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‘Why þat yee meeued been / can I nat knowe’: Autobiography, Convention, and Discerning *Doublenesse* in Thomas Hoccleve’s *The Series*

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Abstract The secretary script of the Privy Seal looms large in the holographs of fifteenth-century clerk, Thomas Hoccleve—both in the written hand on the manuscript page, and the written-ness of his extraordinary quasi-autobiographical poetic productions. Most captivating, if little known, is Durham, University Library, MS Cosin V. iii. 9: witness to the verse collection known as *The Series*, in which disparate exemplary, confessional, and didactic texts are organised as the purported compositions of the ‘Thomas’ of the frame narrative. The stage seems set for an insight into medieval authorial anxiety, patronage, and even mental infirmity, of apparently unprecedented candour. Yet for all his disarming claims to ineloquence, insignificance, and (famously) ‘meetrynge amis’, Hoccleve is a poet creatively alive to the possibilities, and dangers, of self-identification. He adopts in his poetry the double visage of laureate, yet servant; public man, yet ostracised clerk. Though his speakers may really report autobiographical truths of the poet, the poet may frequently refer only to a namesake of himself—mediated through literary convention—in his speakers. Such is the focus of this article, which considers—adopting a narratologist vocabulary—Cosin V. iii. 9 as an example of a work, and artefact, that bears an almost Renaissance sense of the individual’s propensity to self-fashioning, but that is better encapsulated in a term of a distinctly medieval flavour, *doublenesse*. The discernment of such *doublenesse*, I suggest, offers a means of ascribing value to Hoccleve’s still neglected corpus that extends beyond historicism alone, and a pathway, perhaps, for an alternative view of literary authority in late medieval literature. In *The Series*, emotion is concealed behind convention, the maker behind his text; but despite Hoccleve’s diligent control over the words on the page, as for their interpretation by his audience, that, he must finally concede, ‘can I nat knowe’.

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Pearsall (1966), writing of 'The English Chaucerians', notes briefly of Thomas Hoccleve that

> Like Chaucer, and with much of Chaucer's wry self-mocking irony, he is always talking about himself, but where Chaucer's *persona* is always a laughable fiction, Hoccleve uses Chaucerian precedent and techniques to talk, really, about himself, sometimes with such raw honesty as to be painful. (p. 233)

Though far from always openly endorsed, Pearsall's is a remarkably comprehensive statement of the critical approaches to which Thomas Hoccleve has been exposed—or rather, subjected—during the latter half of the twentieth century. The respective book-length studies of Mitchell (1968), Knapp (2001), and Watt (2013) have considered Hoccleve's work from a genealogical perspective; identified his poetic voice as one shaped by a Lancastrian bureaucratic culture; and scrutinized the scribe's making of *The Series* as a window upon fifteenth-century book production. The excellent work of Knapp and Watt in particular, as well as John Burrow's considerable output on the poet,[1] has largely redeemed Hoccleve from Bennett's (1947) denouncement as a mere 'egoist' whose 'naive outpourings of his own hopes and fears are presented to us in all their crude immediacy'' (p. 149), and even gone to somewhat excuse the poet's own much-sanctioned admission of 'meetrynge amis' ('Balade to the Duke of York', l. 48). San Marino, Huntington Library, MSS HM 111 and 744, and Durham, University Library, MS Cosin V. iii. 9 have long been held as indisputable Hoccleve holographs,[2] and in their respective guises as the "collected poems" in English' (Bowers 1989, pp. 27–51), and (according to Burrow 1988) 'the most elaborately self-referential book' of the Middle Ages (p. 242), have also recently provoked diverse codicological, palaeographical, and even theoretical discussions. Yet as has largely been the case since 1892, and the renewed interest in the poet sparked by Frederick Furnivall's edition of the *Minor poems*, the tendency in Hoccleve studies remains one of historicism, an assumption of his deference to Chaucer, and a credulity, if no longer contempt, towards the autobiographical passages in his oeuvre.

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[1] Most notably, Burrow's (1999) edition of the *Series*' 'Complaint' and 'Dialogue with a Friend', but also his editing, with Anthony I. Doyle (2002), of a facsimile edition of the San Marino, Henry E. Huntington Library, MSS HM 111 and HM 744, and Durham, University Library, MS Cosin V. iii. 9, as well as numerous shorter studies (see my references).

[2] Frederick Furnivall, as early as 1892 (see Furnivall and Gollancz 1970), suggested the holograph nature of these manuscripts (which contain all of Hoccleve's extant poetry excluding the *Regiment of Princes*), but retracted the observation in the postscript to his introduction to the *Minor poems*. However, the conclusion of Herbert C. Schulz's (1937) palaeographical study—that the three manuscripts are in fact holographs—is now generally assumed in Hoccleve scholarship. In Cosin V. iii. 9, the missing first quire (containing the 'Complaint' and first 36 stanzas of the 'Dialogue') is supplied by ten paper leaves (fols 3–12) in the hand of John Stow, who acquired the manuscript in the sixteenth century. Unless stated, all references to Hoccleve's poetic works are to Furnivall and Gollancz (1970), with the exception of those to *The Regiment of Princes*, which are to Blythe (1999).

Such a tendency is not without justification. The biography that one is able to trace from the depiction of 'Hoccleue''s 'vnwar yowthe' in *La Male Regle* (l. 41) (c. 1405–06), to the married, benefice-deprived 'Hoccleue''s complaints of the 'unsikir of my smal lyflode' in the prologue to *The Regiment of Princes* (l. 41) (c. 1411–13), and finally, the notorious 'wyld infirmytie' and ensuing ostracisation of 'Thomas' recalled in the *Series*' 'Complaint' and 'Dialogue with a Friend' (l. 40) (c. 1419–21), is both compelling and partially supported by entries in the Privy-Council Proceedings and the Patent and Pells-Issue Rolls.[3] Of Hoccleve's apparent period of madness in particular, Burrow (1994) leads the recent critical trend that sees 'no good reason to doubt that the poet's mind did give way "for a certayne space", probably in the course of the year 1414' (p. 210).[4] Circumstantial evidence for the Beadsman's claim in the *Regiment*, that 'Thow were aqweyntid with Chaucer' (ll. 1866–67), is less forthcoming; yet though such flat assumptions as Pearsall's—that Hoccleve 'knew Chaucer personally'—are now generally avoided, recent editors Blythe (1999) and again Burrow (1994) remain relatively confident of at least some personal acquaintance behind the poet's eulogising in the *Regiment* of his 'maister deere and fadir reverent' (ll. 1961; cp. ll. 1863–69; ll. 2077–93; ll. 4978–5012).[5]

