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The Library of Humfrey, duke of Gloucester and his Reading Habits¹

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Significant among the many contributions to scholarship that Jenny Stratford has made are her insights into the book-collecting of the late medieval kings of England and of their relatives, the princes of the blood royal.² It is an interest which began with her monumental work on John, the third son of Henry Bolingbroke, made duke of Bedford by his eldest brother, Henry V.³ She has enriched our knowledge of the surviving manuscripts which can be associated with him, and also delineated how he took charge of the vast French royal library, primarily the legacy of Charles V, while he was regent in France. Through this wholesale takeover, John's bookish belongings outstripped in size and value any private collection that had been created in England, but his own younger brother went some way to rivalling him.

In their political lives, there were notorious tensions between John and that brother, Humfrey, duke of Gloucester (b. 1390). Many historians have found the dependable and level-headed Bedford more sympathetic than his sibling; the judgement tends to remain that 'throughout his whole career ... Gloucester shows himself to have been deficient in those qualities which the duke of Bedford possessed in such an eminent degree, temper and discretion'.⁴ This Humfrey was the man who, in the wake of Henry V's death, put undue pressure on the alliance with Burgundy by asserting the claims of his new wife, Jacqueline of Hainault (or of Bavaria). When he then abandoned that spouse and took her former servant,

¹ My first debt of gratitude is to the organisers of the 2023 symposium for asking me to speak: I was honoured to be able to be at the lectern to show my respect for such a distinguished scholar. I want also to record my thanks to the symposium's secretariat, Drs Richard Asquith and Rachael Harkes, who made it run smoothly and successfully. The conference ran in the happy days before the cyber-attack on the British Library which has left us bereft of both its digitised manuscripts and digitisation service. The result is that this article is sparser in images than it should be and than the talk itself was. Though the BL's manuscripts are unavailable to view, all those mentioned which are in the BnF are digitised and (at the time of writing) accessible, as is the one relevant manuscript in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (hereafter BAV); there are also plans to digitise those which are in the Bodleian.

² J. Stratford, 'The early royal collections and the Royal Library to 1461' in L. Hellinga and J. Trapp ed., *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain. Volume III: 1400–1557* (Cambridge, 1999), 255–266 and ead. with T. Webber, 'Bishops and kings: private book collections in medieval England' in E. Leedham-Green and T. Webber ed., *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland. Volume I: to 1640* (Cambridge, 2006), 178–217.

³ J. Stratford ed., *The Bedford Inventories* (London, 1993); ead., 'The manuscripts of John, duke of Bedford: library and chapel' in D. Williams ed., *England in the Fifteenth Century* (Woodbridge, 1987), 329–50. See also, most recently, ead., 'Books and Scrolls in Some Fifteenth-Century Manuscripts: The Bedford Master and His Associates' in J. Luxford ed., *The Medieval Book as Object, Idea and Symbol* (Donington, 2021), 129–42.

⁴ J. Stevenson ed., *Letters and Papers illustrative of the Wars of the English in France*, 2 vols in 3 (London, 1861–64), i, xlvii–xlviii. For a more recent unsympathetic assessment, see G. L. Harriss, *Cardinal Beaufort* (Oxford, 1988) (and the same author's short piece, 'Good Duke Humfrey', *Bodleian Library Record*, xv (1995), 119–23; for the minority view, see F. Millard, *Humphrey Duke of Gloucester: politics and reputation: princely influence and memory in fifteenth-century England* (Saarbrücken, 2009). The main published biography remains K. Vickers, *Humphrey Duke of Gloucester* (London, 1907).

Eleanor Cobham, as his second, he chose a woman who was later to be found guilty of consorting with astrologers in an attempt to predict the death of Humfrey's nephew, Henry VI. The duke was, by that point, following John's death in 1435, the heir presumptive to the throne, but his enemies continued to see him as a liability, and his career ended in the extraordinary circumstances of the next-in-line to the throne dying in custody on 23rd February 1447, accused of treason against his nephew.

In their book-collecting, there were some similarities between John and Humfrey, but also substantial differences. The latter gained a few of the codices which had been in the French royal library, and showed (like his brother) a wider interest in literature in the French language. He was also a patron to both English-language authors and to ones writing in Europe's premier language of Latin, in a variety of styles, including the new classicising mode we call humanist, a category of literature absent from John's collecting.⁵ Scholarly attention — mine included — has had a habit of being drawn to this last, 'Renaissance', element, though it was only a minority within Humfrey's library.⁶ There are two more fundamental contrasts with his brother's collection. First, Humfrey's was built up piecemeal by both commissioning and by gift. Second, while John distanced himself from the bulk of his books when he had the French library transferred for safekeeping to England in 1429, Humfrey fully alienated from his ownership a substantial portion of his holdings by a set of donations to the University of Oxford made in the 1430s and early 1440s.

There is a further difference and one which is central to the pages that follow. With any prince, busy with both high politics and the full roster of cultural activities expected at a court, we should wonder how far they had time and inclination to engage with the manuscripts they owned. I myself have suggested that some contemporaries around Humfrey concluded that 'the good duke was more of a book-lover than a book-worm'.⁷ It is now time to revisit that claim with new evidence available. For, while the books of John, duke of Bedford rarely include signs of his own handwriting, there are instances of insertions by the duke of Gloucester in many of his books. The most frequent additions he made were marks of ownership. These are well-known; other interventions that have been claimed for him can now be shown to be misidentifications, while others have not previously been noticed. This article will gather together that evidence, giving an overview of it and considering what we can learn from it.

We should begin by reviewing the state of knowledge of the library of Humfrey, duke of Gloucester. At the beginning of the Harlaxton Symposium to celebrate Jenny Stratford and her work, the tally of manuscripts once owned by him stood at forty-seven, according to the most recently published listing.⁸ I arrived at the conference conscious that there were a few

⁵ For discussion of his English literary patronage, see A. Petrina, *Cultural Politics in Fifteenth-Century England. The Case of Humphrey, duke of Gloucester* (Leiden, 2004) and D. Wakelin, *Humanism, Reading, and English Literature 1430–1530* (Oxford, 2007), 23–61.

⁶ A. Sammut, *Unfredo duca di Gloucester a gli umanisti italiani* (Padua, 1980); S. Saygin, *Humphrey, duke of Gloucester (1390–1447) and the Italian Humanists* (Leiden, 2002).

