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Title: '"Right thus th'Apostel tolde it unto me": biblical reception in *The Canterbury Tales*.'

Among Arne Zettersten's impressive research publications are those on Middle English texts. His brilliant editions of *The Ancrene Riwle*, published over the years in the Early English Text Society, have done so much to further our knowledge of this important religious work. Tracing the sources of the *The Ancrene Riwle* author's quotations is indeed a complex task. Geoffrey Shepherd states that 'the Bible provides most of the material of the Rule – the medieval Bible, a vast indivisible unity, but perceived only by glimpses. Often it is a gloss which leads him [the author] to the scriptural text, not to an initial memory of Scripture'.[1] Shepherd continues by showing the complexities involved in finding the source of biblical paraphrases in *The Ancrene Riwle*:

> It is often difficult to tell whether the author of the Rule is making a direct use of originals entire, or whether he is not using some collections of authorities (*Sententiae*), or current anthologies (*Florilegia*), which would be available in any library by the beginning of the thirteenth century. However, considering the Rule as a whole, we must recognise that the range of scriptural reference or contact with a variety of extra-scriptural writings is wide.[2]

This 'medieval Bible' is very different from ours or indeed the Vulgate, which would have been available then only to the Latin literate; it is more a

pan-European compendium of biblical, patristic and legendary material expressed in as different forms as Danish wall paintings and popular English vernacular poetry or drama. In this article I wish to examine the nature of what appears to be biblical reference in vernacular literature, particularly in the works of Chaucer, to see what might be learned about lay literacy and the nature of this 'medieval Bible'.

There are over seven hundred biblical allusions or quotations in *The Canterbury Tales* and these include misquotations, partial quotations and paraphrases.[3] Some of Chaucer's characters acknowledge their biblical source and some do not, while others give incorrect references. The Parson, for example, conveys a sound knowledge of the Bible, although admitting "I am nat textuel", but many others, like the Miller, have a pretty shaky grasp of Scripture. The Wife of Bath, the Man of Law, the Merchant and the Pardoner cleverly manipulate Scripture and other authorities for their own purposes. However, Chaucer's main aim is not to teach the Bible; he's a professional writer to whom all books including the bible were a means to a literary end.

> Chaucer's mishandlings [of Scripture] are all most likely purposeful and may well be the principal way he uses the Bible for literary, rather than authoritative purposes..… It is as a craftsman of language and as a creator of fictions that Chaucer mainly uses the Bible.[4]

Chaucer is as interested in the *way* his characters use or manipulate their sources as in *what* they say. He is concerned more with the marriage of wisdom to rhetoric, of meaning to style than with an accurate use of sources. Misquotations can usefully be used to reflect on the teller. He never openly criticises a character for gross textual harassment of Scripture, rather he

allows his readers to draw their own conclusions about the character from the way they apply biblical knowledge.

Given that the Vulgate was not accessible in the 14th century to many of the same social and educational groups as those to which his characters belong, how successful is Chaucer in reflecting the type of biblical sophistication (or lack of it) that the various characters might be expected to possess?  Turning the question round: is there anything to be gleaned in Chaucer's works about levels of literacy in the late 14th century, given that Chaucer intends to make his characters realistic?  We have scant evidence of literacy at this time and have to rely on from wills, bankruptcy lists, etc. for information on book ownership.  However, I cannot see why we should not look at literary characters for clues about how the Bible is conveyed to the 'lewd' and in what ways 'auctoritee' trickles down to those with little learning in the fourteenth century.[5]

Most university teachers these days complain about the atrociously low level of biblical knowledge which our students have. Even those who profess to know their bible and claim to have learned it at Sunday School are still shaky on details.  How many today are convinced that the Fall of the Angels and Christ's Descent into Hell are narrated in the Bible?  However, detailed knowledge of the Bible by the laity is a post-Reformation phenomenon and we today are perhaps nearer the medieval mentality, receiving our biblical knowledge from films and TV as well as in fiction, just as medieval *illiterati* learned the bible aurally and visually. We must not, however, underestimate the biblical knowledge of the *illiterati*, but at the same time be aware of the

filters through which this knowledge passed and how it was integrated in a vast encyclopaedic understanding of the history of man and his universe.