Donaldson (1954) and Kane (1989) alerted critics long ago to the dangers of the *persona* and the 'autobiographical fallacy' (Kane) in medieval literature written in the 'tradition of the fallible first person singular' (Donaldson, p. 934). Yet a distaste for Hoccleve's 'crude immediacy' apparently endures in the implicit critical consensus that the poet 'entirely lacked his master Chaucer's ability to speak in voices other than his own' (Burrow 1989, pp. 236–37). Mitchell (1968) displays a rare scepticism towards the Hoccleve–Chaucer acquaintanceship in his suggestion that '[i]t is quite possible that this so-called autobiographical allusion [*Regiment*, ll. 2077–79] is nothing more than a conventional [indeed, Chaucerian] expression of self-depreciation' (p. 117).[6] This reading—of the reliance of the Hocclevian voice upon 'Chaucerian precedent', or ostensibly, Chaucerian posturing—is characteristic of the then current critical interest in literary convention. Yet Mitchell too essentially denies Hoccleve any claim to a poetic *persona* beyond imitation, and fails to properly account not only for the poet's engagement with a far broader, continental, literary tradition, but also Burrow's (1989) later, astute observation,

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[3] 'benefice-deprived': 'I gazid longe first and waytid faste | After sum benefice, and whan noon cam, | By process I me weddid atte laste' (*Regiment*, ll. 1451–1453).

These datings of Hoccleve's works follow Burrow's (1994) authoritative collation of the internal and documentary evidence.

[4] Cp. Knapp (2009): 'there is circumstantial evidence that some real crisis did indeed occur in these years, as his payment from the Privy Seal was interrupted in 1414 and we have no datable surviving poems from the period between 1413 and 1415'' (p. 198).

[5] 'No such specific claims [of acquaintanceship to Chaucer] are to be found in the corresponding passages of eulogy in other Chaucerian poets […], and there is no reason to doubt their veracity' (Burrow 1994, p. 198); 'the geographical and cultural proximity of these two government employees makes the autobiographical claim difficult to discredit' (Blythe 1999, p. 13).

[6] For examples of such 'self-depreciation' in Chaucer, cp. *The Book of the Duchess*: 'Me lakketh both Englyssh and wit | For to undo hyt at the fulle' (ll. 898–99); *The Merchant's Tale*, E.1736–37; *The Squires Tale*, F.105–06; and esp. the *Prologue* to *The Franklin's Tale*, F.716–27. All references to the works of Chaucer are to Benson (2008).

'that people strike "poses" (conventional or otherwise) in life as well as literature' (p. 228).[7]

This last statement warrants unpacking for its particular applicability to the work of Hoccleve. Burrow (1989) denies that convention and autobiographical truth are necessarily incompatible alternatives. In his proposed critical approach to medieval 'autobiographical poetry', he instead gives priority to the distinction between questions of reference (does the poet refer to himself by the first-person speaker?) and of truth (is what this speaker says autobiographically true?) (pp. 225–28). This distinction may be usefully applied to Lawton's (1987) insightful reappraisal of the literary reputation of 'Dullness and the fifteenth century'. Lawton argues that 'a major interest of fifteenth-century writing is its lack of individualism, and the dedication with which "spirit" subordinates itself to the "group"' (p. 761). Therefore, the 'dullness' or 'conventional expressions of self-depreciation' of government servants such as Hoccleve, George Ashby, and even the monk John Lydgate, should be understood as 'a willed, self-conscious and ostensible dullness' (p. 791). By this formulation, the late medieval writer may be seen to assume a double visage of laureate, yet servant; public man, yet ostracised clerk. Though a speaker may really report autobiographical truths of the poet, the poet may frequently refer only to a namesake of himself—mediated through literary convention—in the speaker.[8]

Hoccleve, in his autobiographical passages, may indeed be 'always talking about himself'. Yet remarkable to his poetic, and betrayed, I suggest, throughout his work, is a sophisticated awareness of, and experimentation in, the possibilities and anxieties of this double visage that the poet feels compelled to adopt. The discernment of this literary *doublenesse* [to re-appropriate a term from the literary milieu of Stevens' (1979) courtly 'game of love'] may offer a means of ascribing value to Hoccleve's still neglected corpus that extends beyond historicism alone.[9] Such is the perilous gap between what is written and what is interpreted in the clerk's translation of Christine de Pizan's *Epistre au dieu d'Amours* (*The Letter of Cupid* [1402]); the assiduously disguised *craving* of the *clapping* subject in his petitionary verse[10]; and the focus of the present study: the fraught *doublenesse* of inconsistent framing devices, manuscript production and transmission, and appearing mad and *being* mad, in Hoccleve's last dateable work, the *Series*.

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[7] Cp. Michael Seymour (1981) for a similar assessment to that of Mitchell: 'Hoccleve's greatest debt to Chaucer concerns the creation of his poetic *persona* which is the basis of much of his verse. […] Hoccleve (as far as can be surmised) followed Chaucer only, albeit at a distance and without that complexity which Chaucer gave to his several *personae*. Hoccleve's portrayal of himself is much more unified as well as more simple' (p. xxv).

[8] Indeed, by Lawton's (1987) assessment, autobiographical writing's 'authenticity is enhanced by its intertextuality' (p. 773). Such autobiographical writing was, of course, not taken up for its own sake: 'Unlike the modern autobiography, the corresponding medieval texts will present themselves as written versions, albeit elaborated and formalized, of an everyday self-referring speech-act. They are addressed to particular recipients, and they serve explicitly stated practical ends' (Burrow 1989, pp. 235–36).

[9] 'All social life', writes Stevens (1979) in his influential study, *Music and poetry in the early Tudor court*, 'is in some sense a fiction, "a game". We act many parts; and we try to act consistently, not mixing our roles' (p. 154). I proceed from the assumption that such 'doublenesse' (as vilified in Hoccleve's *Letter of Cupid*, l. 21) has applicability beyond the court setting examined by Stevens, and to the broader medieval imagination in which it constituted a literary, but also a real-life concern.

