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Sonja Drimmer

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The Manuscript as an Ambigraphic Medium: Hoccleve’s Scribes, Illuminators, and Their Problems

Sonja Drimmer
University of Massachusetts

ABSTRACT
This essay argues that late medieval manuscript producers were both aware of and at times troubled by the ontological ambiguity of the medium in which they worked. Nelson Goodman’s aesthetic philosophy provides an apt framework for characterizing this ambiguity, which rests on the manuscript’s dual status as both an allograph and an autograph. Embodying features of both, the manuscript demands a third category, which I term the “ambigraph.” Through an examination of manuscripts of Hoccleve’s *Regiment of Princes*, I demonstrate how both scribes and illuminators struggled with a self-referential text that presents itself as both an original document and the performance of a script. When called upon by the text they copied to produce pictorial evidence of Chaucer’s likeness, scribes and illuminators left behind evidence in both word and image of their perturbation at this brief, as well as their reluctance and refusal to fulfill it. These exertions, I argue, offer a practical theorization of a premodern media concept in lieu of such a theorization in words.

What is the fair copy a copy of? (Bateson 1972, 8)

In the deliberately duplicated accident lies a basic tenet of late medieval media theory. A well-known example originated in one scribe’s omission and restoration of an entire stanza and its accompanying gloss in a copy of Thomas Hoccleve’s *Regiment of Princes* (Figure 1).1 Realizing his mistake, the scribe made amends by shoehorning the omitted stanza and gloss into the fore-edge margin. And to indicate the stanza’s proper place, someone — whether the scribe himself, an illuminator, or even another scribe — offered some pictorial wit, compensating with humor for the irregularities that were introduced into the mise en page. Here, a diminutive man tugs an illusionistic rope that lassos the mislaid lines in anticipation of hoisting them into their proper position in the poem. The rope-tugging man wants, with all his might, to emend the text, but his presence was not summoned by its content. His presence, in this respect, is irrelevant, and word-and-image studies, which encourage us to monitor the conversations that occur between texts and images, would have little to offer by way of elucidation.2 Viewed in isolation, this mini-but-mighty editor is a droll correction and maybe nothing more. Yet his fraternal twin appears in a later copy of the poem, this

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CONTACT Sonja Drimmer sdrimmer@arthist.umass.edu

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time as a premeditated image that aids in feigning a purposeful mistake (Figure 2). As with the text of the Regiment, the singular pictorial contribution has been gathered into the work and is now one of its replicable constituents. This repeated error and the opportunity for pictorial embellishment that it afforded offer a compelling example of what I would like to argue is both the hallmark and the greatest challenge of manuscript studies.

That hallmark and challenge are this: literature, and especially illuminated literature, in a manuscript culture has the discomfiting dual identity of both the autograph and the allograph. This binary was introduced by Nelson Goodman (1976, 99–123) to designate two different kinds of artistic production; as part of this binary, the meanings of these two terms differ from traditional definitions ascribed to them in other fields of study. The first, the autograph, is a work the physical manifestation of which is its end product, and which end product bears the traces of the history of its own production. Among the autographic arts, Goodman includes painting, sculpture, and prints that materialize the trace of a singular or historically unique action. For the purposes of this study, when I use the term “autograph” it is with Goodman’s definition in mind, and not to mean a manuscript in the hand of its author. The allograph, by contrast, is a work that provides notation made of discrete units or syntagms — instructions even — for its repeatable realization in other physical or experiential formats. Among the allographic arts, Goodman includes literature, musical scores, drama, and architecture. There is, to be sure, plenty to dispute in Goodman’s taxonomy, and a number of criticisms have been leveled against it, most notably from scholars of New Media and the digital arts (D’Cruz and Magnus 2014; Zeimbekis 2012). Certainly, any codicologist or critical bibliographer would object to his judgment that “differences between [editions of a text] in style and size of script or type, in color of ink, in kind of paper, in number and layout of pages, in condition, etc., do not matter” (Goodman 1976, 115, emphasis added). Bibliographers will nevertheless be familiar with the general sentiments expressed in Goodman’s binary as the iconic rhetorical question that compares the
spatial disposition of a painting to the temporal occurrence of drama: “If the Mona Lisa is in the Louvre, where are Hamlet and Lycidas?” (McLaverty 1984, 82). However, when this aporia is raised, it is only directed at the textual editor or scholar. Never is it posed as a conundrum faced by manuscript producers themselves, whether scribes or illuminators. Yet, as I will argue, manuscript producers were attentive to, and at times troubled by, the essence of manuscript production that gives rise to that iconic question.

In this essay, I consider how the ontological ambiguity of the work of illuminated literature in a manuscript culture was a condition that impinged on the production of the manuscript itself. Leaving aside criticisms of Goodman’s binary, there is something fundamentally useful in his aesthetic philosophy for grasping the contours of both medieval media and mediation. In splitting artistic production into this dyad, Goodman parses and articulates polar possibilities that engendered a conundrum peculiar to manuscript production. A manuscript retains the properties of both the autograph and the allograph. At one and the same time, it is its own evidence of a singular act of production (that is, its own end product) and the performance of a prior notation (meaning it also serves as notation for its future performance in other subsequent forms, whether realized or not).