⁷ D. Rundle, 'On the difference between Virtue and Weiss: humanist texts in England during the fifteenth century' in D. Dunn ed., *Courts, Counties and the Capital in the Later Middle Ages* (Stroud, 1996), pp. 181–203 (196).

⁸ D. Rundle, 'Good Duke Humfrey: Bounder, Cad and Bibliophile', *Bodleian Library Record*, xxvii ([2015 for] 2014), 36–53 (at 46–53).

updates to be made. The first was a negative one: the compiler of the latest list of manuscripts had perpetuated an error and thus exaggerated the number by one; you can be assured that I have taken him to task for failing to follow an obvious rule — pay close attention to all of Jenny Stratford’s oeuvre. There is a manuscript, now in Rheims, of *La Somme le roi*, in which its original decoration incorporates the coat-of-arms of a duke of Gloucester; this had been assumed to have been the mark of Humfrey’s ownership, but, as Jenny has shown, the manuscript is too early to have been made for him, and the detail of the heraldry demonstrate that, instead, it was produced for his great-uncle, Thomas of Woodstock.⁹

I also knew — thanks to the collegiality of other scholars — that the loss of one codex could be counter-balanced by the identification of one full manuscript and one fragment as having belonged to the duke. The first, recognised by the keen eye of Matthew Fisher, is a copy of England’s *Statuta Nova*; the fragment, identified with characteristic ingenuity by Christopher de Hamel, comes from Charles V’s copy of the Latin *Somnium Viridarii*, a text well-known to Jenny Stratford.¹⁰ What I could not predict was that, on the evening before my talk, Scot McKendrick would come up to me on the verandah of the manorhouse, dressed in black-tie (in honour of the forthcoming dinner, rather than the gravity of the information he was about to impart) and casually mention that there was another Humfrey manuscript about to be revealed to the world. He was far too discreet to say anything more, and my inquisitorial techniques proved woefully lacking but, sure enough, in the autumn of 2023, it was announced that there was a little-known copy of the Old French New Testament (in the so-called ‘version du xiii^e siècle’), then in private hands, which could be shown to have been owned by Humfrey.¹¹ Thus, at the time of writing, this gives us both a total of forty-nine known items and some confidence that revelations are not yet at an end.

It is worth noting how these recent additions sit with our wider knowledge of the duke’s collection. For a prince whose own ownership notes were written in French, it may seem unsurprising that he possessed an Old French New Testament, particularly as we already knew he owned a *Bible historiée*, but this recent discovery provides a more recherché text, and, the majority of Humfrey’s French books were secular works (including Froissart’s poems and Christine de Pizan’s *Le Livre du Charles V*) — and, most importantly, French was only a minority language among his books: out of the forty-nine now known, it is the medium for thirteen.¹² Undeniably, it far outnumbered representatives of that other main vernacular of

⁹ J. Stratford, “‘La Somme Le Roi’” (Reims, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS. 570), the Manuscripts of Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester, and the Scribe, John Upton’, in M.-C. Hubert, E. Poulle, and M. H. Smith ed., *Le Statut Du Scripteur Au Moyen Âge*, (Paris, 2000), 267–82.

¹⁰ The *Statuta* has been long sitting in the BL as MS. Cotton App. XVI; its identification is discussed in M. Fisher, ‘Richard Sotheworth, Chancery Clerks, and a Discourse of Books’, *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, xlv (2023), 313–61. The fragment, once owned by Marvin Colker, and last sold at Christie’s, London on 12th December 2022 as lot 103, is in private hands; its provenance is unravelled by C. de Hamel, ‘Charles V, king of France, and Humfrey, duke of Gloucester’ in A. S. G. Edwards ed., *Medieval Manuscripts and their Provenance. Essays in Honour of Barbara A. Shailor* (Cambridge, 2024), **, and see also C. Schabel, ‘A Folio from the *Somnium Viridarii*’, *Fragmentology*, vi (2023), 101–112. For Jenny Stratford’s work on the treatise, see her ‘The Illustration of the *Songe du Vergier* and some Fifteenth-Century Manuscripts’ in G. Croenen ed., *Patrons, authors and workshops: books and book production in Paris around 1400* (Louvain, 2006), 473–488.

¹¹ It has now been bought by the Bodleian, through funding from **, and is now **.

¹² The *Bible historiée* is BnF, MS. fr. 2. The Froissart and de Pizan and BnF, MSS. fr. 831 and 10153 respectively.

the Lancastrian regnum, English: only two extant manuscripts in that language can at present be associated with his ownership, the dedication copy of the Palladius translation, and a copy of John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, though we know that authors including Thomas Hoccleve and John Lydgate dedicated works to him.¹³ With the outlier of a Hebrew Psalter which we can assume the duke had no way of deciphering, the rest — thirty-three in all — are in Latin.¹⁴ Those survivals are especially and unusually strong in classical and humanist works, to an extent which most likely overstates their significance within Humfrey's library. In contrast, his known interest in medicine is witnessed by a single volume.¹⁵ More represented among the extant manuscripts are works of history and treatises on political power, and it is doubly fitting that we should now know that he owned Charles V's copy the *Somnium Viridarii*; it has long been recognized that he also had in his collection that king's manuscript of the French version of that work, and that was not the only manuscript he came to own from the French royal library which had been appropriated by his brother.¹⁶ Within the context of a collection that shows a prince looking to France and Italy, the more parochial contents of the other recent discovery are notable: we already had evidence of Humfrey's possession of works of civil and canon law, and we could have assumed that a prince immersed in politics would want to have to hand his country's legislation, but it is only now that the assumption is supported by evidence, as no other volume of English law owned by him has previously been known.¹⁷

It is manifest, then, that the additions of 'new' items to our knowledge of Humfrey's library expands and corroborates but also challenges our understanding of his collecting, with the consequence that any conclusions we draw have always to be provisional, despite the fact that the information we already had for his book collection is unusually rich. That is partly because we have the inventories of three of the gifts he made to the University of Oxford, listing 274 items in all.¹⁸ This was not the entire total he donated, and it now appears that among the surviving codices, there is at least one which he presented to the university in an unlisted gift.¹⁹ The inventories provide a short title and a *lectio probatoria*, a combination of evidence sometimes sufficient to identify a volume as his.²⁰ More often, however, the

¹³ Both are in the Bodleian, the Palladius as MS. Duke Humfrey d. 2; and the Gower as MS. Bodl. 294.

