-30r[Prologue:] My frende affter th. [sic] trow a wook or.
twoo/ That th^^is tale endid was hoom to me cam/...[prose text, f. 29r:] The
emperour th^^t I spak of beforne is our lord ihesu crist. his wife is th^^e
sawle the emperour brother is man...to th^^e Ioy of paradyse to th^^e wich he vs
bring th^^t starf for our redemcioun. Amen. Her endith th^^e moralizing of my
tale and begynneth the most profitable and holsomest crafte that is to kune
lerne to dye.

    Prose moralization of the text in art. 3, preceded by a prologue

in verse; Mitchell and Doyle, op. cit., pp. 174-78.

5. ff. 30r-41rSethen all men naturely desyre/ To kunne O eterne sapience/...
Se to th^^i soule soo or thow hens wende/ That it may have the lyf th^^t hath non
ende. Here endith to lerne to dye and begynnyght a prolog of th^^e ix. lesson
th^^t is redd on all halow day.

    Thomas Hoccleve, How to Learn to Die; Mitchell and Doyle, op. cit.,
pp. 178-212.

6. ff. 41r-42r[Prologue:] Tho other thre parties which in th^^e booke/
Off th^^e tretice of deth expressid be/...Her endith th^^e prolog and
begynnyth the lesson. [text, in prose, f. 41v:] Lo thus is seid of
th^^t cite in a place in it is no sorow hevenesse ne wamentyng...th^^e better
parte which parte god graunt vs all to chese thurgh his mercyable grace.
Amen.

    Thomas Hoccleve, The Joys of Heaven, in prose, preceded by a prologue,
in verse; Mitchell and Doyle, op. cit., pp. 212-213.

much as
I tried,
I could not
decipher even a
quarter of these
lines in the
original.
Anglicana +
Secretary
script are
apparently
too much for
me when
mixed!

7. ff. 42r-51r Here begynnyth th^^e prologg of th^^e tale of Ionathas.
This book to have endid had I thoght/ But my frende made me chaunge my cast/...
[text, f. 43r:] Some tyme an Emperour prudent and wise/ Regnyd in Rome and had
sounes thre/...His lyff he lede vn to his dying day/ And so god vs graunt th^^t
we do may. Her endith my tale of Ionathas and of a wikkid woman and begynnyth
the moralisyng.

Thomas Hoccleve, Tale of Jonathas, preceded by prologue; Mitchell and
Doyle, op. cit., pp. 215-40.

8. f. 51r-v This Emperour above expressid is our lord god th^^t hath. iij.
sones. By th^^e ferst sone we shull vndurstand aungeles...to sey th^^e kyngdome
of heven to which bryng vs all. Amen.

Prose moralization of the tale in art. 7; Mitchell and Doyle, op. cit.,
pp. 240-42.

9. ff. 51v-60v O ge folkes hard hertid as a stone/ Which to th^^e world
have all gour aduertence/...Off her tonge I have no suffisaunce/ Her corious
metres in Englisshe to translate. Laus tibi sit christe etc. Finis.

John Lydgate, Dance of Macabre, in the following sequence: Verba
translatoris (5 stanzas); Verba auctoris (2 stanzas); pope, emprour,
cardinall, kyng, patriarke, constable, archbysshopp, baroun, lady of grete
astate, bysshopp, sqwyer, abbot, abbess, baly, astronomyer, burges, chanon,
merchaunt, chartereux, sargeaunt, monke, vsurer, poor man (with rubric: Deth
to th^^e poor man, and text: Vsure to god...; below, the rubric: The poor
man aswerith, with no corresponding text), ffisicion, amorus sqwyer,
gentilwoman amorous, man of law, jurour, mynstrall, tregetour, parson, laborer,
frere minoner [?], chylde, clerke, Ermett (and armytt), agen to th^^e Ermytt
(with rubric: th^^e armytt answerith, but no corresponding text), th^^e
kyng liggyng ded and eten w^^t wormes, Macabre th^^e doctor (2 stanzas), Lenvoy
de translatour. F. Warren, ed., EETS Orig. ser. 181 (1931).

10. ff. 61r-133v Mvsyng upon th^^e restles bysynes/ Which th^^t th^^is troubly
World hath ay on hand/...To thee th^^t all seist of loves fervence/ That knawith
he th^^t nothing is hid ffroo. Explicit Egidius de regimine principum Amen.
f. 134r-v ruled, but blank

Thomas Hoccleve, Regiment of Princes, missing vv. 3976-4049 between ff.

114-115; F. J. Furnivall, ed., EETS Ex. ser. 72 (1897) pp. 1-197; A. S. G.
Edwards, "Hoccleve's Regiment of Princes: A Further Manuscript,"
Edinburgh Bibliographical Society Transactions 5 (Edinburgh, 1978) p. 32.
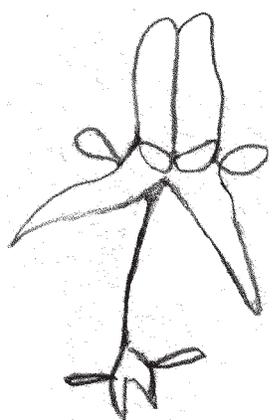
Technical Description

Paper (with parchment leaves for inner and outer bifolios for each
gathering; watermarks: unusual bull's or goat's head not located in Piccard,
Briquet, or E. Heawood, "Sources of Early English Paper-Supply," Library
4th ser. v. 10 [1929] pp. 282-307), ff. i (parchment) + i (contemporary
parchment) + 134 + i (parchment),   ← *Material*

288 x 208 (210 x 108) mm. ← *Dimensions*
Frame-ruled in ink; prickings for bounding lines in all margins except inner.

