

Thomas Hoccleve's *La Male Regle* in the Canterbury Cathedral Archives

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The most authoritative copy of *La Male Regle* is fifty-six stanzas in length and appears on folios 16^v–26^r of San Marino, Huntington Library, MS HM 111, an autograph manuscript made by Thomas Hoccleve between 1422 and 1426.¹ The only other surviving medieval copy of *La Male Regle* appears on folios 406^v–07^r of Canterbury Cathedral Archives, Register O, in a hand that dates from the 1420s or 1430s.² As Marian Trudgill and J.A. Burrow have shown, Register O does not preserve a fragment of Hoccleve's poem but a transcription of nine stanzas (5, 6, 9, 10, 12, 14, 45, 44, and 51) that have been selected to "present a freestanding 'balade.'"³ Trudgill and Burrow's detailed list of variants between the stanzas found in Register O and the autograph copy in MS HM 111 lead them to argue that "the Canterbury text can present no challenge to the readings of that authoritative copy."⁴ Nonetheless, they go on to say, the presence of these stanzas in Canterbury "provides a curious, indeed unique, piece of evidence for the early reception of Hoccleve's idiosyncratic poem."⁵ Currently, anyone wishing to read the Canterbury copy must either reconstruct it from lists of variants or travel to Canterbury. The aim of this

I would like to thank Elon Lang and Rory Critten for helping me to ensure the accuracy of the transcription as well as for their helpful suggestions about improving the edition as a whole. I would also like to thank the anonymous readers at *Opuscula* for their comments. Any errors that remain are, of course, my own.

¹ Several editions of the poem are listed in the bibliography. Hoccleve's copy of the poem can be consulted in J.A. Burrow and A.I. Doyle, eds., *Thomas Hoccleve: A Facsimile of the Autograph Verse Manuscripts*, EETS, s.s. 19 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

² Marian Trudgill and J.A. Burrow cite I.A. Doyle's dating of this hand in "A Hocclevean Balade," *Notes and Queries*, n.s. 45 (1998): 180. The same hand also copies some material in Latin on the following folios.

³ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁵ *Ibid.*

edition, a diplomatic transcription of *La Male Regle* in Canterbury Cathedral Archives, Register O, is to facilitate access to the Canterbury copy of the poem.⁶ Considered in comparison with Hoccleve's copy of the poem in MS HM 111 or in its own right, the version of *La Male Regle* in the Canterbury Cathedral archives might help us to consider questions about the poem's reception and circulation in greater depth. How did these stanzas end up in Canterbury? Who was responsible for the selection of stanzas and the changes made within them? Why were these changes made? What does their appearance in Register O tell us about how early-fifteenth-century readers saw the poem in a literal or literary sense? What might this contribute to our understanding of textual culture in England at this time?

The version of *La Male Regle* in Hoccleve's autograph manuscript, MS HM 111, details the "misreule" (l. 90) that has led Health to forsake the narrator (who is also named Thomas Hoccleve). Thomas blames his bad behaviour on his youth, which "is rebel / Vnto reson, and hatith hir doctryne" (ll. 65–66). His lack of discipline led him to overindulge in food and taverns, where "the outward signe of Bachus and his lure" (l. 121) tempted him to drink excessively. He also claims to have enjoyed the company of the women whom he met in the taverns, though he claims not to have overindulged in "loues aart" (l. 153); he admits, "Had I a kus, I was content ful weel, / Bettre than I wolde han be with the deede" (ll. 155–56). Thomas complains that he suffers in poverty because he has spent too much money attempting to gain favour or because others have flattered him. He invites his reader to "lat this smert warnyng to thee be" (l. 385) before admonishing himself for chattering too much (l. 393). Thomas reiterates his claim that "my body and purs been at ones seeke" (l. 409) before ending the poem by petitioning Lord Furnivall, "þat now is tresoreer" (l. 418), for the ten pounds owed to him for the previous term's work — he has written off what is owed to him from earlier years. This summary belies the complexity of a poem that, in Ethan Knapp's words, "yokes together the petitional and penitential genres in such a way that they work at cross-purposes."⁷ The infelicitous combination of petition and penitential lyric in *La Male Regle* suggests that its audience must have been a sophisticated one, capable of acknowledging the interplay of bureaucratic and literary forms.⁸ Hoccleve was certainly comfortable with both: he wrote bureaucratic documents throughout his time in the Privy Seal, from Easter 1387 until near his death in 1426; his first datable poem was written in 1402, and he continued writing poetry into the 1420s.⁹