Margery Kempe, for example, thanks the priest in Lynn who "read to her many a good book of high contemplation and other books such as the Bible, with doctors thereon, St Bride's book, Hilton's book, Bonaventure, etc…Thus through hearing of holy books and holy sermons  she ever increased in contemplation and holy meditation." She also mentions the paintings and sculpture and an Easter sepulchre, which sent her into raptures. Visually and orally she would be totally immersed in the bible and aware of the typological links between Old and New Testament, as the biblical scenes were invariably juxtaposed in art and literature.  Whether she could distinguish between canonical and apocryphal episodes is unimportant, as all was wrapped up in what might be called the medieval biblical experience or what Margaret Aston calls 'that vanished English library of 'laymen's books''.[6]  All such information had a clear didactic aim, namely to help the laity lead good lives.

In the Middle Ages, as today, there was a wide range of literate and illiterate population.  Illiteracy today and then was often hidden and notions of literacy vague.  Michael Clanchy demonstrates how *clericus* and *litteratus , laicus* and *illitteratus*  are interchangeable terms in the early Middle Ages.[7] Non-lettered and lay were synonymous, and by lettered they referred to Latin literacy and not vernacular. At the time of the Black Death we hear of widowers joining monastic orders who were called  'illiterate as they could only read English'. But by end of the 14th cent *litteratus* was used to describe not only persons of erudition, but those with a minimal knowledge

of Latin. Clanchy states that some tradesmen in London were called *litterati* and Ann Hudson refers to some Lollards at the end of the century who were called *laicus litteratus* . This might appear to be a contradiction in terms , but it reflects changing attitudes to literacy and the laity.

There were, of course, many English translations of parts of the bible by mid-14th century; there were Gospel harmonies and commentaries, versions of the Pauline and Catholic epistles and many other vernacular works which retold parts of the Bible.  More important were the literary works, especially in verse, which paraphrased the Bible, and verse was important to attract the listener and to help the memory. A literal translation of the Bible was unnecessary, many thought, when more attractive renditions were easily at hand.  The *Stanzaic Life of Christ*, for example, written in mid-14th cent and based on *The Golden Legend* and the *Polychronicon*, is specifically designed to relate the Gospels to the unlettered.  In the Introduction the author states: "A worthy person asked me to show certain things that he saw written  in Latin, that he might know in English tongue of Jesus Christ's nativity and his deeds in order, in which he might by good authority fully trust and know."[8] Other literary works, such as the *Cursor Mundi*,  set out the biblical narrative interwoven with legendary material.[9]  Here are all the stories which John the Carpenter would know –of Adam and Eve, Noah and Abraham, but included were many of the apocryphal stories of the Fall of the Angels, the life and death of Pilate (also in the Golden legend), the legend of Seth and the postlapsarian tree, the stories of Joseph of Arimathia, the Harrowing of hell, the handkerchief of St Veronica, and the life and death of Mary.  All the stories which we find in church wall paintings, carvings, stain glass and of course the Mystery Plays.  The medieval bible of the illiterate was not in

any one book or any book at all, but an encyclopaedic synthesis of all the stories connected to the lives of the Old Testament patriarchs and of the holy family and gleaned from a wide range of sources. It was also a pan-European 'virtual book' with the same themes and stories appearing throughout the continent in vernacular writing, paintings, carvings, frescoes and stain glass. All had a common purpose, not simply to narrate biblical scenes, but to influence the lives of the audience, as the cycle plays did and create an element of social control.