Attentiveness to these twin poles exposes the limitations of theories that assume manuscript producers to have been untroubled by the nature of the medium in which they worked, and concerned only with the content it mediated. On the one side is a traditional vein of philological study, whether it is textual criticism in literary studies or what is loosely referred to in art history as source study or Kopienkritik, which seeks access to an original text or object and which prizes authorial intention. On the other side is the more enthusiastic outer reaches of an anarchist philology that perceives the medieval vernacular work of literature as inherently unstable, and which declares, “meaning was to be found everywhere, and its origin was nowhere” (Cerquiglini 1999, 33). Adherents to this latter school of thought — the most zealous proponents of variance (Cerquiglini) and mouvance (Zumthor 1972, 70–75) — relish the paradox that “the literary work was a variable.” (Of course, the question this begs is, “a variable from what?”) And at their most passionate, such theories romanticize the centuries preceding the advent of movable type as a prelapsarian moment of ebullient “excess” when “the effect of the vernacular’s joyful appropriation of the signifying nature suited to the written word was the widespread and abundant enjoyment of the privilege of writing” (Cerquiglini 1999, 33). Respectful as these theories are of the essence of manuscript culture as one of textual incident and accident, their necessary starting point is nevertheless a received notion of textual ideal, on which scribes riffed jubilantly, unconcerned with the mandates of their exemplars. By definition, the poles I have just described are extreme, and scholars — particularly since the advent of New Philology (Nichols 1990) — have engaged productively with the shades that color the spectrum in between. In addition, as Daniel Wakelin (2014b) has discussed more recently, medieval scribes could embrace both polar possibilities of textual ideal (the “immaterial text” demanding accuracy) and textual accident (the material text inviting variation). Similarly, Stephen Partridge (2000) illustrates the potential for either extremity to press on scribes’ anxieties, whether about respecting an author’s apparent incompletion of a text, or following their own aesthetic predilections for, say, “codicological neatness” (58).

But what if manuscript producers’ decisions — and indecisions — found their motivation in neither of these two possibilities? In other words, what if manuscript producers’ actions were not governed exclusively by their attitude to the content they were transmitting?
What I will argue in the following sections is that Goodman’s model of the autograph and allograph presents an alternative set of extremes that addresses not the content of what is being transmitted but rather the nature of the medium doing the transmitting. This alternative recognizes the ontological complexity of the manuscript medium as perceived by the individuals who produced it. I propose, further, that this ontological complexity requires a third term that is neither autograph nor allograph, but is instead an embodiment of both: the “ambigraph.” In showing how manuscript producers were motivated by an awareness that a manuscript is at once a copy of something else and an original object in itself, as well as by the quandaries that this awareness engendered, I will illustrate the profound media consciousness that defined late medieval bibliographical culture.

The manuscript page as duplicate and document

Works by Thomas Hoccleve are an ideal laboratory for testing the value of Goodman’s framework because so many of them are “self-referential artifacts.” David Greetham (1989) used this phrase to describe the metafictional qualities of Hoccleve’s output, but it is equally apt to characterize that output’s obsessively indexical qualities, in that it frequently draws the audience’s attention back to the book-object itself and its “literary and physical making” (Watt 2013, 13, emphasis added). John Burrow (1984) has remarked, for example, that Hoccleve’s Series “not only describes the making of a book, but also is that book” (266, emphasis as in original), a comment that applies, to greater and lesser degrees, to a number of Hoccleve’s other poems including his Ballad to My Gracious Lord of York, Poem to the Duke of Bedford, Ballad to My Master Carpenter, and The Ballad of Good Company. Take
the *Regiment*: as a text embodied in forty-three unique manuscripts — some with images and some without — it occupies territory on both sides of Goodman’s binary between the autograph and the allograph. Its existence as an aesthetic object arises from its identity as a third category of object that is both: the ambigraph.

The replicated pictorial correction with which I opened, and to which I will return in closing, is an excellent, if quirky, example of the vexations raised by the ambigraphic medium. But an even better-known moment in the same poem leverages the evidentiary traces of the handmade book as its own *authentica* (Wood 2008, 53–56); and in doing so, it taxed the discrimination of many of the poem’s manuscript producers. When, in the *Regiment*, Hoccleve (1999) memorializes Chaucer as the “firste fynder of our fair langage” (4978) and promises an adjoining image of the man himself, he encourages his audience to accept this tribute not simply as homage but as testimony (Figure 3). Readers of *Exemplaria* will be familiar with both these verses and the extensive critical commentary that they have stimulated; but an examination of this textual and pictorial moment as testimony enables further insight:

Allas, my fadir fro the world is go,  
My worthy maistir Chaucer—him I meene;  
Be thow advocat for him, hevenes queene.

As thow wel knowist, o blessid Virgyne,  
With lovyng herte and hy devocioun,  
In thyn honour he wroot ful many a lyne.  
O now thyn help and thy promocioun!  
To God thy sone make a mocioun,  
How he thy servant was, mayden Marie,  
And lat his love floure and fructifie.