Whereas the autograph version of *La Male Regle* humorously juxtaposes Thomas's profligacy and need for penance with his petition to Lord Furnivall for money, the Canterbury version in Register O generalizes its admonition that readers should follow "a mene rule" (l. 352), going so far as to substitute the word "therfore" for "Hoccleve" in line 351. In Register O, according to Trudgill and Burrow, "we find the *Male Regle*, stripped of its autobiographical particulars, transformed into a general moral balade, and inscribed by some Canterbury hand on blank leaves towards the end of a volume otherwise largely devoted to the business affairs of the monastery."¹⁰

⁶ On the Canterbury copy as a version of *La Male Regle*, see Elon Lang, "Thomas Hoccleve and the Poetics of Reading" (Ph.D. diss., Washington University in St. Louis, 2010), 35–40.

⁷ Ethan Knapp, "Bureaucratic Identity and the Construction of the Self in Hoccleve's *Formulary* and *La Male Regle*," *Speculum* 74, 2 (1999): 371.

⁸ For more on the relationship between these forms, see Emily Steiner, *Documentary Culture and the Making of Medieval English Literature*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 50 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁹ For a concise biography, see J.A. Burrow, *Thomas Hoccleve*, Authors of the Middle Ages 4, English Writers of the Late Middle Ages (Aldershot: Variorum, 1994).

¹⁰ Trudgill and Burrow, "A Hocclevean Balade," 178–79.

The other documents in Register O range from accounts concerning rentals and estates to legal instruments such as charters and bulls. These documents were copied into the register over time: the chancery hands that copied most of them range in date from around 1275 to 1330. Given the other contents of Register O, it is intriguing that its version of *La Male Regle* omits the scenes in which Hoccleve depicts life as a clerk of the Privy Seal in London and Westminster. Paradoxically, these omitted scenes might provide the best evidence for how *La Male Regle* found its way to Canterbury and, more specifically, into a book whose main purpose was to preserve documents pertaining to the administration of Christ Church Canterbury.

Many scenes in the autograph version of *La Male Regle* anticipate that the reader is intimately familiar with Westminster and its bureaucracy. For example, Thomas asks whether there is anyone better known than him “at Westmynstre yate / Among the tauernerres namely / And cookes...?” (ll. 178–80).¹¹ He then provides an account of returning “Hoom to the Priuee Seel” (l. 188) after a hot afternoon spent drinking. Initially, it seems surprising that Thomas decides to take a boat back to the Privy Seal, given that its scribes worked right around the corner in Westminster Hall. His choice becomes clear only if the reader knows that he must be heading toward the hostel provided by the Keeper of the Privy Seal where its clerks lived together. It is reasonable that he would take a boat to the part of London near Temple Bar where a number of such houses were located.¹² Perhaps mindful of the cost of boat rides, Thomas describes drinking in this area at other times, proclaiming that “At Poules Heed me maden ofte appear” (l. 143); according to John Stow, the Paul’s Head tavern was located near St. Paul’s Cathedral.¹³ The clerks of the Privy Seal and almost all of their colleagues in Westminster Hall would have known these areas as intimately as they knew the kind of petitions to which Hoccleve alludes in the poem’s form. They also would likely have recognized the names of other clerks who make an appearance in *La Male Regle*, Prentys and Arundel. The depiction of these two clerks of the King’s Chapel in this poem, like that of Hoccleve himself, might or might not be accurate, though many aspects of *La Male Regle* in MS HM 111 imply that its readers might have been able to judge this based on their personal experiences.

The later careers of Prentys and Arundel might provide insight into how *La Male Regle* travelled to Canterbury and why it might have been copied into Register O. Both started as clerks within the bureaucracy and advanced through ecclesiastical ranks: “Prentys was appointed Dean of St Stephen’s, Westminster, in 1418 and Arundel Dean of St George’s, Windsor, in 1419.”¹⁴ Medieval clerks were part of the ecclesiastical ranks, so this kind of progression was normal. Medieval clerks were also an important reading audience in late-fourteenth-century and

¹¹ Paul Strohm provides an account of this scene’s symbolic resonance in “Three London Itineraries: Aesthetic Purity and the Composing Process,” in *Theory and the Premodern Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 3–19.

¹² A.L. Brown, “The Privy Seal Clerks in the Early Fifteenth Century,” in *The Study of Medieval Records: Essays in Honour of Kathleen Major*, ed. D.A. Bullogh and R.L. Storey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 265.

¹³ John Stow, *A Survey of London*, 2 vols., introduction and notes by Charles Lethbridge Kingsford (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), 1: 77, 2: 193.