Much of Chaucer's own learning would have come second hand by this trickle down effect or, in Chaucer's case, cascade effect– not directly from the patristic or classical source but from collections, florilegia, anthologies and miscellanies. We have the friars to thank for many of these compendia from which Chaucer and many other vernacular writers gleaned Latin quotations, exempla and miscellaneous general knowledge. A good example of a very popular collection is John of Wales's *Communiloquium* of the late 13th cent., used by priest and laity alike, and in which there were many biblical and classical quotations, all carefully listed with lemmata, for quick reference. It is a work that Chaucer never mentions, but it would appear to have been used in his *Wife of Bath's Prologue, Summoner's Tale, Nun's Priest's Tale* and elsewhere. Many of the *exempla* which the Pardoner uses in his model sermon are taken from this work, as Robert A Pratt has shown..[10] Derek Pearsall writes of 'the magpie-like nature of his [Chaucer's] raids on scholarly texts' which were probably 'the product, more than we know, not of his indefatigable reading but of his conversations with more learned friends.[11]

Itemizing the sources of each tale does in fact give a misleading impression, since it misses that great body of writing in Latin anthologies, miscellanies, compendia and encyclopaedias, which is what gives the 'many storied' quality to Chaucer's writing in *The Canterbury Tales* …Echoes of sermons and sermon literature are everywhere, and of course the Bible and liturgy are plundered for some of Chaucer's most dazzling literary effects.[12]

One wonders how frequently the clergy went to the Vulgate even for biblical texts and *exempla*.  'Creative preachers must have been at a premium', states Janet Coleman; 'these handbooks may, in part, be the origin of frequent satirical complaints against a clergy illiterate in the Bible".[13]   As might be expected, these handbooks were severely criticised by the Wyclifites who considered them stultifying for the spiritual growth of the laity. The Dominicans were the first to collect exempla in handbooks for preachers.. They were the work of important scholars such as the highly influential John Bromyard's *Summa Praedicantium* (c. 1356) and Robert Holcot's *Liber de moralitatibus* with moralized *exempla*, a major source of Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale*.

But this is not to downplay Chaucer's learning.  Chaucer of course translated from Latin, as can be seen in his *Boece* and he claims in the revised Prologue to *The Legend of Good Women* to have translated Innocent III's *De contemptu mundi*.  In his translations it would appear he did not always go back to the original text, but in the prose sections he relied heavily on Jean de Meun's translations, although it appears that he went to the original Latin to check the French translation.  He also relied on Nicholas Trivet's Latin

commentary on Boethius to explain allusions and indeed the four works by Boethius, Jean de Meun, Nicholas Trivet and Chaucer appear in different combinations in a few fifteenth-century manuscripts with one vernacular version as marginal or interlinear gloss on the other.[14]

So, fourteenth-century lay authors, like Chaucer, can be shown to have strong biblical and patristic knowledge, albeit much at second hand, but how did they 'cascade' this to the next level, their lay audience who may or may not be literate in the vernacular?

In *The Canterbury Tales* Chaucer creates characters who in real life would possess different degrees of biblical knowledge and understanding. The Parson is obviously well-versed in Scripture, beginning his tale with the biblical reference for his text, Jeremiah 6, followed by the Latin Vulgate source, a close translation it and then an explanation. Following exegetical practice he then gives patristic interpretations by Ambrose, Isidore and Gregory. This is all textbook stuff in his tale 'of moralitee and virtuous mateere'.

In *Piers Plowman* the Vulgate plays a pivotal role. Latin Scripture naturally adds weight to the argument, but, as Janet Coleman suggests, 'the biblical, Latin quotations in *Piers Plowman* comprise a central principle of construction, from which the Middle English 'divisions' fan out …he [Langland] frequently began with a Latin quote and, using the aids of the medieval preacher, derived much of the substance of his poem.'[15]

 And Salamon seide, †e same, †at Sapience made:

Qui parcit virge, odit filium.

Ê†e Englich of †is Latyn is, whoso wil it knowe:

Whoso spareth †e sprynge, spilleth his children.[16]

The biblical source is invariably then amplified with allegories and examples and much of this material has a source in Bromyard's encyclopaedic *Summa*.

The Norfolk Fransciscan, John of Grimestone (1372), uses the same technique:

Man ne hat nouth grace for God 3ef hit nouth

But for it is nouth rediliche of man isouth

Homo non habet graciam non quia hanc non dat Deus.