¹⁴ Leiden: Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS. Hebr. Scaliger 8 (MS. Or. 4725), identified by G. I. Leifstinck, 'The "Psalterium Hebraycum" from St Augustine's Canterbury rediscovered in the Scaliger Bequest at Leyden', *TCBS*, ii (1955), pp. 97–104.

¹⁵ BL, MS. Sloane 248, on which see n. 40 below. For Humfrey's known interest, see V. L. Bullough, 'Duke Humphrey and his Medical Collections', *Renaissance News*, xiv (1961), 87–91.

¹⁶ The *Songe du Vergier* is BL, MS. Royal 19 C. IV; Humfrey was given by his brother Paris: Bibliothèque de Sainte Geneviève, MS. fr. 777, the presentation copy for Charles V of Pierre Bersuire's translation of Livy. For Jenny Stratford's work on the fate of the French royal library, see n. 3 above.

¹⁷ His ownership of civil and canon legal texts is demonstrated by his gifts to Oxford, on which see next note.

¹⁸ The lists are most recently edited as R. Thomson, *University and College Libraries of Oxford* [Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues, xvi] (London, 2015), UO1–3.

¹⁹ See D. Rundle, 'The Playpen: reform, experimentation and the memory of Humfrey, duke of Gloucester in the Registry of the University of Oxford' in J. Willoughby and J. Catto ed., *Books and Bookmen in Early-Modern England* (Toronto, 2018), pp. 17–39 for discussion of the presence of BAV, MS. Urb. lat. 694 in the university's collection.

²⁰ This is the case with Oxford: Corpus Christi College, MS. 290, where I must acknowledge the great help provided by Daniel Williman, who made a collection of *verba probatoria* (the first word or words of the second folio of a volume) to assist with such identifications. For the process involved, see D. Williman and K. Corsano, 'Tracing Provenances by dictio probatoria', *Scriptorium*, liii (1999), 124–145.

association with Humfrey is confirmed or demonstrated by the presence of an explicit mark of ownership. One of these is his coat-of-arms — the English royal arms quartered with French modern (with three fleur de lis in each of the French quarters), all within a bordure argent — which appears in three of his books. Much more frequent was his wont to add in his own hand an *ex libris*, usually below the book's final explicit, with the standard formula being 'Cest livre est a Moy Homfrey duc de Gloucestre', sometimes with further details added of how he came by the volume. Occasionally, he provided a motto, either 'mon bein mondain' or (as in the copy of the English statutes), one referring to his wife, 'Loyale et belle a Gloucestre'. There is some sign of these types of interventions in 38 of the 49 manuscripts.²¹

We have to say 'some sign' because there is a complication: in eighteen of those cases, the mark of ownership has been effaced. This speaks to the vicissitudes Humfrey's book collection suffered. These began following his death on 23rd February 1447 while under arrest. In the wake of this event, the University of Oxford asserted that his last will would demonstrate that he had bequeathed his remaining books to them, but the government declared that he had died intestate. Some of his manuscripts were eventually diverted to the new royal foundation at Cambridge of King's College, but by no means all: others were dispersed with some legerdemain involved and, as part of that process, the evidence for his former ownership was removed by scratching.²² This was only the first of two dispersals. In the first half of the sixteenth century, the library of the University of Oxford, recently established in its own library-room with Humfrey's donations at its heart, saw a decline culminating in its closure in 1549. This precipitated a second scattering of the remains of his collection, and at this point also some of the *ex libris* were removed, by scratching or rewashing.²³

It is worth emphasising the consequence of this second dispersal. If we include the recently identified *Somnium Viridarii* fragment, there are matches for fifteen of the 274 items listed in the gifts to Oxford: a survival rate of 5.5%. If the same percentage applied to all of Humfrey's collection, that would suggest that the other 34 manuscripts represent an original collection of over 610 volumes, in addition to those given to the University. In other words, we would have to hypothesise that the duke's chests were crammed with nearly nine hundred books, a number which would make it larger than most institutional libraries, unprecedented for a personal library in England and comparable to that of Charles V in France. It might make psychological sense that Gloucester wanted to better his brother Bedford, but the outlay and effort required to compile such a large collection in a few decades makes it unlikely that he reached such numbers. In short, this hypothetical total is probably exaggerated. This has a logical consequence: those not given to Oxford have had a better chance of survival than the ones which were sent there. In other words, being donated to Oxford was bad for a manuscript's health, but there was a worse fate: being sent to King's College, Cambridge. We cannot know what proportion of Humfrey's library was redirected to there but of its mid-

²¹ For examples of his *ex libris*, see (for instance) Sammut, *Unfredo*, tav. II.

²² I outline these events and name the main culprit in 'Two unnoticed manuscripts from the collection of Humfrey, duke of Gloucester: II', *Bodleian Library Record*, xvi (1998), 299–313.

²³ For an overview, see D. Rundle, 'Habits of manuscript-collecting and the dispersals of the library of Humfrey, duke of Gloucester' in J. Raven ed., *Lost Libraries* (London, 2004), 106–124.

fifteenth-century catalogue of 175 books, only three are now definitely identifiable (two of them once owned by the duke): that provides a survival rate for that library of 1.7%.²⁴ During the sixteenth-century crisis of libraries, ownership by an established institution could prove for their old books less often a safe place for retirement than a route to the grave.

The losses that have occurred, both of whole manuscripts and of markings of the duke's ownership, cannot deprive us of the realisation that Humfrey was conspicuously possessive, often keen to announce a book's association with himself. These signs, as we have said, often appear at the opening or the close of a volume, but what of the pages in between each end? Scholars have wanted to see him as not just a book-hoarder but also as an assiduous reader, and some instances of annotations have been claimed for him. It must be said, however, that if all of these were indeed by him, he must have been a master of palaeographical disguise: they are too various to be by him and, in fact, can be shown not to be his work.