[10] *craving*, ger.: '(a) Begging, entreaty, prayer; (b) demand for payment of a debt; (c) accusation'; *clapping*, ger.: '(c) idle talk, chatter; quarrelling', in *Middle English Dictionary* (McSparran 1952-2001). See *La Male Regle* (ll. 393–400).

The brief outline of Hoccleve's autobiographical passages above should indicate that not every speaking 'Thomas' is the poet Hoccleve. Throughout this article, I will maintain Watt's (2013) division 'between the narrator, Thomas, and author, Hoccleve' (p. 5).[11] For poet and audience alike, this distinction in reference is not infallible: who is the 'I', for instance, in the complaint of the speaker of the 'Dialogue', 'Why þat yee meeued been / can *I* nat knowe' (l. 807, my emphasis)?[12] Too narrowly historicist a reading of Hoccleve's poetry must inevitably end in frustration; for all the poet's discerning claims to ineloquence, poverty, and madness, Hoccleve's work, I wish to propose, necessitates an equally perceptive critical approach in order to discern the *doublenesse* beneath his 'dullness'.

> Many a sawte made I to this myrrowre,
> thinkynge, "yf that I loke in this manere
> amonge folke / as I now do, none errowr
> of suspecte loke / may in my face appere,
> this countinance, I am svre, and this chere,
> If I forthe vse / is no thinge reprevable
> to them that have / conseytes resonable." ('Complaint', ll. 162–68)

The passage above, in which Hoccleve's solitary speaker recalls how he *amendyd* his *chere* before 'my glas' 'when I was | my selfe alone' ('Complaint', ll. 155–156), has become something of a touchstone in modern criticism of the *Series*' 'Complaint' and 'Dialogue with a Friend'.[13] In the 'Complaint', a confiding subject describes how 5 years ago 'the substaunce / of my memory went[e] to pley' (ll. 50–51), and that now, although 'my wit / were home come agayne, | men wolde it not' (ll. 64–65). Such is his distress that here, at the poem's midpoint, the speaker finds himself organising his 'countinance' in order to display the outward signs of sanity; yet 'Thomas' realises that if indeed he *is* mad, his own perception may be equally compromised: 'men in theyr owne case / bene blynd alday […] and in that [same] plyght / I stonde may' (ll. 170–72). Whether psychological, theoretical, or codicological, readings of the mirror-scene have produced remarkably similar observations of the 'Complaint' and 'Dialogue''s 'awareness of a gap or mismatch between outer, physical appearances and inner, mental or spiritual realities' (Harper 1997, pp. 388–89). This gap—the *doublenesse* to which Hoccleve is so sensitised in these framing passages—is again, as is implicit in Lawton's conception, essentially that between ‘inner’ intention and ‘outer’ reception. Yet in the verse collection known as *The Series*,[14] one sees, to use Pearsall’s (1966) terms, perhaps the most ‘raw’, ‘painful’ manifestation of this *doublenesse* in all of Hoccleve’s work.

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[11] I refer here to Watt's (2013) good practice of naming the speaker of the *Series*' narrative frame as 'Thomas' and its flesh-and-blood poet, or 'maker', as 'Hoccleve'. In this article, the speaker, if named, is referred to in quotation ('Hoccleue', 'Thomas', or in the possessive, 'Hoccleue''s and 'Thomas''s), and the poet himself as Hoccleve.

[12] The speaker's objection here is purportedly towards those (unspecified) women who have misinterpreted the *Letter of Cupid*. Yet it is impossible to discern whether this vague offence ('they nat foryeue haue / no foryite' [l. 672] is merely an extension of the fictitious 'Friend''s officious misreading ('Thow hast of hem [women] so largeliche said' [ll. 754–55]), or a hint towards the poem's real-life reception.

[13] See Greetham (1989, p. 247), Simpson (1991, p. 24), MacLennan (1992, pp. 20–21), Harper (1997, pp. 390–91), Knapp (2001, pp. 169–71), Watt (2013, pp. 11–12), and Spearing (2012, pp. 187–88).

The question of reference regarding the speaker of the ‘Complaint’ (does the ‘I’ refer to Hoccleve himself?), and the autobiographical truth of the ‘wyld infirmytie’ suffered some ‘five yeere’ previously (l. 56) follows much the same critical trend as that of Hoccleve’s other autobiographical passages above. Furnivall’s (Furnivall and Gollancz 1970) straight credulity goes largely unchallenged by Bennett (1955) or Pearsall (1966), and great emphasis has been placed on the payment of the Easter 1416 instalment of Hoccleve’s annuity to friends rather than to the clerk himself.[15] Mitchell (1968) is more wary of this circumstance: ‘the poet’s own words are the only record we have of his sickness’ (p. 4), and indeed, Doob (1974) in *Nebuchadnezzar’s children* contends rather that ‘the unity of the “Complaint” derives from the underlying *metaphor* of madness’ (p. 215; my emphasis).[16] Burrow’s (1994) convincing case for the dating of the ‘Complaint’ and ‘Dialogue’ to late 1419 or 1420, and Hoccleve’s illness as early as 1414, has recently enlisted yet more compelling documentary evidence: the apparent non-payment of the Michaelmas 1414 instalment of Hoccleve’s annuity.[17] Burrow (1994), Knapp

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[14] Comprising the ‘Complaint’, the ‘Dialogue with a Friend’, ‘The Tale of Jereslaus’s Wife’ and moralisation (recommended to ‘Thomas’ by the ‘Friend’ in four stanzas following the Tale), ‘Learn to Die’, a further twelve stanzas of dialogue in which the ‘Friend’ requests that ‘Thomas’ write a tale of instruction to his son, ‘The Tale of Jonothas’ and moralisation, and in Cosin V. iii. 9, a dedication to Joan Beaufort, countess of Westmorland.

[15] Furnivall and Gollancz (1970): ‘Hoccleve, poor old fellow, tells us in his pitiful *Complaint*, […] written in November 1421, as I suppose, or early in 1422, how he went mad five years before’ (p. xxii); Bennett (1955): ‘His youthful excesses seem to have damaged his health for a time, and for some 5 years he suffered from a “wyld infirmyte” and was out of his mind’ (p. 90); Pearsall (1966): ‘The Complaint, where *he* [Hoccleve] talks of *his* recent mental breakdown and his struggle to get over it, is ruefully frank’ (p. 224; my emphasis).