¹⁴ A.B. Wathey, “Music in the Royal and Noble Households in Late Medieval England: Studies of Sources and Patronage” (D.Phil. diss., University of Oxford, 1987), 152, 166–67. Jenni Nuttall discusses the significance of this scene further in *The Creation of Lancastrian Kingship: Literature, Language, and Politics in Late Medieval England*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 67 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), especially 69.

early-fifteenth-century England.¹⁵ It therefore seems likely that Hoccleve's verse found its way to Canterbury with a clerk who moved from Westminster's bureaucracy to an ecclesiastical post elsewhere in the realm. Thomas Felde or Field, who was secondary of the Privy Seal from October 1406 to circa 1410, is one person who might have carried it: "he left the Privy Seal c. 1414 or c. 1415 to become an official of the archbishop of Canterbury, Henry Chichele."¹⁶ His duties as an official would likely have made it necessary for Felde to be in contact with Register O at some point. Chichele, who became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1414, provides another possible connection.¹⁷ He was a notable benefactor of Canterbury Cathedral and its library; he also had a profound interest in books, though only two belonging to him survive.¹⁸ Hoccleve names the archbishop's brother, Robert, as the instigator of one of the poems in MS HM 111, the manuscript where *La Male Regle* also appears. Although Hoccleve did not copy *La Male Regle* into MS HM 111 until 1422 at the earliest, he initially composed the poem in 1405. Archbishop Chichele or one of his clerks could have acquired a copy of it before leaving for Canterbury or when the archbishop returned to Westminster, something he did regularly in order to attend council, a body that included in its number the Keeper of the Privy Seal.

Hoccleve's personal connection to clerks throughout the realm makes it plausible to think that someone familiar with Hoccleve brought a copy of *La Male Regle* to Canterbury. Perhaps the copy in Register O was made by some acquaintance who thought that it needed to be generalized in order to appeal to readers unfamiliar with Hoccleve and his circumstances. Perhaps the copy in Register O was made by someone else who came across the poem after it had already arrived in Canterbury — someone who did not know Hoccleve and had no interest in scenes that seem to have been written for a Westminster coterie. Perhaps it was made by someone who had access to a different, shorter version of the poem made by Hoccleve himself — the kind of poem that might circulate more easily but also be much more susceptible to loss unless preserved in a compilation of some kind. This last possibility deserves more attention because the legal documents in Register O have been preserved in this book for the same reason: it contains copies of short documents that otherwise circulated independently. When seen in this way, Register O has much in common with MS HM 111, a book that repeatedly draws attention to the fact that its nineteen items were initially meant for circulation at some prior time and in some other form. Register O might have even more in common with another book that Hoccleve made during the same years as he was compiling MS HM 111, a formulary that preserves model documents passing under the jurisdiction of the Privy Seal: London, British Library, MS Additional 24062. Collectively, Hoccleve's autograph manuscripts and Register O indicate that, while clerks in the 1420s and 1430s might have seen bureaucratic and literary texts differently in some respects, they sometimes treated different kinds of texts in similar ways.¹⁹ The version of *La Male Regle* in the Canterbury Cathedral Archives does indeed provide evidence about the reception and circulation of Hoccleve's poem. It might therefore have profound implications for

¹⁵ See, especially, Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Steven Justice, "Langlandian Reading Circles and the Civil Service in London and Dublin, 1380–1427," *New Medieval Literatures* 1 (1997): 59–83.

¹⁶ A.B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957–59), 682–83.

¹⁷ For more on the archbishop, see E.F. Jacob, *Archbishop Henry Chichele* (London: Nelson, 1967).

¹⁸ His breviary, with initials painted by Hermann Scheere before 1416, is now Lambeth Palace Library MS 69; his copy of Innocent IV's *Apparatus decretalis* is now Antwerp, Plantin-Moretus Library MS 12.

¹⁹ Sheila Lindenbaum addresses this topic in the context of London in "London Texts and Literate Practice," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Literature*, ed. David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 284–309.

our understanding of the clerky readers who made such a substantial contribution to textual culture in early-fifteenth-century England.