One case in point is provided by the dedication copy of the English translation of the Palladius.²⁵ It is unusual in not having a statement of ownership but Humfrey may have considered that unnecessary, as the presence of his coat-of-arms made clear the book's intended recipient. It has been suggested, however, that the duke did leave his mark in the book, with one note having handwriting which 'resembles that of his *ex libris* inscription' in another of his books.²⁶ This is wishful thinking: to my eye, the differences in script between this anglicana and Humfrey's usual secretary are greater than any similarities, with this specimen deploying letter forms he is not known to have used elsewhere (the double-looped **g** and sigmoid **u**, and being written in a small module and with lighter pressure of the pen. Instead, this Latin note, providing a quotation from Ovid, is part of a wider pattern of explication in the margins and between the lines, provided as part of the process of production rather than being a response from a reader.²⁷

Likewise, we have, sadly, also to reject another proposed sighting of his handwriting. In an early humanist copy of Cicero's *Epistolae* which has Humfrey's *ex libris* and which was given by him to the University of Oxford in 1439, there are two layers of marginalia by English hands.²⁸ The more frequent set of interventions has been correctly identified as by Richard Burgeys, fellow of New College and Registrar of the University at the turn of the fifteenth to the sixteenth century, demonstrating the manuscript's use while it was in that town.²⁹ It has been claimed that the other layer is by Humfrey and this would be an exciting

²⁴ The two Humfrey manuscripts are Cambridge: King's College, MS. 27 and BL, MS. Harl. 1705; the third is Oxford: St John's, MS. 106 which Daniel Williman's database of *verba probatoria* helps us equate with Clarke ed., *Cambridge*, UC29.74. Another manuscript which passed from Humfrey to King's but does not appear in their library catalogue is the Hebrew Psalter now Leiden: Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS. Hebr. Scaliger 8 (MS. Or. 4725).

²⁵ Oxford: Bodleian, MS. Duke Humfrey d. 2.

²⁶ D. R. Howlett, 'The Date and Authorship of the Middle English Verse Translation of Palladius' *De Re Rustica*, *Medium Aevum*, xlv (1977), 245–252 (246), discussing a note at fol. 53.

²⁷ The note reads 'Unde Ouydius sed qui temptare nocebit', a citation of *Metamorphoses*, I.397. The same hand adds interlinear notes at, for instance, ll. 2 and 4, and is found also at, for instance, fol. 49.

²⁸ BnF, MS. lat. 8537.

²⁹ For Burgeys's biography, see A.B. Emden, *Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to AD. 1500*, 3 vols (Oxford, 1957–59), i, 309. The identification of both layers of annotation was proposed by A. C. de la

discovery as it includes, on one occasion, Greek words; we know that books in that language were in the duke's circle but there is no other evidence to hint that the prince himself could write in it with some fluency.³⁰ Disappointingly, while there is a general similarity of script in slant and thickness, there are some graphs which post-date Humfrey's lifetime, and the placing of the note on some occasions around one by Burgeys confirms that this annotator, whoever they were, was engaging with the text over half a century after the duke's death.³¹

Yet another script has also been identified as Humfrey's in another humanist manuscript which he gave to Oxford. It is a copy of the recent Latin translation of Ptolemy's *Cosmographia*, made for the duke in Milan around 1440.³² He wrote in it his *ex libris* before he donated it to the university in 1444, though this is one example of where it was later erased. There is also a set of annotations, many of them brief, but, unlike those in the Cicero codex, they have the appearance of being close in date to his ownership. It would be exciting if they were by Humfrey, as they show a reader particularly keen to note the references to Alexandria.³³ Yet, these notes are written with less secretary influence in both letter-forms and shading than was Humfrey's wont, and so, once again, the differences are too great to attribute them safely to him. It is more likely that they were added soon after the codex had arrived in Oxford.

While such previous attributions of marginalia to Humfrey cannot be sustained, it would be overhasty to conclude that the marks he left in his books were confined to signs of ownership. There is, in fact, a range of other types of intervention that he made, and we can here, for the first time, gather together these snippets of writing.

That range begins with a cluster of notes which are closest to being like a sign of ownership in that they have a tendency to the autobiographical and which are chronological the earliest he provided. They appear on the flyleaves of a manuscript of Jean Froissart's love poetry in which Humfrey does not provide his accustomed *ex libris* but in which he does name himself by his ducal title, and also refers to his wife.³⁴ We have already mentioned that he inserts into some of his books the motto 'Loyale et belle' which can be taken to refer to his long-term companion, Eleanor Cobham, but she was his second wife, whom (as we have mentioned) he married after he had abandoned his first wife and Eleanor's former mistress, Jacqueline of Hainault. The notes in this Froissart codex date to this time of fickle fidelity:

Mare, 'Manuscripts given to the University of Oxford by Humfrey, duke of Gloucester', *Bodleian Library Record*, xiii (1988–89), 30–51 and 112–121 at 33.

³⁰ One of the duke's secretaries, Antonio Beccaria, translated works of Athanasius and of Plutarch while in his employ; I discuss this in D. Rundle, 'From Greenwich to Verona: Antonio Beccaria, St Athanasius and the Translation of Orthodoxy', *Humanistica*, v (2010), 109–119.

³¹ For a younger graph, see the flat-footed **t** with two angled strokes joined by a short horizontal at the base-line (usually taken to be a sixteenth-century development), BnF, MS. lat. 8537, e.g. fol. 13 (...radix) and, for the placement, e.g. fol. 5^v ('honor' added after Burgeys's 'extraordinarius').

³² Oxford: Magdalen College, MS. lat. 37 (B) (bound with another manuscript owned by Humfrey); the attribution of the notes to him was made in [Bodleian Library exhibition catalogue,] *Duke Humfrey's Library and the Divinity School 1488–1988*, no. 38.

³³ References to Alexandria at Magdalen College, MS. lat. 37 (B), fol. 167, 182^v, 233, 265, 267, 273^v, 274^v; other annotations at fol. 67, 267^v–68^v, 270^v, 278. Note, in particular, the difference in style of majuscule **C** from that used by Humfrey in his *ex libris*.