‘It is curious that Hoccleve’s 1416-Easter £6 13s. 4d. is paid to him on July 8 by three instalments thro friends,—had he borrowd from any of them?—£2 thro Jn. Burgh, 6s. 8d. thro Robert Welton, and £4 6s. 8d. thro Jn. Welde, Hoccleve’s clerk’ (Furnival 1892, p. xxi). Critics continued to cite this circumstance for nearly 100 years; see Medcalf (1981, pp. 124–25).

[16] This ‘metaphor of madness’ is one that has many manifestations in the medieval imagination, but which according to Doob (1974), ultimately consists of ‘turning away from God and from God’s image, reason’ (p. 229).

[17] Scholars had previously followed Furnivall and Gollancz (1970) in dating the *Series* to late 1421 or 1422, based on his correct identification of the ‘statute’ by which ‘golde to wey/chargid now ben we’ (‘Dialogue’, 136–37) as ‘the Act of [2 May] 1421 A.D., […] enacting that no coin shall be good payment unless it is of the standard weight’ (p. xxii). Burrow (1994), however, argues that Hoccleve ‘must have added this stanza some time after 2 May 1421, when he was still working on the *Series*, but the rest of the *Dialogue* was written earlier, all or probably most of it probably in 1420’ (p. 215). Such a dating is supported by the deictic marker ‘when’ (i.e., before the statute) in the above stanza’s opening lines (‘*when* I this wrote / many me dyd amyse; | they weighed gold / vnhad aucthorite’ [‘Dialogue’, ll. 134–35; my emphasis]), and the Latin sidenote (*scilicet de secundo reditu suo de Francia* [Cosin V. iii. 9, fol. 19^{v}, ll. 18–19]) explaining that ‘Thomas’’s joy of hearing of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester’s ‘comynge ffro ffrance’ (‘Dialogue’, ll. 542–43) refers to the Duke’s ‘second return’ from Henry V’s second French expedition in November or December 1419. ‘Hoccleve’, speaking of Humphrey as ‘my lord þat now is lieutenant [regent of England whilst Henry was still in France]’ (’Dialogue’, ll. 533), must then refer to the Duke’s *first* period of regency between 30 December 1419 and the beginning of February 1421, rather than, as previous scholars have supposed, his second regency of 1422 (Burrow 1994, pp. 214–15).

(2009), and also Watt (2013) acknowledge the likelihood of a genuine mental breakdown during this period.[18] Yet it is perhaps Mitchell's (1968) biographically inconclusive remark, that 'Hoccleve's account of his illness, whether entirely true or not, is certainly most convincing' (p. 17), that is most instructive to a *literary* study of the 'Complaint' and 'Dialogue'. Lawton (1987) has noted that lines 36–42 of George Ashby's *Complaint of a Prisoner in the Fleet 1463* (a stanza bewailing the prisoner's abandonment by his friends) 'is all but a direct quotation from Hoccleve's account of his nervous breakdown in his "Complaint"' (p. 773).[19] Yet here, originality is not paramount to authenticity. This account, argues Lawton, is like Hoccleve's 'convincing'; it is autobiographically 'true' in terms of the emotion conveyed to its fifteenth-century audience 'because of, not in spite of, its conformity to a cultural pattern' (p. 773).[20]

Hoccleve, in the 'Complaint' and 'Dialogue', is perhaps the greatest sceptic of all regarding the extent to which 'conformity to a cultural pattern', in both his *chere* and his verse, should be amiably interpreted, or dismissed as *doublenesse*. Burrow, as outlined above, argues that convention and autobiographical truth are not inherently exclusive in medieval autobiographical writing—and 'writing', I suggest, should be understood here in the sense of both the text, and also the act of producing that text itself. Elucidating this point, and of great value to recent Hoccleve criticism, have been those studies—most notably Spearing's (2012) *Medieval autographies*—of the representation of textuality in the *Series*.[21] A text's 'writtenness', its existence as a material object, a book, is perhaps the most pervading 'convention' of all for the late medieval reader (and is particularly heightened in the case of a holograph such as Cosin V. iii. 9). Hoccleve, in the *Series*—the supreme example of his discerning *doublenesse*—draws apparently reluctant (though in fact, irresistible) attention to the work's textuality. Here, it is the exposure of the written artefact itself that may come closest of all to an 'autobiography' for the poet.

Burrow (1984), in his essay 'Hoccleve's *Series*: Experience and books', is perhaps deliberately provocative in his description of the *Series* as 'far and away the most reflexive of all medieval English writings' (p. 260). Simpson (1991), in 'Madness and texts: Hoccleve's *Series*', takes up Burrow's critical gauntlet. In particular, he draws attention to the transition between the 'Complaint' and the

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Footnote 17 continued

'the apparent non-payment of the Michaelmas 1414 instalment of Hoccleve's annuity': Furnivall and Gollancz's (1970) 'Appendix of Hoccleve documents' shows a payment of £6 13s. 4d. made to Hoccleve on 2 May 1414; however, his next payment, witnessed only by an undated entry in the Teller's Roll (*Thomas Occleve, de certo suo annuo. x. marce.*) is not made until Easter the following year (p. lxi).

[18] See n. 4; cp. Watt (2013, p. 9, n. 33). Knapp, it should be noted, has elsewhere taken 1416 as the year of Hoccleve's illness (2001, p. 59, n. 1).

[19] Cp. 'Complaint', ll. 64–147.

[20] Cp. Seymour (1981) writing of the 'Complaint' and 'Dialogue': 'Hoccleve is, no doubt, writing as it were to a formula, but the apparent artificiality of the design […] makes the real emotions of the *persona* the more striking' (p. xxvi).

[21] Chris (2008), in the *Oxford dictionary of literary terms* defines 'textuality' as 'The condition of being textual, or in other words of "writtenness"' (pp. 332–33).