Grimestone's work was intended to be notes for preachers, but in these he collected a vast range of patristic, biblical, classical and even contemporary authorities such as  Robert Holcot (died 1349)..[17]

A direct quotation from the Vulgate gives the English text authority, and Chaucer demonstrates how this method can easily be abused, for example by the hypocritical friar in *The Summoner's Tale* who misapplies biblical quotations while claiming: 'My spirit hath his fostryng in the Bible' and by the Pardoner who sprinkles or seasons his sermon with Latin, purely for effect.:

And in Latyn I speke a wordes fewe,

To saffron with my predicacioun,

And for to stire hem to devocioun. (*The Pardoner's Prologue*, 344-6)

Similarly the Somonour delights in quoting phrases in Latin and indeed when drunk 'wold he speke no word but Latyn' Such misapplication of the Bible is openly criticised in *Piers Plowman* and elsewhere in the fourteenth century. For example, Lady Mede in Passus 3 is angered by Conscience's argument against the abuse of riches and defends gift-giving with a biblical quotation:

Also wroth as †e wynde wex Mede in a while,

'I can no Latyn',quod she, 'clerkis wote †e sothe.

Se what Salamon seith in Sapience bokes,

That hij that 3iveth 3iftes the victorie wynneth

& moche worschip had †er-with as holiwryt telleth,

*Honorem adquiret qui dat munera, etc.' (* Passus 3, 328-333)

Conscience then points out that the quotation is unfinished. Mede, he says, is like the lady who quoted '*omnia probate*' 'test all things', but forgot the continuation, '*quod bonum est tenete*' 'hold that which is good' which she would have found if she had turned the leaf:

Ac 3ow failled a cunnyng clerke †at couthe †e lef haue torned.

And if 3e seche sapience eft fynde shal 3e.†at folweth,

A ful teneful tixte to hem †at taketh Mede,

And †at is, *animam autem aufert accipientium, etc.*

And †at is the taille of †e tixte of †at †at 3e schewed,

†at, †ei3e we wynne worschip and wi† mede haue victorie,

†e soule †at †e sonde taketh bi so moche is bounde. (343- 349)

Lady Mede claims to be angry at Conscience's use of biblical texts, but continues with the partial quotation to show that gift giving brings honour (Proverbs 22:9) (331-2). Conscience suggests that 'a cunnyng clerk', an intelligent cleric, should have pointed out her partial, and hence misleading, quotation by turning the page and seeing the rest of the text. Conscience completes the Latin text and continues by paraphrasing it in English: '†e soule †at †e sonde taketh bi so moche is bounde'.

Janet Coleman quotes from a late fourteenth-century sermon in which the preacher answers a parishioner's query about lay reading of the Bible. The preacher says that the laity are not forbidden from reading Scripture, 'but itt is forbede anny lewde man to mysuse holywritte'. Coleman interprets the sermon thus:

> This preacher seems to be saying that it is inappropriate for an unlearned man to misuse the Bible, but he who is able to read and go further in his education should do so, for it pleases Christ…It is not enough to read Scripture; one must understand its meaning… [i.e.] the traditional interpretations of the text.[18]

The clerical fear of vernacular translations of Scripture was centred on the laity's lack of formal training in *ennaratio*, the authorised interpretation of the Word.

Surely the position of the most accomplished 'partial quoter' in the Middle Ages must go to Chaucer's Wife of Bath. She has indeed a cleric to hand, namely her fifth husband Jankyn, the ex-cleric, who would have had a sound scholastic training, but Jankyn himself indulges in misapplication of Scripture for misogynistic reasons and Alisoun is simply copying his methods to prove her case for multiple marriages. However the difference

between Lady Mede and Dame Alisoun is that the latter's misquotations and partial quotations are not picked up by a narrator or Conscience figure and the onus is on the reader to make of her biblical quotations what they will. Could this show that Chaucer has a more mature and trusting attitude to his readers, or does it reflect his greater interest in the *way* the Wife argues than the orthodoxy of her comments.?

I nyl envye no virginitee.

Lat hem be breed of pured whete-seed,

And lat us wyves hoten barly-breed;

And yet with barly-breed, mark telle kan,

Oure Lord Jhesu refresshed many a man.