Althogh his lyf be qweynt, the resemblance  
Of him hath in me so fressh lyflynesse  
That to putte othir men in remembrance  
Of his persone, I have heere his liknesse  
Do make, to this ende, in soothfastnesse,  
That they that han of him lost thoght and mynde  
By this peynture may ageyn him fynde.

The ymages that in the chirches been  
Maken folk thynke on God and on his seintes  
Whan the ymages they beholde and seen,  
Where ofte unsighte of hem causith restreyntes  
Of thoghtes goode. Whan a thyng depeynt is  
Or entaillid, if men take of it heede,  
Thoght of the liknesse it wole in hem breede.

Yit sum men holde oppinioun and seye  
That noon ymages sholde ymakid be.  
They erren foule and goon out of the weye;  
Of trouthe have they scant sensibilitee.  
Passe over that! Now, blessid Trinitee,  
Upon my maistres soule mercy have;  
For him, Lady, thy mercy eek I crave. (4982–5012)
Adjacent to these stanzas, in the outer margin of Harley MS 4866, is a framed miniature of Chaucer shown from roughly the hips up, against a deep green background. Dressed in a black gown and hood, he suspends a penner from his neck and holds a rosary in his left hand. Here, Chaucer’s figure responds to the words that eulogize him, and he trespasses the bounded space of representation as his right hand breaks the frame to indicate the stanza that pledges to provide his likeness.

Together this image and Hoccleve’s verses offer a critic’s bounty, with their invocation of Marian literature, visual and textual eulogy of an English poet, polemic against contemporary religious heresies, and meditation on the value and function of visual representation. In one strain of criticism, the image of Chaucer constitutes a landmark in English art, the mimetic claim of which is authenticated by religious orthodoxy (Carlson 1991). In a second, related body of scholarship on this passage, the image and text figure in Hoccleve’s enterprise to insert himself into a literary lineage fathered by Chaucer (Knapp 1999; Prendergast 2004). Ever “nobody’s man,” Hoccleve not only attempts to find a patron in the prince, he also insinuates his inheritance of the literary legacy that his mentor bequeathed the nation (Simpson 1995). For Nicholas Perkins (2001), this portrait provides an image of a vernacular author as authoritative advisor, a characterization he supports by comparing it to contemporary images of advisory figures (119). Similarly, Alan Gaylord (1995) confers authority on Chaucer’s figure here by referring to representations of aged, wise men in other manuscripts. To Andrew Galloway (2015), Chaucer and the accompanying passage present a “state of pensive reflection” (117). Derek Pearsall (1994) perhaps goes the furthest in commenting that “[i]t is, expressly, a picture of a wise and pious counselor, one hand raised in grave admonition, the other fingering a rosary. It would have been impossible for Hoccleve to have found an iconographically more powerful way of establishing a ‘cult of personality’ in which Chaucer, in his very person, embodied the idea of a national literary tradition” (402). I enroll these opinions because, despite the diversity of their language, they converge on the same point: namely, that the function of this textual and pictorial moment is to celebrate Chaucer as a wise and laudable progenitor, a function that presented little difficulty to the illuminator who produced it and the scribe who copied the stanzas to which it refers.

All of this commentary, however, overlooks the source of Chaucer’s eminence, which is not in his appearance but rather in the testimonial conditions of his display. Part of Hoccleve’s goal in this passage is to draft his own membership in the literary lineage that Chaucer founded; but first he must convince us that Chaucer’s auctoritas was by this point already in place. To the contrary, Hoccleve’s passage was instrumental in establishing not just Chaucer’s greatness but, far more importantly, his existence — and I mean this literally. Anticipating Caxton’s printed epitaph of Chaucer by almost seventy years, Hoccleve’s manuscriptual monument was a critical document to Chaucer’s historicity and facticity — prerequisites to the condition of an auctor (Lerer 1993, 147–75). Alastair Minnis’s (1988) well-known quip (and paraphrase of Walter Map) that “the only good auctor was a dead one” (12) was anticipated by Hoccleve, who commissioned a picture that both buried and authenticated the man he hoped would be granted that title.

What is important about this codicological monument was the implied necessity of its truth claims. Within a manuscript culture where the author’s name could go missing and his face could take on a dozen different hues, Hoccleve and the illuminator of this portrait rendered proof against the indeterminacies that could beset the vernacular poet — particularly one who writes an avatar for himself into the fiction of his own verse. Not a single known
inventory or will that includes a *Canterbury Tales* manuscript mentions Chaucer’s name until 1540 (Manly and Rickert 1940, 1:606–45); and all five representations of Chaucer in manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales* differ (Hardman 2003). The Chaucer portrait of Harley MS 4866 does not earn its pedigree because it matches in a forensically demonstrable way

Figure 3. Thomas Hoccleve, *Regiment of Princes*. British Library, Harley MS 4866, fol. 88r. Photo © The British Library Board.
the contours of Chaucer’s actual physiognomy, nor because it has a definable iconographic parallel in images of (wise) old men. As Shulamith Shaha (1997) has remarked,

The image of the old person was not unequivocal. The old man was believed to possess wisdom, an accumulated experience of life, cooler passions. … At the same time, the old person was held to have feeble mental faculties and to tend to irascibility, melancholy, miserliness. (70)

Rather, the portrait accrued the prestige it has because its verisimilitude tallies with Hoccleve’s truth claims in the adjacent text. Together, text and image do not illustrate or translate one another into their respective media; they do not engage in ekphrastic congress. Instead, they together produce a certificate of authenticity and enter into a mutually ratifying exchange.