Editorial Conventions

In order to facilitate comparison between the two versions of *La Male Regle*, this edition follows Trudgill and Burrow in numbering lines and stanzas according to their appearance in Hoccleve's copy of the poem in MS HM 111 and published editions of it. The transcription adheres to the conventions outlined by M.B. Parkes in "A Note on the Transcriptions" wherever possible.²⁰ Expanded contractions or suspensions are marked by means of italics. Unreadable text is marked with angle brackets (<>). Some portions of the poem are indecipherable due to damage that the manuscript incurred during a fire in 1670. In many cases, missing text is supplied with reference to MS HM 111; instances where this is not possible without intrusive emendation are marked with a question mark (<?>). Interlinear corrections are marked in this way: (- ↖). An expunged letter *h* is presented as it appears in the manuscript. The scribe's use of *u* and *v* has not been modernized. Care has been taken in transcribing punctuation. The scribe uses the *paraph* (¶) to mark stanzas on fol. 407^r; *paraphs* might also have been present on fol. 406^v, but they are no longer visible. He uses the *virgula* (/) to mark breaks within a line, something that Hoccleve also does regularly. Finally, he uses a *punctus* (·) several times: three times with the exclamation "O" (l. 69 and twice in l. 401), and once to mark a question (l. 37). Readers might wish to compare the *punctus* in line 37 to Hoccleve's use of a *punctus elevatus* in the same place in MS HM 111. The square brackets used by the Canterbury copyist at the end of each line to mark rhymes have not been transcribed. The brackets are notable since the copyist seems not always to have extended his interest in the rhyme scheme to the rhyming words themselves (ll. 108, 352).

Variants

This edition lists as variants the forms that appear in Hoccleve's autograph copy of the poem in MS HM 111. It lists substantive variants as well as those variants that might indicate something about dialect (e.g., *e* for *y* or *i*). It records the inclusion or omission of final *e* when it might provide some indication of the way in which the scribe scanned the line but not when it would have been elided.

²⁰ M.B. Parkes, "A Note on the Transcriptions," in *English Cursive Bookhands 1250–1500* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), xxviii–xxx.

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The Manuscript

Shelfmark: Canterbury, Cathedral Archives, Register O (Register P originally formed the first part of the volume)
Material: Parchment, 409 folios
Language: Latin and English
Script: Latin entries are in chancery hands that vary. The English text and additional entries at the end of the manuscript are in a secretary hand datable to the 1420s or 1430s.

The Text

[fol. 406^v]

Balade

[5]

33 y haue he<rde> of men ful <?>r ago
that *pr*osp<eritee is>²¹ blynd / ande se ne may
35 and verefye y may wel hit is so
<For I> myself haue put hit in asay
<Whan I> was wel / cowde y *con*sydere it · nay
<But what me> longyd aftyr nouelrye
<As yeeres yonge> / *zernyn* day be day
40 and now <my> smert / acusyth me my folye

[6]

<Myn un>war yowth / knew no3t what he wroghte
<Thys w>oot y wel / whan fro the twymyd²² he
<But> of his ignoraunce / him self he soghte
<And> knew not / that he dwellyng was wyth the
45 for to a wyght / were to gret nycete
<H>ys lord or frend / wytyngly for to offende
<Lest> that the wyghte / of his aduersyte
<The> ffool oppresse / and make of hym an ende

33 y haue] But I haue of men ful [?]r] men
seye longe
35 may] can
36 haue put] put haue
38 longyd] longed
39 be] by
40 acusyth me my] accusith my

41 no3t] nat he] it
42 the] thee twymyd] twynned he] shee
43 his] hir him] hir he] shee
44 he] shee the] thee
45 to] it gret] greet nycete] nycetee
46 frend] freend to offende] toffende
47 aduersyte] aduersite

²¹ This reading differs from that offered by Trudgill and Burrow. The scribe has written a *p* with a loop around the descender, a common abbreviation for *pro*.

²² *Twymyd* is recorded here, likely the result of the scribe omitting a minim when spelling the word *twynnyd*.

[9]

65 and 3yt for the more part / 3owth ys rebel
vnto reson / and hatyth his doctrine
and regneng that / hit may no3t stonde wel
wyth youthe as fer / as wyt can ymagyne
o' 3owthe alas / why wolt thow no3t enclyne
70 and to rewlyd resoun / bowyn the
syn resoun / ys the verry streghte lyne
that ledyth folk / yn to felycite

[10]

ful selde ys seyn / that youthe takyth hede
of perils / that ben emynent to falle
75 <for> haue -he- take a pourpos / he wol nede
<?>alle hit / and no conseyl to hym calle
<Hys> owyn wit / he demyth best of alle
<A>nd ferth ther wyth / he rennyth Brydilles
<A>s he / that no3ght betwyxt hony and galle
80 <Ca>n iuge / ne the werre fro the pees

[12]