³⁴ BnF, MS. fr. 831, with the notes at fol. iv and 202^v. See G. Croenen, K. M. Figg and A. Taylor, 'Authorship, Patronage, and Literary Gifts: the books Froissart brought to England in 1395', *Journal of the Early Book Society*, xi (2008), 1–42 and Rundle, 'Boulder, Cad', 40.

instead of the motto he later adopted, he writes variations on ‘Cest bien saison A Jaque de Baviere’ but then also inserted phrases like ‘Sanz plus la laide Jaque A gloucestre’. The cause, however, of this cooling off was not, according to these notes, Eleanor but another woman, for he also adds as a counterpoint to his comment on Jacqueline’s ugliness, ‘Plus belle nya que my waryny’ — that is Jeanne Wargny, who was wife to one of Jacqueline’s equerries.³⁵ We might consider these notes to be an act of oversharing, but we might also wonder whether the content of this Froissart manuscript encouraged Humfrey to write them, and whether he intended them not as an aide-memoire to himself of the merry-go-round of lovers he rode but as a less private memorial of his affections to be seen by those women themselves. If so, they act as a sort of precursor to the texts courtiers in the 1530s left in volumes of English vernacular poetry.³⁶

This group of self-revelatory phrases is unparalleled in Humfrey’s engagement with his books. More numerous are those witnesses to his handwriting which stand, as it were, on the threshold of a manuscript’s main text. A particular variety of this can be seen in the small volume of (as he states in his *ex libris*) ‘seaulmes les quelx Jay esleus du saultier’.³⁷ This bespoke Psalter opens with a calendar, whose litany of saints was presumably also constructed with the commissioner’s agreement, but which Humfrey must have decided should be fuller, since, after its scribe had finished working, two feasts were added to the month of August — ‘bartholomei’ (24th) and ‘decolacio sancti Johannis baptiste’ (29th) — in what is recognizably the duke’s own hand.³⁸ In other cases, his paratextual interventions involved providing simple finding aids to a book: they are preparatory to reading and so can be called ante-lectional. In the presentation copy of the *Panegyrici latini*, made for him in Milan, the scribe had provided at the front a brief contents list (preceding it with the statement ‘Est illustrissimi domini ducis Cloucestrensis’).³⁹ The duke decided it needed to be supplemented, added further entries and marked all items with a folio reference, which required him to go through and foliate the manuscript. This is one instance of Humfrey’s script which has already been correctly identified; likewise, it has been rightly noted that he inserted running headers and folio numbers in a philosophical compendium that he received from John Whethamstede, abbot of St Albans.⁴⁰ We can supplement these examples with his foliating of a medical volume containing the works of Albucasis, to which we will have cause to return, and his insertion of a contents list (now erased) in one of the manuscripts of the

³⁵ The identification of her husband is given by Vickers, *Humphrey*, 158.

³⁶ For an introductory overview (much broader in its chronological extent than the early sixteenth century), see A. Marotti, ‘The Manuscript Transmission of Poetry’ in M. Hattaway ed., *A New Companion to English Renaissance Culture and Literature* (London, 2010), 190–220 and, in more detail, the same author’s classic *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (Ithaca NY, 1995); for rich detail on early manuscripts of the verse of Thomas Wyatt, see C. Stamatakis, *Sir Thomas Wyatt and the Rhetoric of Rewriting: ‘Turning the Word’* (Oxford, 2012). For exemplary discussion of a single manuscript, see E. Heale, ‘Women and the Courtly Love Lyric: The Devonshire MS (BL Additional 17492)’, *Modern Language Review*, xc (1995), 296–313.

³⁷ BL, MS. Royal 2.B.I, with the *ex libris* at fol. 87^v.

³⁸ MS. Royal 2.B.I, fol. 4^v.

³⁹ BnF, MS. lat. 7805, fol. D^v, noted by de la Mare, ‘Manuscripts’, 115–116.

⁴⁰ Oxford: Corpus Christi College, MS. 243, noted by Bruce Barker-Benfield in his review of Sammut, *Unfredo* in *The Library*, 6th ser., iv (1982), 194.

works of Nicolas de Clamanges which he owned.⁴¹ These interventions constitute the sort of work that one might expect a prince to leave to his secretary and, indeed, in another humanist manuscript, a copy of Leonardo Bruni's translations of Plutarch's *Vitae* sent by the author to the duke, Humfrey's then secretary, Tito Livio Frulovisi, did provide that service: he both added running headers and wrote a contents list at the end of the book.⁴² Given that Frulovisi did this before the *Panegyrici latini* arrived in England, it might be that Humfrey learnt the practice from his secretary.

This manuscript is also significant because it has a piece of marginalia which provides one of the relatively few occasions on which we see Humfrey responding directly to a passage in the text. It appears next to a section in the *Cicero Novus* — Bruni's Plutarchan biography of the humanists' favourite classical author and public figure — which mentions that Cicero taught scribes to employ a form of shorthand to take down orations as they were being given, a system we know of as Tironian notes in honour Cicero's long-suffering slave and scribe, Tiro.⁴³ Next to this, in a script close to that of the ducal ownership notes, is the comment: 'nota de notariis'. In the context of both this manuscript, where the duke's *notarius* has added to the volume and, more broadly, of Humfrey's own secretary-like interventions, this is suggestive. It becomes more so when we also remember that there is an entry in the library catalogue of King's College, Cambridge which describes a volume on Tironian notes, a very rare Carolingian work and so most likely to have reached that college as one of those manuscripts it received from the late prince's chattels.⁴⁴ With his brief annotation, Humfrey draws an association between classical learning and those around him, both humans and books.

Other marginalia are similarly evocative. So, for instance, the impressive copy of Matthew Paris's *Historia*, made at his abbey of St Albans in the author's lifetime but surrendered in the second quarter of the fifteenth century into the duke of Gloucester's hands, has accrued many layers of annotations. One of the less frequent layers was left by Humfrey but on one folio he gives a relatively long note. Against Paris's discussion of Magna Carta, he writes 'nota bene', followed by 'nota de Illis qui faciunt contra magnam cartam anglie quomodo incurrunt sentenciam excommunicacionis'.⁴⁵ It is reassuring that an heir to the English throne would consider this an important lesson to be remembered. While the notes mentioned so far disprove the assumption occasionally made that the duke was committed to writing in French, it is not the case that all his annotations were in Latin.⁴⁶ In his late

⁴¹ The Albucasis is BL, MS. Sloane 248; the Clamanges Bodl., MS. Hatton 36, with erasure at fol. 135^v. For Humfrey's other manuscript of works by Clamanges, see Thomson, *Oxford*, UO1.113.