Everything rests here on the portrait’s retrospection, its separation from the (by then) decade-deceased poet whom it “pull[s] … out of a merely mythic existence and into historicity” (Wood 2008, 119–20). Much has been made of Hoccleve’s use of the word “likeness,” although the word is not unusual in reference to images, not even in this context. Tomb contracts frequently make use of the word and its analogs. What is so unusual is Hoccleve’s choice of the possessive here: “his liknesse.” In contrast, tomb contracts use the indefinite article when referring to the effigy, requesting “the likeness of a chaplain,” or “the counterfeit of an esquire … [and] the counterfeit of a lady.”12 Hoccleve is insistent here that his image has an iconic quality, is not merely a symbol of Chaucer’s estate or vocation. Christopher Wood’s prescription for the fabrication of likeness — “to introduce information beyond any warrant” (136), to supply an “excess of information with respect to the apparent function of the image” (139) — correlates well with Chaucer’s face on the Harley manuscript’s page. Sloping shoulders, a snowy forked beard, plump dimensions, sleepy eyes, and an animated pose: taken together, this surplus of pictorial detail and the image’s departure from the conventions of static frontality that characterize the religious icon lend Chaucer that “lyflynesse” on which his historicity hangs, regardless of its correlation with the empirically observable body of Chaucer.13 There is, after all, an extant Chaucer portrait alongside the same verses in another Regiment manuscript: BL, Royal MS 17 D vi, fol. 93 v. Yet because the truth claims to the right are incommensurate with the generalized and stylized features of the figure to the left, it has been largely forgotten and certainly not fêted in the way that the Harley figure has been.

The Chaucerian occasion in the Regiment exemplifies how self-consciously medieval artists and authors were testing the outermost limits of the cultic status of the image, not as a manifestation of auratic presence, but as evidence of its own production history. Critical to the Harley page’s evidentiary effect is the conspicuousness of what Jacques Derrida (1987) would characterize as the parergon sheltering Chaucer’s likeness and its rupture by his hand (absent in Royal MS 17 D vi). If “the frame separates the image from anything that is nonimage” (Stoichita 1997, 30), then Chaucer’s hand is an excess that disturbs the ontological segregation of this page’s constituent parts. Because Chaucer reaches out past the frame, he is not an illustration that is internal to, or merely conjured by, the text; he sees it, acknowledges it, gazes at it. The two exist in the same spatial reality. Chaucer’s hand here emulates the signifying hands of donors commemorated in benefactor books, donors who point at copies of founding documents or texts describing their gifts, as they would at evidence. This certifying configuration could be carried to an extreme, as in the case of Alan Strayler, the illuminator responsible for painting the very image that commemorates the gift of the cost of paints he used to create both it and other images in this same book.
The deictic words on the Harley 4866 page and Chaucer’s pointing hand effect a circuit of accreditation, tantamount to the mutual recognition of documentary convention. A true document is one that both proclaims, “I have signed here,” and provides a physical impression that makes good on that proclamation, in turn making the proclamation itself good (Bedos-Rezak 2000). Where one part lacks the other, the medium fails and becomes most obvious as the mere piece of parchment that it is.14

This particular passage, as it appears in Harley MS 4866, positions itself as much as a document to the historical moment of its production as a document to Chaucer’s historical existence. In this respect it is a special category of autographic object, the self-reflexive image that “aspir[es] to the condition of art … [and] cultivate[s] and recognise[s] its artifice” (Hamburger 2011, 43). As a hand-produced book, it enunciates its autographic quality, just as the brushstrokes of a painting track the painter’s physical movement across the canvas and allow viewers to reconstruct imaginatively the history of the painting’s creation. Yet the object of representation that it produces is, at least potentially, a facsimile of itself, one that calls attention to its allographic origins and possibilities. Even the documentary image itself could be produced with a mind towards its reproduction. Jessica Berenbeim (2015) has drawn attention to the importance of the “transferrable image” in charters and cartularies, and the expectation “that it could be deemed sufficiently critical to transfer the image of a document along with its text” (54). In these special kinds of (testimonial) conditions, it is not only text that has both allographic and autographic value and potential, but images as well. Manuscript producers, as I will go on to show, were aware of — and at times troubled by — these potentials.