‘Dialogue’ announced by the speaker’s ‘And, endyd my “complaint”…’ (‘Dialogue’, l. 1):

> Just as the momentary gesture towards referentiality [the apparently autobiographical reference of Hoccleve’s ‘Complaint’] seems to collapse back into the conventional [the conformity of the ‘Complaint’ to the conventions of a literary *planctus*], so too does the momentary gesture towards the non-textual [the fiction that we have been listening to a speaking, complaining subject] collapse back into textuality [the appearance of the ‘complaynt’ as a book which the speaker goes on to read to the Friend (‘Dialogue’, l. 17)]. (p. 15)[22]

Simpson’s commentary is astute, and will receive further discussion in my own reading of the ‘Dialogue’’s opening lines below. I endorse his statement that ‘Hoccleve is himself intimately aware of the kinds of problem I have raised’ (p. 16); but his contention that the poet ‘so constructs his text in order to resist this “collapse”’, employing ‘devices to efface any sense of “literariness” or of textuality’ in order to ‘convince his audience that outside his texts there is a sane poet’ (p. 22), seems overinvested in the overtly modern practice of imagining a speaking subject behind every text.[23]

Simpson notes the manner in which Hoccleve disrupts the rhythm of the rhyme royal stanza, and presents direct speech without any marker of speaker ‘to create the effect of a speaking voice’ (p. 19); whilst the deictic markers *this*, *here*, *nowe*, produce a sense of ‘here and now’ (p. 20)—the realm of reality, not the text. Yet Spearing (2012), in *Medieval autographies*, convincingly counters that ‘the fictive reality of the “Dialogue” is constructed out of literary sources and is intended to be recognized as such’, not least in the inclusion of ‘unspeakable sentences’, such as its first line, ‘And, endyd my “complaint”/ in this manere’, that belong ‘not to speech but to writing’ (p. 193).[24] By ‘marker of speaker’, Simpson refers to those marginal glosses that indicate a change of speaking character (cp. *Sapientia* and *Discipulus* in the opening exchanges of ‘Learn to Die’ [Cosin V. iii. 9, fol. 53^r, l. 1; l. 15]). Sebastian Langdell (2012), in his study of speech-markers in the Hoccleve holographs, has analysed in greater depth the appreciable movement in the Durham manuscript away from the marginal name-markers employed in HM 111 and 744. Like Simpson, Langdell suggests that the poet-scribe’s refinement of his textual apparatus ‘allows the reader to remain suspended in the imagined reality of the text’ (p. 325). Yet more convincing, in light of Spearing’s argument, seems instead to be the practical dimension of Langdell’s findings: of ‘Hoccleve’s own initiative, as both poet and scribe, to create a more self-sufficient text—a text that can potentially minimize instances of scribal miscopying', and with an integrity particularly appealing to an aging poet perhaps afflicted by what Langdell describes as an 'anxiety of conservation' (pp. 323–28).[25]

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[22] The eventual consolation taken by the speaker of the ‘Complaint’ is derived from ‘a lamentacion | of a wofull man/in a boke I sye, | to whom word[e]s/of consolation | Reason gave’ (309–312). Rigg (1970) has identified this book as Isidore of Seville’s *Synonyma*. By Simpson’s (1991) estimation, ‘[a]s soon as the *Complaint* has made its referential gesture, it falls into line as one further member of a specifically literary tradition [the *planctus*], whose meaning is produced by reference to that tradition’ (p. 16). However, cp. Lawton (1987) above.

[23] As identified (and effectively dismantled) by Derrida (1976) in ‘Linguistics and grammatology’, in *Of grammatology* (pp. 27–73).

[24] Spearing here extends Ann Banfield’s (1982) concept outlined in *Unspeakable sentences: Narration and representation in the language of fiction*. Such a sentence ‘*can* be spoken, of course, but it could only have originated [syntactically] as writing, not as speech’ (Spearing 2012, p. 166).

Indeed, Hoccleve's concern for the posthumous (or simply, post-holograph) accuracy of his poetry has also been posited by Burrow (1988). His survey, 'The poet and the book', includes Hoccleve amongst those poets whose textual productions implement safeguards against the displacements and inaccuracies of scribal transmission.[26] The highly reflexive framing of the *Series*, rather than fostering the illusion of a coherent, extra-textual speaking subject, serves then to embed the collection's separable items,

> in a primary narrative matrix which tells, or purports to tell, how they came to be composed. […] [T]hey are set back or recessed in the fictive frame—not like pictures in a frame, but like pictures in a picture. (Burrow 1988, pp. 243–44)

This allusion to a world beyond the text—one which supplies the circumstances for the composition of that text itself—bears comparison to the incipits and explicits of the petitionary and religious verses of HM 111 and 744.[27] Yet Burrow's identification in the Durham manuscript of a 'fictive frame' for Hoccleve's poetry, of 'pictures within a picture', reaches further, I suggest: towards the analytic notion of diegetic levels more familiar to narratological studies (see below). The 'picture' analogy occurs again in Spearing's (2005) articulation of *Textual subjectivity* in his work of that title. This concept, which has been key to Spearing's groundbreaking work in medieval narrative theory of the last decade, rests upon a departure from the anachronistic assumption of a fictional speaker as the organising principle for every text, and the recognition instead that 'medieval writings rarely *represented* the distinct subjectivity of a text's fictional speaker, and their habit was to *encode* subjectivity in textual form by means such as deixis' (p. 5). Hence, writes Spearing,

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[25] Langdell's (2012) hypothesis is certainly a most compelling approach to the biographical readings to which Hoccleve studies are so susceptible: 'At the end of his life, Hoccleve seems to have viewed the folio margin as a potentially problematic space […]. By limiting the authority of the textual apparatus, Hoccleve affords the central text decidedly more authority. […] By subsuming both speech-markers and his identity into the central text of Durham, then, Hoccleve arguably creates a more "self-sufficient" text—one that carries with it evidence of its creation (and creator) and clues to how it should be read. Clarity of conversation, in other words, gives way to clarity in conservation' (p. 329); cp. Thompson's (2001, p. 85) and also Spearing's (2012, p. 133) comparable suggestions of Hoccleve's concern for posterity.

[26] Burrow (1988) also considers Dante's *Vita Nuova*, Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, Charles d'Orléans' 'livre de prison' as preserved in the disparate Bibliothéque Nationale, fr. 25458 and British Library, Harley 682, Guillaume de Machaut's *Livre du Voir Dit*, and Juan Ruiz's *Libro de Buen Amor*. '[E]ach of the poets under discussion here […] was both a writer himself, in the fullest sense of the word, and also had direct access to, and some control over, at least some of those other writers, the scribes, upon whose activity the integrity of any sequence would depend' (p. 245).

[27] E.g, the incipit of the 'Balade to the Virgin and Christ, englisht for Master Robert Chichele' (HM 111, fol. 43^{v}), and in the case of the second 'beata virgine' and 'The Story of the Monk who clad the Virgin by singing Ave Maria', a sidenote in Hoccleve's hand stating that 'T. Marleburgh' commissioned the poem's composition (HM 744, fol. 36^{r}).