⁴² BL, MS. Harl. 3426, with the contents list at fol. 177^v. For Frulovisi as scribe, see D. Rundle, *The Renaissance Reform of the Book and Britain* (Cambridge, 2019), 41–49.

⁴³ BL, MS. Harl. 3426, fol. 102, against the passage: 'cicerone consule uelocissimos scriptores disponente atque docente ut per signa quedam et paruas breuesque notas multarum litterarum uim habentes dicta colligent nondum enim reperti erant hi qui notarii appellantur'.

⁴⁴ Clarke, *Cambridge*, UC29.165. The editor's tentative identification of BL, MS. Add. 21164 with this entry has to be rejected as it does not include the words cited as the start of the *lectio probatoria*.

⁴⁵ BL, MS. Royal 14.C.VII, fol. 155^v, commenting on *Historia Anglorum*, 3 vols (London, 1869), iii [Roll Series, xlv], 137.

⁴⁶ For that assumption, see, for instance, F. Cairns, 'The Metrical and Stylistic Competence of Latin Poetry by Englishmen in the Second Half of the Fifteenth Century' in G. Tarugi ed., *Homo Sapiens, Homo Humanus* (Florence, 1990), pp. 33–40 (35).

fourteenth-century codex of *Le livre de linformacion des princes*, Humfrey writes in the margin just once, against the start of the chapter on chamberlains ‘note bien tout cest chapitre’ – an appropriate comment to be made by England’s Great Chamberlain.⁴⁷

A further example of a lone annotation in a manuscript: Humfrey had been given was the unique copy of the complete text of *De laboribus Herculis*, the *magnum opus* of the Florentine Chancellor, Coluccio Salutati (d. 1406); at one page, he marking the full length of the text with a line, and adds the words ‘nota contra Ipsos qui se credunt astronomos’.⁴⁸ Given what we know of the fate of his wife, Eleanor Cobham, disgraced on the basis of accusations of having consorted with astrologers to predict the death of the king, it is difficult not to read this as biographical and personal.⁴⁹ Some caution, however, is needed; Humfrey was not the only annotator to make such a comment in his books. In another volume of works by Salutati which includes the duke’s *ex libris*, early marginalia are not by him but by one of his associates, his former physician, Gilbert Kymer, and one of those reads ‘contra astronomos’.⁵⁰ It may be that such comments reflect more a general concern about the study of the stars than a response to a specific incident.

What this does remind us is that, while the books discussed announced their ownership by Humfrey, a prince’s books were rarely his alone: he is not the only annotator in these codices and is also not the most frequent. There is a certain restraint to the number of his interventions, with one manuscript providing an exception. That is the medical volume of Albucasis which, as we mentioned before, he foliated. In addition to that, he add notes in the margin at least a dozen times, with a notable interest in cures of baldness — a telling reminder of the anxieties that dog some middle-aged men.⁵¹ This suggests a level of continuous attention to the text before him which has no equivalent among the range of manuscripts owned by him. This should cause us to reflect on the evidence we have gathered together in the preceding paragraphs.

It is sometimes said, paraphrasing a comment of the future Pius II, that only a fool thinks princes read books.⁵² Given the evidence we have gathered, it would be foolish to claim that this particular prince always left his books closed. We might be disappointed with how rare his interventions in that minority of his books which have his annotations are, but we, in our search-and-find culture of reading cannot claim superiority (I know that Jenny will read every word of us but how about you other readers? Write your answer, please, in the margin). We might instead console ourselves with the truism that marginalia can only ever be a subset of a reader’s responses, and so can assume that Humfrey’s interaction with these texts extended beyond those moments of annotation. There were certainly those authors who were keen to describe the noble they considered or hoped would be their patron as an

⁴⁷ BL, MS. Royal. 19 A. xx, fol. 67, inner margin.

⁴⁸ BAV, MS. Urb. lat. 694, fol. 47^v.

⁴⁹ R. A. Griffiths, ‘The Trial of Eleanor Cobham: an episode in the fall of Duke Humphrey of Gloucester’ in id., *King and Country: England and Wales in the fifteenth century* (London, 1991), 233–252 [reprinted from *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, li (1969), 381–99].

⁵⁰ Manchester: Chetham’s Library, MS. Mun. A.3.131, fol. 141^v. Kymer’s annotations have not been identified before; I intend to provide a full study elsewhere.

⁵¹ BL, MS. Sloane 248, fol. 74^v, 5, 12^v, 25, 54^v, 55, 56, 67, 79, 82, 116^v, 163, 181.

⁵² His actual words were: ‘stultus qui putat libellis et codicibus moveri reges’: *Der Briefwechsel des Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini*, ed. R. Wolkan, 4 vols (Vienna, 1909–18), ii (1912), 203.

engaged reader. The witnesses to this in the English vernacular are often discussed, those in Latin a little less so.⁵³ When the papal collector in England, the Venetian Pietro del Monte, dedicated a dialogue, *De vitiorum inter se differentia*, to Humfrey, he prefaced it with effusive praise for the duke's assiduous reading habits and prodigious memory.⁵⁴ We could debate how far these claims were refracted through literary tropes and personal aspirations for money or support.⁵⁵ I propose, however, that it is time to change the question: instead of asking whether Humfrey read or even how often he might have read, we should consider how he read. Our culture's paradigm for reading envisages it as solitary and silent activity but it was not always so or only so. There is enough good recent scholarship to remind us that this was not the only mode, and the evidence of Humfrey suggests to me that we should consider at least two other methods of reading.

First, let us recall Humfrey's ante-lectional activities which I described as being akin to the work of a secretary. I mused that the servant might have influenced the master in these practices. If so, this could suggest a close relationship while at the desk similar to what early modernists call facilitated reading, in which a secretary guided the attention of the man whom he serves — for this is conceptualised as a homosocial situation — during shared reading sessions.⁵⁶ The development of such activity is usually placed in the late sixteenth century and assumed to be a result of the availability of humanist education, but it had precedents. A well-known example comes from John Blacman's hagiographical description of Henry VI, in a chapter emphasising how the king avoided idleness and gossiping, concentrating instead on the reading of both scriptures and chronicles; Blacman recollects that he himself sat together with the king in his chamber at Eltham, 'in sanctis libris cum eo laborans'.⁵⁷ Blacman records this collaborative reading as witness to the king's pursuit of spiritual enrichment, books being studied for devotion rather than for political action as tends to be emphasised by early modern scholars. It is another contrast, however, between the late Elizabethan habits and those of Humfrey himself that strikes me: the later 'knowledge transactions' between secretary and master, though couched in rhetoric of friendship, are predicated on and reinforce social hierarchy, the noble outsourcing aspects of reading to his servant; in contrast, while there is no diminution in status, the duke of Gloucester, in effect, insources secretarial labour to himself. There is even something ostentatious about this: the hand that writes the *ex*

⁵³ See, for instance, A. S. G. Edwards, 'Duke Humfrey's Middle English Palladius Manuscript' in J. Stratford ed., *The Lancastrian Court* [Harlaxton Medieval Studies, xiii] (Donnington, 2003), 68-77, Petrina, *Cultural Politics*, 259-340, and cf. Wakelin, *Humanism*, 23-61.