The ambigraph in action

Hoccleve’s insistently documentary verses in this passage of the Regiment presented a daunting brief to subsequent manuscript producers: no fewer than thirteen of the forty-three witnesses of the poem tinker with them. In BL, Harley MS 116, there is no portrait of Chaucer at all. Instead, a formerly blank space registers one scribe’s minor crisis (Figure 5). It looks like the scribe reached the critical verse in his exemplar, with its deictic, “I have heere his liknesse / Do make,” and paused upon realizing, perhaps, that his exemplar had no likeness to present. Alternatively, he might have hesitated because his client hadn’t furnished the money needed to make this likeness appear, although this latter conjecture strikes me as unlikely. It was only later that the scribe, or possibly a reader imitating his hand, returned to fill in the missing words with their now empty promise. The rising slope of these words above the baseline, and the darker (or heavier application of) ink used to write them witness their belated inscription on the page. However, since the line is technically “good,” this moment — and other moments like it throughout medieval manuscripts — fails to register the revisionist or editorial impulse that moves textual critics to the analytical act. The collation of the Regiment compiled by Charles Blyth (2014) makes no mention of this moment because, in attending to the allographic notation of words, it does not allow for commentary that reflects on the autographic disposition of them in space (4995). In a similar instance of reluctance, the scribe of Cambridge, St John’s College MS I.22 deferred the reader’s attention to another space where Chaucer’s portrait might appear, replacing the word “this” with the word “that” in the verse, “By that payntur may ageyn him fynd” (Figure 6). A collation or diplomatic edition would certainly acknowledge this revision,
but what it would neglect is the scribe’s inky indecision about the letterforms on the fabric of the paper: the word appears originally to have read “this,” but the extended tail of the “y” above allows the “i” in what was originally “this” to pass as a casual “a”; and by adding an ascender to what once was the final short “s,” the scribe transformed “this” into “that,” thereby divulging his second thoughts. Daniel Wakelin (2014b) has remarked that

the intention in copying can be invisible, especially when scribes do copy what is in front of them. … In the smooth surface of the accurate text, it is only wrinkles that reveal the scribe’s presence — moments where he adds paratexts, such as annotations or new titles, or where he disrupts the text by revision, when he pursues what has been called “professional or ‘active reading’” (251)

Part of what I would like to argue here is that in concentrating on the page as an autographic work, as material evidence of the history of its production and not simply as an allograph that stages variant performances, we can monitor even more closely the thought processes that the hand obeys. In at least some of these cases (if not in precisely these terms), the scribes must have asked themselves, “To what extent is the manuscript I am producing a facsimile of my exemplar?” Ingrid Nelson (2013) makes a trenchant point when she argues that “premodern media do not contain ‘information’ in the way that much new media theory understands it. Rather, they integrate message, materiality, bodies, culture, reception, and nonhuman phenomena” (217). Scribes were preoccupied with far more than the transmission of information alone, and in instances repeated across manuscripts of Hoccleve’s *Regiment*, the confluence of the self-referential text and its demand for pictorial affirmation tested the protocols of their professional decorum.

The indecision and resolution of these episodes embody the difficulty peculiar to the ambigraphic work. A manual reproduction — an original production in itself — produces the expectation that it will be called to account for its pledges. In committing his own hand to voicing Hoccleve’s first-person diction, the scribe assumed personal responsibility for what his hand promised. In a purely allographic medium, these lines and the absent image to which they refer would present no problem. Blithe in the knowledge that the text is only a representation of an act within its fiction, the scribe could copy these lines knowing that his client would never expect them to make good on their promise. Alternatively, in a purely autographic medium, these lines wouldn’t matter: the scribe would be at liberty to follow his own editorial whims, and any verses could be dispensed with at will, as they are in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Dugdale 45 and Cambridge, University Library MS Gg 6.17. Or as with manuscript Royal MS 17 D vi, they could furnish the occasion for the scribe or illuminator to produce his own rendition of Chaucer’s form, no matter how unfaithful to the liveliness that Hoccleve professes to recall. An autographic work is what it is. It has no responsibility to some prior thing. And even the most committed effort at pictorial mimesis still enjoys the prerogative of deviation from its living or actual subject without losing its character as an autograph.

The Harley 116 scribe’s initial pause is pregnant with the indecision that the work of art in an age of manual reproducibility provokes.15 This is an indecision that emerges with particular prominence when words and images acknowledge each other, when the quantal notation of letters collides with the spectral trace of figural lines, and when they are asked to answer for one another’s vows. Historically, manuscript scholars have tended to downplay the act of replication as a rote one, motivated by nothing more than inertia or obligation.16
But as Wakelin (2011, 50) cautions, and as this example illustrates, the decision to retain something, to copy it, can be just as considered as the decision to make a change. These verses did not present a conundrum to the scribes of Harley MS 116 and St John’s College MS I.22 alone. Other scribes swapped “there” for “here,” resulting in a verse that reads, “I have pere þe liknesse / Do make” (Figure 7). The alternative deictic refers the audience to some other manuscript, where presumably that likeness of Chaucer can be found. Other scribes altered the tense of one of the words. Rather than, “I have heere his liknesse / Do make,” these scribes wrote, “I have heere his liknesse / Do maad,” a grammatically incorrect construction that might translate to something like “I have caused his likeness to have been made here.” Perhaps this slight adjustment was meant to insinuate the narrator’s own acknowledgment that the present manuscript is a lesser facsimile of some illuminated original. Rather than reminisce on some prior, authentic witness, the scribe of Bodleian MS Rawl. Poet 168 advances a bad check, citing, “I have her his likenesse / to make” (fol. 50r), a perpetual promise for a future portrait that would never be (and never was) supplied. And in the most heterodox revision, the scribe of Newberry MS 33.7 seems to have promoted imageless devotion at odds with the subsequent stanza, when he edited the line to read “Of his persone y have here no likenes / do make” (fol. 72v). What appears to have mattered more to the scribe than consistency with the author’s orthodox position on images was textual consistency with the imageless page. Despite the diversity of these alternatives, what all the scribes of these manuscripts share is an anxiety about the fidelity of the copied, allographic words to the visual properties of the autographic object in which they appear and, crucially, to which they refer.