> just as in a painting we have no need to refer to the painter or his surrogate as part of what is painted, so in narrative fiction we have no need to refer to a narrator as part of the fiction itself[.] (pp. 19–20)[28]

'Textual subjectivity' is Spearing's hermeneutic alternative. Such is the basis for his conception of the medieval 'autography': a *dit*-like 'supergenre' of 'first-person writing in which there is no implied assertion that the first person either does or does not correspond to a real-life individual' (Spearing 2012, p. 7). Spearing presents Hoccleve's *Series* (and also the 'preamble' to the *Regiment*) as paramount examples of such autography[29]; and indeed, there is much to commend the category to my own study of Hoccleve as a poet of discerning *doublenesse*. In the chapter 'Hoccleve's *Series*', Spearing speaks of the 'inner life evoked by the *Dialogue*, constructed out of recognizable literary fragments'; of the work as 'an intention that evolves over time', but without the removal of 'the traces of the creative process so as to give the impression of a clear plan'; and of Hoccleve's demonstrable belief that '[t]he stability of the self does not come only from within: it depends on confirmation by other human beings and by God' (p. 207; p. 175; p. 185). Like Simpson, Spearing recognises the *Series*' revelation of its own textuality as integral to the work's 'fictive frame'; self-evident, however, is his objection to the notion of a 'sane poet' projected outside the text, to whom Simpson dangerously looks for coherence.

Perhaps inevitably, given that Spearing's exemplification consists predominantly of clerkly prologues and Middle French *dits*,[30] the medieval autography fails to adequately accommodate one vital aspect of the 'Complaint' and 'Dialogue': their story.[31] Things *happen* within the framing of the *Series*. It consists, to repeat Burrow's tantalising description, of 'pictures in a picture', purportedly disguised yet repeatedly exploded, and delighting in their double status as the material production of the flesh-and-blood Hoccleve yet the disorganised conversations and compositions of a fictive 'Thomas'. Such *doublenesse*, I suggest, is carefully managed by Hoccleve in the opening lines of the 'Dialogue'—textuality ostensibly withheld, but impossible to ignore. An analysis of the significance of 'Thomas''s 'And, endyd my "complaint"…' will benefit from a brief synopsis of the *Series*'s narrative framing to this point, one that, for accuracy, I will phrase using the terms of classical narratology, as suggested by the formulation of Burrow above.

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[28] Spearing here follows the formulation of Käte Hamburger in *The logic of literature* (1973, p. 136).

[29] Spearing (2012, pp. 135–36) divides the first 2156 lines of the *Regiment* (normally collectively described as the 'prologue') into the 'preamble' (ll. 1–2016) and the 'prologue' (ll. 2017–2160), which has the rubric *Verba compilatoris ad regem* ('the compiler's words to the king') and constitutes a formal address to the prince.

[30] Chiefly those of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, Hoccleve, and Bokenham's saints' lives. For further discussion of the structural similarities between the *Series* and the Middle French *dit*, see Spearing (2012, pp. 172–73) and Burrow (1997, pp. 43–45).

[31] By the term 'story', I refer to '[t]he content plane of narrative', loosely applicable to Russian formalism's *fabula* (Šklovskij 1991), and Todorov (1980) and Genette's (1980, p. 27) *historie*, as opposed to 'text/discourse': '[t]he expression plane of narrative' (*sujet/discours*) (Prince 2003, p. 93; p. 21). I owe these references to Michael Scheffel's contribution, 'Narrative Constitution', in *The living handbook of narratology* (Hühn et al. 2010).

'First', writes Spearing (2012) in his own summary of the *Series*, 'comes a verse *Complaint*, in which Hoccleve, as in the preamble to the *Regiment*, presents himself as suffering from anxiety' (p. 171). As in the *Regiment*, there are grounds to distinguish here between the 'Complaint' proper, and the opening five stanzas in which the speaker recalls how 'in the ende/of novembar, vpon a nyght' (l. 17) he became so vexed by 'thowghtfull maladye' (l. 21) that 'I brast oute on the morowe/ and thus began' (l. 35), followed by the explicit-like line, 'here endythe my prologue and folowythe my complaynt.' This 'prologue' is highly conventional: 'the broune season of myhelmesse' (l. 1) marks an intended contrast to Chaucer's 'Aprill, with his shoures soote' (*General Prologue*, A.1), whilst this *thowght*-afflicted sleeplessness also appears in the opening of the *Regiment*.[32] The framing of the *Regiment* in particular inverts the sleep-followed-by-composition formula of the Chaucerian dream vision[33]; yet whilst Hoccleve's speaker commences the *Regiment* proper ('Unto my lord Prince thus I wroot', l. 2016) only after 2000 lines of discourse with the Beadsman, 'my complaynt' ('Complaint', ll. 36–413) is already presented as the narrating act of a speaker external to the harried clerk 'amonge the prese' (l. 73) of the diegesis.[34] Genette (1980) provides the first, and still frequently appropriated articulation of the diegetic levelling that I am attempting to introduce here: 'any event a narrative recounts is at a diegetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act producing this narrative is placed' (p. 228).[35] Tentatively then, if we regard the 'Complaint' proper as one of the *Series*' 'pictures in a picture' at the diegetic level, so the speaker in the 'prologue' is at the story's extradiegetic level.[36]

To return to Spearing (2012): 'Second is a verse *Dialogue*, in which an unnamed Friend visits him, listens to him reading the *Complaint*, and advises him not to release it' (p. 171). Apart from contending that the 'Dialogue' is in fact the third item of the *Series*, I take issue here with the lack of specificity regarding the identity of 'him'. 'And, endyd my "complaint"' suggests a return to the extradiegetic level of the 'prologue'. The reader is exposed to Simpson's 'collapse' back into textuality with the reminder that the text they have been reading is exactly that, a text. Yet Hoccleve leaves some ambiguity as to the exact nature of this 'complaynt'. The inverted commas here are Furnivall's (Furnivall and Gollancz 1970): this folio (9^r) in John Stow's first quire of the Durham manuscript contains no such punctuation, and the reference in the holograph section to 'the pistle of Cupyde' (fol. 24^v, l. 19) also appears without them.[37] It is not until line 17, 'I redd hym my "complaint"', that 'complaynt' can be unequivocally read as a noun—the text of the 'Complaint'—as opposed to a verb—the extradiegetic speaker's act of complaining that has occupied the last 400 lines.