⁵⁴ Sammut, *Unfredo*, 151-53 (esp. ll. 7-52). For discussion, see D. Rundle, 'Virtue and Weiss', 195-96.

⁵⁵ There will be space to do so in my monograph in preparation, *The Library of Humfrey*.

⁵⁶ The classic articles are L. Jardine and A. Grafton, "'Studied for Action": how Gabriel Harvey read his Livy', *Past and Present*, cxxix (1990), 30-78, and L. Jardine and W. Sherman, 'Pragmatic Readers: knowledge transactions and scholarly services in late Elizabethan England' in A. Fletcher and P. Roberts ed., *Religion, Culture and Society in Early Modern Britain: essays in honour of Patrick Collinson* (Cambridge, 1994), 102-204, both now reprinted in A. Grafton, N. Popper and W. Sherman ed., *Gabriel Harvey and the History of Reading. Essays by Lisa Jardine and others* (London, 2024), 21-76 and 219-244 respectively. The other essays in that volume are also significant, as are P. Hammer, 'The Use of Scholarship: The Secretariat of Robert Devereux, Second Earl of Essex, c. 1585-1601', *English Historical Review*, cix (1994), 26-51, and P. Brown, "'Hac ex consilio meo via progredieris": Courtly Reading and Secretarial Mediation in Donne's The Courtier's Library', *Renaissance Quarterly*, lxi (2008), 833-866.

⁵⁷ M. R. James ed., *Henry the Sixth. A Reprint of John Blacman's Memoir* (Cambridge, 1919), 15-16.

libris can be seen at work on contents list and folio numbering, and so announces that this prince is not above permitting his fingers to become inky.

Yet, as anyone who has foliated a manuscript knows, to do so accurately one must not allow the eye to slide down the page and be distracted by the text itself. In other words, the ante-lectional can prove anti-lectional. Humfrey's paratextual practices show that at times he turned over every leaf of a manuscript but cannot prove that he pored over every word on each of them. For engagement with a text, we need to focus on that subset of his additions which are annotations, drawing attention to passages within a work. These could be a result of the sort of shared reading just described: two people sitting together, and when they find a passage notable, the duke adds a comment. It is also possible that they reflect our culture's dominant mode of solitary reading, which we can see reflected in images of St Jerome in his study, accompanied by no living thing other than a docile lion. Such a setting might best explain the relatively frequent marginalia Humfrey left in his copy of Albucasis. At the same time, the uniqueness of that within his collection should encourage us to envisage another scenario for those volumes when only one or a very few annotations were entered into the margins.

I have already mentioned how strikingly suitable to his princely status some of Humfrey's annotations are: his noting that he should learn from a chapter on chamberlains, for instance, or his demonstration that he would not be one who would infringe the rights secured by Magna Carta. I have also warned that we are in danger of over-reading some of these if we take them all to be solely autobiographical. These brief comments, hidden in the margins, may not be revelatory of a private self but the fact that so many appear fitting or, so to speak, 'on message', reinforcing his persona, seems to me highly suggestive of their purpose: they are an acting out of the character of a bien-pensant reader, who knows how he should and is expected to respond.

This sense of a performance is not merely textual, it is also visual: it is corroborated by the palaeography of these annotations. When marking up a page, many late medieval readers tended to resort to non-verbal interventions: a *manicula* or pointing hand, for instance, or a trefoil.⁵⁸ Humfrey habitually reduced the word *nota* to two letters with a suspension mark, and, on one occasion (as has been mentioned) he draws a line the length of the page, but he does not use any other of the panoply of annotating devices that were available to him. He prefers to write full words or, indeed, complete phrases. Moreover, he does so not, as some readers would, in a current cursive or a *manus velox* but in a version of his secretary script.⁵⁹ His notes do vary in their level of accomplishment: in his copy of Petrarch's *De remediis*, one of the two annotations he provides is slightly compressed by being squeezed in before the edge of the page; in contrast, his comment, discussed above,

⁵⁸ Unlike the early medieval period — see E. Steinová, *Notam superponere studui. The Use of Annotation Symbols in the Early Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2019) — and the early modern period — see, for instance, W. Sherman, *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia, 2007) — the methods of high and late medieval annotating awaiting a good scholar. While we wait for them, I have some comments which will form the basis of an exhibition at present in development.

⁵⁹ For an example of an author-as-reader marking up his text in his *manus velox*, see my discussion of John Whethamstede in D. Rundle, 'Of Republics and Tyrants: aspect of quattrocento humanist writings and their reception in England c. 1400–c. 1460' (unpublished Oxford DPhil. thesis, 1997), 87–101.

about Cicero's use 'de notariis' is written very presentably, with an ostentatious approach stroke to the opening **p** and the bowls of the **f** somewhat extended.⁶⁰ His annotations also tend to be of a same size as the script: these are not bashful deposits but assertive announcements that Humfrey was here.