While all of these alternatives direct the reader away from the object at hand, another scribe who augmented Hoccleve’s poem in a variety of ways glossed over the troubling
deixis entirely. The scribe of Cambridge, University Library MS Hh 4.11 was apprehensive enough about his inability to supply an image that is faithful to Hoccleve’s remembrance that he omitted the word “here” (fol. 88r): a shrewd workaround, but one that interrupts the expertly decasyllabic meter of Hoccleve’s lines (Jefferson 1987). This omission is particularly revealing of the problems local to this verse because, in other respects, this manuscript is an idiosyncratic witness of the Regiment. In it, we encounter the most copiously illuminated copy of the poem, although its downmarket profile is perhaps responsible for its relative obscurity among the Regiment’s manuscript corpus. Adorning the major poetic divisions of this scruffy, mixed paper-and-parchment manuscript are ornamental and figural illuminations that host banderoles with brief, aphoristic mottos, all executed in a casual, if not amateurish, style. It seems highly likely that the manuscript’s scribe and illuminator were one and the same individual, who used each decorative occasion as an opportunity to supplement Hoccleve’s words of royal counsel with his own pearls of poetic wisdom. In the opening historiated initial to the poem, for example, a man opens his arms wide, while holding in his right hand the edge of a scroll with the advice, “Be war stodi not to sore” (fol. 1r).19 So this manuscript producer assumed — or was permitted by his client to assume — relatively broad parameters for his own autograph additions to the poem, including not only figural, ornamental, and heraldic illumination, but also poetic amplification. In light of his alacrity to add color to the page, it seems all the more remarkable that he declined to illuminate the face of Chaucer when this is precisely what the text invites. Yet at the same time, he eliminated the one word (“here”) that would inform on his refusal. While we can only speculate on his reasons, it seems to me that, like the scribes responsible for over a quarter of all extant Regiment witnesses that tamper in significant ways with these verses, this scribe was uncomfortable promising in word something that he was equally uncomfortable providing in picture.

The provision of the Chaucer image in the margin of the manuscripts that contain it is, perhaps, compelling testimony of its deliberately optional presence, forecast as likely as not.
to be included. Its marginal location may even have been Hoccleve’s own guarantee against alteration to his verses’ *mise en page*, even in instances when the image was not reproduced. Aditi Nafde (2013) has made the sensible point that, “[a]s a man of the book trade, Hoccleve would have … been aware that his own manuscripts could have been used as exemplars”; and that he took pains to ensure “that his meaning is transmitted from copy” and “that half his form is not lost on a scribal rendition of his text” (63). In addition to helping to preserve the four-stanza *mise en page*, the marginal placement of the miniature assures that, even if such a miniature were planned, its potential incompletion would go unnoticed, unlike the vacant frames one often encounters interrupting incompletely illuminated books (Hardman 1994, 1997). It seems entirely likely that enfolded into the plan for this poem is an acknowledgment of the difficulty it would pose for its producers.

There were, in fact, consequences when scribes remained faithful to Hoccleve’s original verses without satisfying their promise of an image. Where some copyists failed to deflect the reader away from the portraitless page, readers registered their disappointment. One such reader glossed “Chaucer’s ffiguire” (BL, Royal MS 17 D xix, fol. 91r), while the antiquarian John Stow complained, “his picture shuld be here” (BL, Harley MS 372, fol. 103r). What caused this disappointment was the way in which the manuscript can beguile its audience into forgetting that it is, ultimately, a simulacrum in the most specific sense: a copy of something that has no original (Baudrillard 1994). When a manuscript refers to itself, it seems to refer to its *self*, rather than recalling some prior object. Burrow (1984), significantly, alluded to the manuscript’s inherent self-referentiality long ago, writing that “When the record of the act of writing is itself printed … no reader will ever be tempted actually to identify the two texts; but the reader of a manuscript is in a rather different position” (263). In the Rosenbach witness of the *Regiment* (Philadelphia, Rosenbach Museum MS 1083/30, fol. 72r), there even appears a copy of the Harley Chaucer portrait, added to the fifteenth-century manuscript some three hundred years after its original production.
S. DRIMMER (Edwards 1993). Even readers who are wise to the manuscript’s dissembling sincerity lack language adequate to describing that it is what it is not. An annotation by Francis Douce (d. 1834) exemplifies what I mean by this. Committing a little act of philology in the margin, he informs us that “in some copies Chaucer’s portrait is placed here / D” (Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Douce 158, fol. 88r). Of course, by “here” Douce meant, “in the margin alongside the verses that promise to provide an image of him.” Douce, however, chose efficiency over pedantry and wrote, “here,” knowing that any sensible reader would catch his drift. If, instead, he had wanted to be both efficient and accurate, words would have failed him: too extravagant an expenditure of language is necessary to cope with the ontological ambiguities of the ambigraphic object.