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[32] 'Thought me byrefte of sleep the force and might' (*Regiment*, l. 7).

[33] Cp. 'And fonde me lyinge in my bed; […] Thoghte I, "Thys ys so queynt a sweven | That I wol, be processe of tyme, | Fonde to put this sweven in ryme' (*Book of the Duchess*, ll. 1325–1332); 'Now herkneth, as I have you seyde, | What that I mette er I abreyde' (*House of Fame*, ll. 109–10); the notable exception is the F *Prologue* to *The Legend of Good Women*, in which Chaucer's speaker begins composing whilst still asleep (544–545). 'Hoccleve''s vision apparently occurs whilst waking: 'I roos me up, for boote fond I noon | In myn unresty bed lenger to lye. | Into the feeld I dressid me in hye' (*Regiment*, ll. 115–117).

[34] *Regiment*, ll. 2157–5439 is, of course, a mirror for princes (or *Fürstenspiegel*) rather than a narrative. Indeed, the 'Complaint', for all its relation of the speaker's period of illness and ensuing isolation, can hardly be described as 'narrative' in the sense of the plot-led 'Tale of Jereslaus's Wife' and 'The Tale of Jonothas'. However, my argument pertains that the speaker of the 'prologue', temporally located in November and spatially in bed, is certainly distinct from the 'I' 'in westmynster hall[e]' (l. 72), and later 'in my chamber at home' (l. 155) depicted in the 'Complaint'.

[35] For a more recent summary of this analytical notion, cp. Herman (2009, pp. 65–68).

[36] These terms are Genette's (1980, pp. 228–229). 'Diegetic level' (or 'diegesis'/Herman's 'storyworld'): 'the universe of the first narrative' (p. 228, n. 41.). 'Extradiegetic': the narrative act 'carried out at a first [diegetic] level' (p. 228); 'narrators are extradiegetic if they do not inhabit the story world evoked by their discourse' (Herman 2009, p. 65).

At the moment of the Friend's arrival in the first stanza, however, the latter is still a distinct possibility. Stow has indented the first three lines to indicate the placement of an initial (which appear at the head of each of the separate items of the *Series*), yet the incipit, *Dialogus cum Amico*, has been supplied in pencil by George Davenport, a seventeenth-century owner of the manuscript, and may not have appeared in the lost quire.[38] One might be forgiven for assuming that the 'him' that speaks the prayer at the end of the 'Complaint' has simply taken a breath and continued, now narrating in the present. Certainly, having laid down at line 372 of the 'Complaint' the 'boke' containing 'Reason''s consolation to a lamenting (to follow Thomas Rudd's marginal gloss) 'Thomas', Hoccleve signals the speaker's return to the extradiegetic, extra-textual level forty-one lines before the 'Dialogue' has begun.[39] The fallacy of this assumption is demonstrated by 'my complaynt''s revelation as a book that has been written and can be read, but one that certainly cannot speak. Our search for 'him' must resort then to the extradiegetic speaker of the 'prologue', and the 'Complaint' understood therefore as a recital rather than an overheard composition. Yet once again, Hoccleve thwarts our wish for narrative coherence by presenting the speaker of the

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[37] Burrow (1999), in his highly recommended *'Complaint' and 'Dialogue'*, presents Bodleian Library, MS Selden Supra 53 (SC 3441) in a facing-page format with his 'Variant Original' of the *Series*' lost first quire (constructed from a collation of the six extant non-holograph manuscripts containing the *Series*). Selden, argues Burrow, 'is distinctly the most reliable, as well as the best spelled' of the non-holographs (in comparison to the surviving 574 lines of the 'Dialogue' in the Durham manuscript) (p. xxiv), and of course neither it, nor Burrow's Variant Original give any indication that 'my complaynt/compleinte/conpleynte' at line 1 unequivocally refers to a material text (pp. 32–33).

[38] Cp. the initials of fol. 26^v ('The Tale of Jereslaus's Wife'); fol. 49^r (Friend recommends that 'Thomas' add a moralisation); fol. 50^r (moralisation); fol. 52^v ('Learn to Die'); fol. 74^v (introduction to 'The Joys of Heaven'); fol. 75^r ('The Joys of Heaven'); fol. 76^v (Friend requests that 'Thomas' writes a tale of instruction for his son); fol. 77^r ('The Tale of Jonothas'); fol. 93^v (moralisation); fol. 95^r (Dedication). Stow's comparable indentation of the first three lines of what I have described above as the 'Complaint' proper (fol. 3^v, ll.1–3) supports my interpretation of 'my prologue' and 'my complaynt' as separate items in the *Series* (it suggests that a new section begins at 'Complaint', l. 36). However, as highlighted by Burrow (1999), it is highly unlikely that the scribal copy from which Stow worked had its original in the holograph. Any deductions regarding the textual apparatus of the Durham manuscript's lost quires must therefore remain speculative (p. xviii).

For the acquisition of Cosin V. iii. 9 (apparently in 1664) by George Davenport, one of Bishop Cosin's chaplains, see Burrow and Doyle (2002, p. xxxiii).

Dialogus cum Amico 'may not have appeared in the lost quire': no incipit appears in Selden. That in Burrow's (1999) Variant Original: 'Heere endith my Conpleynte and begynneth *a* Diallog' (pp. 32–33; my emphasis), is if anything, rather suggestive of the continued narration suggested above.

[39] Thomas Rudd (1668–1733), Chapter Librarian at Durham Cathedral from 1716 to 1726. See Burrow and Doyle (2002, p. xxxiii).

'Complaint' as entirely temporally disparate from that of the prologue: 'Syn now the holy seson is of lente' (l. 662)! The effect is perplexing; readers find themselves returning to the extradiegetic level, but do not come out where (or perhaps even with whom) they came in. Hoccleve compounds this disparity, notes Watt (2013), when in apparently his second recital of the 'Complaint'—now to the Friend—the speaker condenses 'into one line [17] the time it has taken for the reader to progress through the text so far' (p. 90). Effectively, '[t]he beginning of the "Dialogue" draws attention to the fact that its maker and reader operate on different temporal planes' (p. 90).