As, then, these annotations are performative, the question arises of who was their audience. My suggestion is that the likely theatre for his annotating was his own court. In Blacman's description of Henry VI's reading, he narrated how the king complained when the two of them were interrupted by a knock on the door by 'quidam potentissimus regni dux' (chronology allows the possibility that Blacman is alluding to Henry's last surviving uncle).⁶¹ More generally, he contrasted these quiet times of reflection to the chatter of a court. Blacman presents a preference for the dual over the plural, a pair of readers rather than a wider gathering — a preference which was not necessarily widely shared. A common practice was communal reading, in which one would elocute the text which the others absorbed by ear: what has become called a culture of aurality.⁶² This is the second main mode of reading, one for which there is plentiful contemporary evidence, including from Humfrey's circle. The papal collector already mentioned, del Monte, in his dedication to Humfrey, celebrated the prince's willingness to give his leisure hours not to jokes or to hunting but to *hoc litterarium exercitium*, adding:

quod si forte legendi facultas defuerit, ad disputandi disserendique studium te
convertis, illud sane pugnandi genus periocunde aggrediens...⁶³

If del Monte is believed, the duke's palace at Greenwich was home to lively literary discussion. That this was sometimes sparked by an act of aurality is made explicit of another letter by the same person. Responding to an epistle he had received from the Vicar General of the Camaldolese Order and humanist translator, Ambrogio Traversari, del Monte describes how:

legi ... epistolam tuam illustrissimo principi Humfredo duci Gloucestrie ... quod
tantam litterarum studiis curam diligentiamque adhibuit adhibetque quotidie, ut
de omni disciplinarum genere ... docte diserte copiose ac memoriter loqui ad
disputare posse mihi videatur ... laudavit is [*i.e.* Humfrey] non parum ingenium
doctrinamque atque eloquentiam tuam...⁶⁴

This is not the only time when del Monte ventriloquises a response from the duke to a humanist work, and we may legitimately wonder how far he was putting words into a mouth

⁶⁰ The Petrarch is now BnF, MS. lat. 10209, this note ('nota cuius [*sic*] Iste liber Intitulatur') is at fol. 8; the second by him ('nota clare') is at the following verso. For the Cicero, see n. 42 above.

⁶¹ James ed., *Henry*, 15.

⁶² The term is Joyce Coleman's: see in particular ead., *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (Cambridge, 1996), and, for an introduction, ead., 'Aurality' in P. Strohm ed., *Middle English* (Oxford, 2007), 68–85. For an earlier period, see D. H. Green, *Medieval Listening and Reading. The Primary Reception of German Literature 800–1300* (Cambridge, 1994), and we look forward to the publication of Tessa Webber's 2016 Lyell Lectures, 'Public Reading and its Books: Monastic ideals and practice in England c. 1000–c. 1300'.

⁶³ Sammut, *Unfredo*, 152 (ll. 30–34).

⁶⁴ Piero da Monte ... *Sein Briefsammlung*, ed. J. Haller (Rome, 1941), 83. That the dative refers to the reading rather than the letter itself is confirmed by the fact that del Monte goes on in this letter to encourage Traversari to make direct contact with the duke: in short, Traversari had not yet written to him.

his correspondent could not hear.⁶⁵ What is significant in this passage, however, is that del Monte thought it plausible to describe an occasion of reading aloud which inspired conversation. In this, courtly aurality differs from that of the monastic refectory, where a reading would be heard in silence. This pattern of listen-and-discuss, I propose, provides a credible context for Humfrey's practice of annotating.

Conjure up in your mind the hall at Greenwich in, let us say, an evening setting. The duke commands one of his books to be taken out of the chests and to be read to those paying court by one of his household, a secretary perhaps. In the ensuing discussion, a particular passage draws the attention of the interlocutors and the prince then commands his servant to provide him with a quill, and he inserts on the relevant folio a note attesting to his recognition of its significance.

As I have emphasised, this would not have been the context for all the times he took up the pen. Those manuscripts with ante-lectional interventions probably reflect a different reading strategy, and the closer attention on display in the Albucasis suggests another. However, in the remaining six books where he added notes to the margins, a group-reading scenario could well explain why his interventions are usually confined to one per manuscript, and have a strong scent of the personal being presented. They exude a certain theatricality, and desire to be seen to be leaving his mark — to announce that he had become part of this book's life. The annotations, then, can act as an extension of his more usual practice of inserting his *ex libris*, as part of a policy of making his possession conspicuous. A great lord surrounded himself not just with concentric circles of servants, retainers and hangers-on but also with objects that assist in projecting a sense of his nobility: they become agents in the ducal retinue. A humanist tradition of rhetoric would argue that this was particularly so with his books, for a prince becomes noble through lavishing attention on them: his books ennoble him.

We might conclude, then, by rephrasing the paraphrase of Piccolomini and saying only a fool thinks princes read only alone. The habits of reading were too varied to imagine solitary intellectual engagement as the sole or the primary form of interaction between human and the animal skin that is a book's parchment. Reading, too, can have an audience and that brings me to a parting thought. When he donated his books to Oxford, he did not require or expect that his *ex libris* to be removed and, for its part, the university seems to have been prized them.⁶⁶ Each of those inscriptions therefore came to state not just that he is the owner of this book but that he had been, for a time, its owner. They speak to a future. The performative style of his annotations next to the text in some of his manuscripts may seem more present-centred. They suggest the action of a fleeting moment, which we might imagine lived on only in the memory of its observers — if it were not for the fact that it was fundamental to this performance that it left a deposit on the page. They remained to be re-seen later, but who would recognise his hand when they stumbled upon one of these rare pages later? Those in his household, familiar with their master's handwriting could. Maybe

⁶⁵ For del Monte's ventriloquising, see Poggio Bracciolini, *On Princes and Tyrants*, ed. H. Schadee & K. Sidwell, with D. Rundle, I Tatti Renaissance Library, xcvi (Cambridge MA, 2024), pp. 226–28.

⁶⁶ For this prizing, see the discussion of BL, MS. Harl. 33 in N. R. Ker, 'The Chaining, Labelling, and Inventory Numbers of Manuscripts belonging to the Old University Library' in id., *Books, Collectors and Libraries* (London, [1985]), 321–26 [reprinted from *Bodleian Library Record*, v (1954–56), 176–80].

few others later would. Yet, just as the duke was undoubtedly mindful of posterity when he showed his extravagant largesse to the University of Oxford, so in a more understated way he was allowing later handlers of his books to discover a little part of him in those annotations. This is to say: we too can be the audience to his performances, if we have eyes to see.

The published article has as an appendix a listing of the manuscripts known to have been owned by Humfrey. Even by the time it was published in August 2025, it was out-of-date. The up-to-date version of the listing is available at <https://bonaelitterae.wordpress.com/david-rundles-research-projects/the-library-of-humfrey-duke-of-gloucester/> .