Manuscript mediation

A current desideratum among medievalists is the articulation of a media consciousness peculiar to the era we study. Much of the momentum behind this quest has as its source frustration with an “assumption underlying the field of media studies … that media consciousness is necessarily modern, or even postmodern” (Brantley 2013, 201). Just as Hans Belting (1994) quarantined the Middle Ages behind a verge that opens out onto an era of art — and in so doing excluded medievals from active participation in theorizing their own media consciousness — scholarship that locates the “genesis of the media concept” (Guillory 2010) in (early) modernity has limited its researches to verbalizations of that concept, as if other cultural performances were not competent to express it. Textual expression is, indeed, so essential to John Guillory’s identification of an early modern media consciousness that his study is not just philological but also etymological. But the scholar of media theory does herself a disservice by assuming a logocentric stance. Jeffrey Hamburger (2006) puts a fine point on it in his remark that “[a]rt’s work ... is to provide an implicit theory of the image where medieval texts provide none” (406). Similarly, expressions of media consciousness are not limited to text. Actions habitually carried out on what we now refer to as media are just as theoretically charged, just as cognizant as verbal declarations of such awareness.

Like the confounding moment surrounding Chaucer’s image, the copyediting twins with which I opened help us to “reimagine practices of literary interpretation … based on media ecologies of the medieval manuscript,” which I take to include both the processes by which manuscripts are produced and their essence as singular analogs.20 It seems to me that it is

Figure 7. Thomas Hoccleve, Regiment of Princes. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 40, fol. 89r. Photo: author, by permission of the Bodleian Libraries, Oxford.
not at all mere coincidence that this pictorial emendation takes the form of bodies posed illusionistically on the page: bodies only began to proliferate in the margins of manuscripts in the thirteenth century, as a consequence of the increasing physicality of manuscript reading and interaction, which in turn heightened the manuscript’s visibility as a medium (Camille 1997). In the earlier of the two images, the lassoing man leaves visual evidence of the error that necessitated him: the fibers of his rope muscle in between the lines of gloss and stanza, overlaying the descenders from the line above and the superscripts below. His fervor to correct is itself error-laden, since he sweeps up into his lariat the gloss below, which would have no place in the main column of text towards which he tugs it. When, in the later manuscript, another scribe decided to retain an easily emendable error, he spot-checked and improved it with a sensitivity to the economy of space. Here, he placed the Solomonic gloss in the gutter margin, — the only gloss in the entire manuscript to appear adjacent to the gutter — appended the subsequent stanza to the fore-edge margin, and situated its gloss a good few lines above. Neither one of these men reports on the contents of the text; they report instead on matters of textual production. The man in the earlier manuscript depicts his own origins in an error; the man in the later manuscript depicts his origins as a visual witticism, as premeditated as an intended pun. Even though they are locked in a relationship of replication, each of these men indexes his maker’s independent thoughts on reproduction, whether it is about reproduction of words or images on the page. And as such, they offer up a tacit theorization of the manuscript as a medium we ought to heed. What they tell us is this: if we want to conceptualize a media theory proper to the later Middle Ages, we should consider its crux the point at which an object is both an authentic representation of its own moment of production and a representation of that which it reproduces.

Notes

1. This correction has been discussed in Wakelin 2014a, 286–87; and Kerby-Fulton, Hilmo, and Olson 2012, 92–94.
2. While a historiography of word-and-image studies remains to be written, Michael Camille’s (1985) contribution to the inaugural volume of the journal Word & Image can in many ways be seen as a defining statement of the subfield’s chief preoccupations and methodological commitments, at least as they relate to medievalists. In it, Camille envisions a productive excess of meaning produced on the manuscript page by one of two relationships between texts and pictures: either they are locked in harmony or they are discordant. In both of these, however, Camille assumes that it is the responsibility of both text and image to have a hermeneutic relationship with one another, which is not always the case.
3. Goodman’s (1976) inquiry into the matter is provoked by the “puzzle” of authenticity and why it is that a forgery of, say, Rembrandt’s Nightwatch is possible, whereas a forgery of, say, Shakespeare’s Othello is not. He writes, “Let us speak of a work of art as autographic if and only if the distinction between original and forgery of it is significant; or, better, if and only if even the most exact duplication of it does not thereby count as genuine” (113, emphasis as in original).
4. This definition of allograph should not be confused with the legal term, which refers to a writing or a signature made by one person for another, as in an individual authorized to sign checks in the name of another individual; nor should it be mistaken for the term in linguistics, which refers to the variant form of a grapheme or the variant written form of a phoneme.
5. For a historiography and critique of Kopienkritik, see Perry 2005, 8–22 and 79–109.
6. Authorial incompletion was, as often as not, an opportunity for scribal elaboration, on which, see for example, Higl 2012.
7. For descriptions of the manuscripts, see Seymour (1974); Edwards (1978); and Perkins (2001); Linne Mooney (2011) has argued that a manuscript of the Regiment in the British Library (Royal MS 17 D xviii) is in Hoccleve’s own hand. However, I concur with Warner (2015), who challenges that attribution.