<M>y ffrendes / seyde to me ful ofte
90 <M>y mysrewle / wolde me cause a ffyt
<A>nd reddyn me / in esy wyse and softe
<A lyte> and <lyte to> withdrawe hit
[fol. 407^r] But that no3t / myghte synke into my wit
so was the lust / rotyd into myn herte
95 and y am so rype / vn to my pyt
that scarsly / y may no3t hit a sterte

65 and 3yt] As part] paart
66 his] hir
67 and regneng that] Regnyng which no3t]
nat stoned] stand
69 wolt] wilt nat] no3t
70 to] vnto rewlyd] reuled bowyn] bowe
the] thee
71 verry] verray streghte] streighte
72 yn to] vnto felycite] felicitee
73 seyn] seen hede] heede
74 emynent to] likely for to falle] fall
75 he wol need] þat moot neede
76 [?]alle hit and] been execut to hym calle]
wole he call

77 owyn] owne demyth] deemeth
78 ferth] foorth rennyth] renneth
79 no3ght] nat galle] gall
80 were] werr
89 seyde] seiden to] vn to
90 wolde me cause] me cause wolde
91 reddyn] redder
92 withdrawe] withdrawen hit] it
94 rotyd in to] yrootid in
95 and y am] And now I am
96 scarsely] scarsly no3t hit] it nat

[14]

105 ¶ Resoun me bad and redde / as for the best
To ete and drynke / in tyme and temprely
But wylful ȝouth / nat obeye lest
vn to hys rede / he sette noȝt ther by
he of hem bothe / hath take outrageously
110 ant out of tyme / not two or thre
But xx^{ti} ȝeres / passyd contynuelly
Excesse at borde / hys knyf hath leyd wyth me

[45]

¶ Who so that passyng mesure desyryth
as that wytnessyn / olde clerkys wyse
355 hym self encombryth / ofte sythe and myryth
and therefore / let the mene the suffyse
yf such conceytys / in thyn herte ryse
as thy profyt / mowe hyndre or thy renoun
yf ~~h~~ they were execut / in any wyse
360 Wyth manly resoun / thurst thow hem a dowun

[44]

345 ¶ And al so despenseȝ large / en haunce a mannes loos
Whyl they endure / and whan ther is more²³
hys name ys ded / men kepe her mowthis cloos
as noȝt a peny / hadde be spent afore
My thank ys queynt / my purs his stuf hath lore
350 and myn karkeys / replet of heuynesse
Be war therefore / y rede the \bar{r} the \bar{r} more
and to a mene rewle / now dresse the

105 best] beste

106 and temprely] attemprely

107 ȝouth] yowthe lest] leste

108 hys] þat rede] reed he] ne noȝt] nat

109 he of hem bothe / hath take] I take haue of
hem bothe

110 ant] and not] nat two or] two yeer or

111 ȝeres] wyntir passyd] past

112 hys knyf hath leyd] hath leyd his knyf

353 that] *om* passing] passyng

354 wytnessyn] wittenen clerkys] clerkes

355 ofte] often

356 therefore] forthy

357 such conceytys] switch a conceit

358 mowe] may

359 they] it

360 thurst] thriste hem a dowun] it down

345 And al so] *om*

346 ther is more] they be forbore

347 ded] deed mowthis] mowthes

348 be] he afore] tofore

350 myn] my replet] replete of] with

351 therefore] Hoccleue the] thee <the>

more] therefore

352 now dresse the] thow thee dresse

²³ The scribe has altered this line substantially. It is unclear whether he means more expenses or losses.

[51]

401 ¶ O · god / o · helthe / vnto thyn ordynaunce
Thow weleful lord / lowly *summytty*²⁴ me
y am contryt / and of ful repentaunce
That euyr y swam / in swych nycete
405 As was dysplesaunt / to thy deyte
Now scew²⁵ on me / thy *mercy* and thy grace
hyt syttyth a god / to be of *grace* free
fforyeue me lord / and y no more wole *trespace*

401 ordynaunce] ordenance

402 Thow] *om* lowly *summytty*] meekly

submitte I

403 of ful] ful of

404 euyr] euere swam] swymmed nycete]

nycetee

405 deyte] deitee

406 scew] kythe

407 hyt] it syttyth] sit to be] been of his

408 me lord] *om* y no more wole] neuere

wole I eft

²⁴ The reading is likely meant to be *summytt y me*; the manuscript is smudged here, but there is no space between *t* and *y*.

²⁵ *Scew* here should be read with the *sc* representing the *sh* sound (i.e., the word can be read as “*shew*” or “*show*”).