For Watt (2013), Hoccleve's *doublenesse* here 'dismantles the fiction that a book can be made in a single day' (p. 91). For Burrow (1984), much like Spearing, the indulgence of such inconsistencies represent the traces of the creative process that make the *Series* so 'profoundly bookish' (p. 260). Yet as Burrow goes on to remark,

> books are themselves a part of life, not least in the case of an author who was himself a professional scribe; and Hoccleve takes pains to represent the production of this particular book as an event of great importance in his own life. (p. 260)

Spearing (2012) is correct to identify the 'danger of reading Hoccleve as a whole self back into a text in which he appears as a fragmented subject' (p. 174). Yet the textuality of the *Series*—its production as a holograph, and the text's encoded reminders of this production—does indeed point towards a creative agency *behind* the text: not the 'Thomas' portrayed in the work's extradiegetic frame, but an invisible Hoccleve, as present in the arrangement of the manuscript's quires as the secretary script on the page. By his own admission, Spearing's reading of the *Series* as autography goes almost full circle; yet I propose that it is not only the *Series* itself, but also the circumstances of its preservation in Cosin V. iii. 9, that 'seems to show autography evolving into autobiography' (Spearing 2012, p. 173) in Hoccleve's final known literary production.

Such is the 'raw'-ness of Hoccleve's *Series*: a glimpse of the poet-scribe-compiler arguably unprecedented in Middle English literature. Yet for all the fascinating implications of the Durham manuscript for the modern Hoccleve scholar, for the poet himself, these feints towards textuality must also have further highlighted the unbridgeable gap—indeed, the spatial and temporal disparity—between maker and reader. Cautiously, I would suggest that at least one dimension of the much interpreted, and multifaceted mirror passage, is as a dramatisation of this most 'bookish' anxiety. With the first instance of direct discourse given to the diegetic 'Thomas' ('yf that I loke in this manere…'), Hoccleve effectively creates a further 'metadiegetic' level: one which may be described as the adopted subjectivity of 'folke' (as simulated in the mirror), and by analogy, the reader.[40] To the stratified audience alluded to elsewhere within the *Series*' (Duke Humphrey of Gloucester ['Dialogue', ll. 526–616], womankind ['Dialogue', ll. 799–818], and Hoccleve's dedicatee, the Countess of Westmorland) Hoccleve adds himself, or at least his fictive namesake, 'for fayen wold I / yf it had not be right, | amendyd it' ('Complaint', ll. 160–61): this 'it' being the *countinaunce*, the outward reception, of his *chere*. This desire to *amenden* recalls the more conventional clerkly entreaties elsewhere in Hoccleve's verse: to 'maistir Massy' in the 'Balade to the Duke of Bedfrod' ('what is mis / rectifie', l. 18) and 'Maistir Picard' in the 'Balade to my Gracious Lord of York' ('to amende and to correcte', l. 53). In the mirror passage, 'Thomas', doubled, is his own purported critic. Yet like Hoccleve, perhaps inevitably the speaker here finds himself confronted by the familiar, impenetrable subjectivity of his audience.

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[40] 'Metadiegetic': 'a narrative in the second degree' (Genette 1980, p. 228).

The effectiveness of *doublenesse* as a critical framework by which to trace the anxiety towards, and responses to, this preoccupation within Hoccleve's poetry, is surely due in part to the presence (though by no means origin) of speakers similarly alert to potentially hostile subjectivities in his predecessor, Chaucer's oeuvre.[41] Yet equally, the concept also serves to *distinguish* Hoccleve's 'dullness' from that of his fifteenth-century 'Chaucerian' contemporaries. Indeed, it may hint if not towards a prefiguration, then an anticipation, of the 'self-fashioning' that, according to Greenblatt (1980), so obsessed the writers of the next 200 years. Most significantly, in the distinctive context of Hoccleve's quasi-autobiographical literary productions, the poet's *doublenesse* provides a pathway for an alternative view of literary authority in late medieval literature. Hoccleve is no Chaucer: affecting humility, but with pretensions to the company of classical *auctors*.[42] The clerk's intimates are his every reader—painfully scrutinizing, but yet more agonisingly remote—and legitimising his sallies with their interpretation is ultimately perhaps only the liberating, as well as terrifying admission, 'Why þat yee meeued been / can I nat knowe'. Hoccleve's is a poetry poised between delightfully careless *clappe*, and almost dumbing self-consciousness; with his potential for perpetual hesitation, we may be thankful that in life, Hoccleve's fear in the 'Complaint' that he may have 'lost my tonges key' (l. 144) is characteristically double.

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[41] Cp. the *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women*: 'what so myn auctour mente, | Algate, God woot, yt was myn entente | To forthren trouthe in love and yt cheryce, […] this was my menynge' (F.470–74; G.460–64). Hoccleve was undoubtedly familiar with the *Legend*. In the *Letter of Cupid*, Cupid makes specific reference to 'my legende of Martres' (l. 316). For another striking example, one need only think of Chaucer's Criseyde, who in a grim presage of her medieval literary reputation, laments that 'Thoroughout the world my belle shal be ronge! | And wommen moost wol haten me of alle' (*Troilus and Criseyde*, ll. 1062–63). A similar sentiment is dramatised at the end of the fifteenth century in Robert Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid* (c. 1492) (see Barney 2006) in which Cresseid ostensibly provides the pattern for the clerkly misogyny of proceeding (or for Henryson, preceding) centuries: 'O ladyis fair of Troy and Grece, attend […] And in your mynd ane mirrour make of me' (ll. 456–57). The *doublenesse* of both authors is evident, however, in their speaker's hesitancy to endorse such condemnation (cp. *Troilus*, ll. 1093–99), or to complacently rehearse the 'narratioun' (*Testament*, l. 65) of their sources ('Quha wait gif all that Chauceir wrait was trew?' [*Testament*, l. 64]).

[42] Cp. Chaucer's dreamer's description of literary authorities atop pillars of iron and copper in the house of the personified Fame (*House of Fame*, ll. 1456–525). One should be aware, as I have highlighted throughout this article, of a false equivalence between the dreamer 'Geffrey' (l. 729), Chaucer the poet, and indeed, the speaker of the proems. Nevertheless, it is tempting to entertain the possibility suggested by Cooper (1999), that amongst the authorities on Troy, 'Englissh Gaufride' (l. 1470) is a reference to Chaucer himself (assuming that he had already begun writing *Troilus*, and instead of the figure's usual interpretation as Geoffrey of Monmouth).

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