8. British Library, Harley MS 4866, fol. 88r contains the best-known image of Chaucer; and British Library, Royal MS 17 D vi, fol. 93r contains another. Two other manuscripts once contained similar images of Chaucer, but they were later excised: British Library, Arundel MS 38 and Harley MS 4826 (which retains several centimeters of its width, showing that it was a standing image of Chaucer, similar to the one in Royal MS 17 D vi). Another Chaucer image was added (probably in the eighteenth century) to Philadelphia, Rosenbach Museum MS 1083/30, fol. 72r (Edwards 1993). My thanks to Jobi Zink for photographing this folio for me.

9. The manuscript has been fully digitized and can be seen here: <<https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?index=0&ref=Harley_MS_4866>>.

10. Since the Ellesmere manuscript is the only (extant) illuminated copy of the Canterbury Tales that predates the composition of Hoccleve’s Regiment, it seems reasonable to infer that the artist Hoccleve contracted to create this portrait did so using either the Ellesmere manuscript itself, a related copy, or a sketch of either as his model. Such affiliations are not so farfetched: Hoccleve had partnered with Scribe B of the Ellesmere manuscript to copy the Trinity Confessio Amantis (Doyle and Parkes 1978). In addition, Horobin (2015) has argued recently that Hoccleve was “the supervisory figure behind the production” (246) of both Ellesmere and Hengwrt, manuscripts that feature the work of Scribe B. Mooney (2006) has identified “Scribe B” as Adam Pinkhurst. For arguments against this identification see Roberts (2011) and Warner (2015); Warner states definitively that “Adam Pinkhurst and Scribe B were not the same man” (98). See also Thompson (2001).

11. For the opposing view, see Seymour (1982).

12. York Minster Library, L1(2), fol. 56v; and Northamptonshire Record Office, Stopford Sackville Collection No. 4239. Quote and translation from Badham and Oosterwijk (2010, 198 and 218, emphasis added). There is a large body of literature on medieval portraiture and the visual construction of identity. For the later Middle Ages, see especially Perkinson (2009, 2012). For a concise synthesis of scholarship on late medieval portraiture, see also Sand (2014, 12–14).

13. It is important here to acknowledge that the portrait type did not immediately give way to physiognomic likeness in the fifteenth or sixteenth century. Stephen Perkinson (2002) offers an especially nuanced discussion of the coexistence of the two conventions of portraiture (the “fantastic” and the mimetic) into the sixteenth century.

14. This is an idea widely cited from the work of Bill Brown (2001): “We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the windows get filthy, when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, however momentarily” (4). It is indebted as well to Heideggerian philosophy.

15. I am of course alluding here to Walter Benjamin (1969), “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”. Interestingly enough, early in the essay Benjamin acknowledges that, “in principle a work of art has always been reproducible. Man-made artifacts could always be imitated by men” (2). However, after insisting that mechanical reproduction “represents something new” (2), he declines to comment on other forms of reproduction.

16. Both Matthew Fisher (2012), who calls this “replicative” copying (37–38) and Richard Beadle (2013), who uses “verbatim” copying (238), also discuss its significance as a more considered act. Similarly, Müller (2014) writes, in the history of art, “the term ‘copy’ does not have a particularly positive connotation and it is not related to the concept of deciding according to the artist’s own free will” (xi), a notion she seeks to revise.

17. This phrasing occurs in Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, McClean MS 185, fol. 76v; Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Ashmole 40, fol. 89v; and Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS McClean 182, fol. 131v.

18. This phrasing occurs in BL, Royal MS 17 C xiv, fol. 81v; Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 221, fol. 127v; and Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Laud Misc. 735, fol. 128v.
The other phrases written into scrolls as part of the manuscript’s decorative borders are as follows: “Merry passeth alle vertuous thynge” (fol. 10r); “In wele be wyis and w[..] op[er] þu be wo” and “Thou3 thou now sle yit do nothyng so” (fol. 21r); “Say trouthe be not fals” and “Telle no talys” and “Whanne þu begynnyst a thyng thynk on the endynge” (fol. 36v); “Fyh on pryde” (fol. 38r); “Man in thy [?]rost thynke on thyn ende” and “Deth spariþ no creature” and “Say the best and bere the softe ontau3t tunge greuith ofte” (fol. 44v); “Off longe suffraunce comith greet greuance” and “Meknes deth oftin ease” (fol. 52v); “Whan þu gynnyst ony thyng þinke upon the endinge” (fol. 58v); “If(?) þu may sle yit do not so” (fol. 60v); “Say the best and bere þe softe untauht tunge greuith men ofte” (fol. 72v); “In wele be war or thow be woo” (fol. 78v); “Ihesu for thi moche myht save alle peple that loue trouthe and hate alle unryht” (fol. 83v); “Mekenes passe alle maner thynges” (fol. 88v).

This quote is taken from a call for papers for the New Chaucer Society 2016 panel “Beyond the Imagetext,” which was chaired by Jessica Brantley and Ingrid Nelson.

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Notes on contributor

Sonja Drimmer is Assistant Professor in the Department of the History of Art and Architecture at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

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