Collation
I-IV^^14, V^^14 (-11, after f. 66; no loss of text), VI-VIII^^14,
IX^^14 (-4; text loss between ff. 114-115), X^^14 (-12, 14; both blank).   ← *PAINSTAKINGLY CORROBORATED*

↑ *Ruling*

Catchwords, enclosed
in plain brown and/or red scrolls, at lower edge of page near inner vertical
ruling, verso; quire and leaf signatures (e.g., c.j., c.ij., etc.) in
lower right corner, recto.

watermark

Handwriting
Written in a current mixed hand,   Anglicana with Secretary forms, by a single scribe who wrote in a more
cursive and compressed style of script → *This is surprisingly true. The hand changed so substantially*
for the prose sections of text.   *that I refused to believe it was the same scribe at first.*

<u>Punctuation</u> - Primarily periods at the end of lines, Though in some sections (notably the Complai and the dialogue, periods appear with much greater frequency throughout ea line. No signs of additional punctuation, though extensive decoration helps to break apart stanzas and connect couplets.

<u>Scribal Dialect</u>
Is entirely beyond me. It does not seem to have been analysed in A. McIntosh, M.L. Samuels et al, <u>A Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English</u> (Aberdeen, 1986).

<u>Correction</u>
Corrections are rare, but when they do appear, it is in the form of added words or lines marked in the margins, but distinguishable from marginalia because it is written in the same ink as the primary text.

<u>Marginalia</u>
Extensive and varied. Primarily seems to comment on the text, although particularly in section 4, the marginalia is regular enough (accompanyin each stanza in a clear pattern) that it appears almost part of the text. Casual marginalia appears twice in the manuscript as a woman named Charlotte seems to have been testing her pen.

<u>Decoration</u>

Blue initials, 6- to 2-line, for major text divisions, with several distinct styles of red flourishing. Compare, for example, initials on ff. 1v, 41v, 77v. Headings and marginal notes in red; paragraph or stanza marks alternate red and blue.

This does the decoration little justice.
This is better ➔

a scribe who paid careful attention to the presentation of the text: stanzas are divided by red lines that extend width of written space; metrical arrangements are marked by brackets in red; notes are added, in red, in outer margins and preceded by blue paragraph marks that are often joined together to form a vertical wavy line. In addition, the scribe has also paid attention to minor ornamental features: decorative flourishes, mostly in red, have been added to many lower margins; ornamental ascenders in top line of text extend into upper margin and are often decorated with red.

But really, 'careful attention' doesn't capture it. The visual effect of the lines the scribe has imposed on the text (the metrical arrangement brackets and stanza break lines) is astonishing: it's rhythm physicalized.

Binding: s. xx. Tan pigskin, blind-tooled, with title, in gold, on spine: "Hoccleve/ Manuscript/ XV Cent." Edges spattered red. Clearly not original.

<u>Secundo folio</u> · ffor ofte

<u>Provenance</u>

Modern provenance unknown.
Apparently acquired by Robinson's in July 1952 (pencil note inside back cover).
Purchased from H. P. Kraus in 1970 as the gift of Edwin J. Beinecke.

Reflections on My Role as Author, Compiler and Scribe

In a very powerful, immediate sense, this project resembles Manuscript 493. Both are (at this point) self-aware, semi-autobiographical narratives embedded within a series of loosely related, disparate texts. In both cases, the scribe has "paid careful attention to the presentation of the text"[2] (for good or for bad, as the case may be.) And, of course, in both, the overarching experience of the work relies on the juxtaposition of elements that are not naturally paired but make sense when combined: pig skin and paper, English and Latin, Hoccleve and Lydgate, the Beinecke collection catalog and the Medieval Book- and so on, and so on. As author of the analytical text, "scribe"/copier for some of the images, and compiler of numberless fragments, I have taken on most of the authorial functions that can be assumed by a single person. Despite the frustrations of discovering my own inability to write in Anglicana/secretary script, by the end, I am struck most by the massive effort of assembly: this sensation of having encountered and mixed and synthesized a thousand tiny pieces into a creation all their own. It requires a vision broader than any single text could need.

In a modern context, this labor might be compared to the work undertaken by artists like Girltalk who construct new songs by sampling the work of others: each individual sample is recognizable as its own, preexisting self, but in combination with the others, takes on a wholly different character. Although these musicians clearly appropriate their source material in a different way, pushing contextualization and arrangement to an level not reflected in the manuscript, the fundamental process seems oddly but appropriately analogous. This practice is by no means restricted to music or medieval manuscripts, but it seems particularly apt to reflect on precursors like the Hoccleve manuscript given that so-called 'remix culture' has been so enthusiastically adopted in the last several decades. It is perhaps easier to acknowledge the significance of the individual who decided to include Lydgate with Hoccleve in the larger scheme of the work, having recognized that importance in the more extreme case of modern music. Thus, I hope that despite my own liberal sampling in the production of this work, it can be recognized as thoroughly its own entity, a creature rising above the many small pieces of paper and code that allowed its creation, to question in both content and form what it means to compile.