In swich estaat as God hath cleped us

I wol persevere; I am nat precius.  (*Wife of Bath's Prologue*, 142-8)

The Wife of Bath confuses Mark and John in the passage about wheat and barley bread and totally misunderstands the traditional interpretation of this passage about the hierarchy of spiritual states (wheat representing chastity and barley incontinence) by confusing the literal and the anagogical meanings; barley represents an inferior spiritual state in which we should not be content, but the Wife claims with mock modesty that she is happy as she is. She uses the same argument when partially quoting from 2 Timothy 2: 20-21:

For wel ye knowe, a lord in his houshold,

He hath nat every vessel al of golde;

Somme been of tree, and doon hir lord servyse. (Wife of Bath's Prologue, 99-101)

She claims, again with apparent modesty, that she will be happy to remain a 'wooden vessel' in her Lord's house and not aspire to be golden; but the text continues by comparing the gold and the wooden to honourable and dishonourable states, and encourages mankind to 'purge himself from these, [and] he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the master's use.' (2 Tim. 2:21)

From the beginning of the Prologue the Wife has indulged in selective quotations, invariably choosing the part of texts about marriage which refers to the husband's responsibilities, while remaining silent on the mutual and reciprocal duties of the wife:

But wel I moot expres, with-oute  lye,

God bad us for to wexe and multiplye;

That gentil text can I wel understonde.

Eek wel I woot he seyde, myn housbonde

sholde lete fader and moder, and take me.  (27-31)

.    .    .    .    .    .    .    .    .

'I have the power durynge al my lyf

Upon his propre body, and nought he

Right thus the Apostel tolde it unto me,

And bad oure housbondes for to love us weel.

Al this sentence me liketh every deel'.

Up stirte the Pardoner, and that anon;

'Now dame, quod he, 'by God and by Seint John!

Ye been a noble prechour in this cas' *Wife Bath's Prologue*, 160-5

There is no Conscience figure here who pops up in alarm, as in *Piers Plowman*, only praise for her rhetorical technique from the Pardoner who is also an expert in twisting his sources to prove his point. There is also a hint of ridicule when, for example, he touches on the Wife's incorrect reference to St Mark by his oath 'by Seint John!'.

She seems a perfect example of the dangers of applying the Bible without expert theological help. But why does Chaucer allow her to go unchecked and does he not fear what has been called 'the new reading public' of the fourteeth century, namely those who cannot read the Vulgate and have not been guided in their interpretations? Chaucer's motives are ambiguous, as he obviously wants the Wife to appear, not as the vindictive La Vieille in *Le Roman de la Rose*, but an attractive and well-armed adversary of the male, clerical interpretation of the bible and church fathers. I believe that the answer lies in the fact that he is more interested in her rhetorical techniques, namely her deliberate textual harassment, than her unorthodoxy.

There is, however, one controlling voice on the manuscript page. The majority of the earliest manuscripts have glosses and there is no other section of the Tales more glossed than the *Wife of Bath's Prologue.* The glosses appear in the earliest of the manuscripts, Hengwrt and Ellesmere, and are written in the same hand and as large and prominent a hand as the text itself.[19] They are in Latin and visually appear to balance the vernacular text both physically and morally. They may be there to give weight and authority to the text, as most major Latin works of this time were glossed. Indeed an unglossed work was akin to a book today that goes unreviewed and therefore considered insignificant.[20] There may be another reason for

the glosses, namely that the glossator was afraid that the reader might not catch the pilgrim's distortion of the biblical text. There is a chance, as I have argued elsewhere, that the author of many of these glosses was Chaucer himself, but if it were not he, then it was a contemporary 'editor' of the text who was keen to point out the original source.[21]

A further, significant conclusion one can draw from the glosses concerns how Chaucer and thereby his characters have come by the text.. Was it from the Vulgate or some intermediate source? Most of the biblical quotations do not quote the Vulgate directly, but are taken from paraphrases in Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum.* This is the text from which Jean de Meun found material for his character La Vieille and therefore a principle source of Chaucer's Wife. So what the wife is citing is Jerome's version of the text in *Adversus Jovinianum* in which Jerome builds a case against Jovinian's liberal views on the equal status of virginity and marriage. Jerome sees virginity, the state in which Christ remained, as symbolising a spiritual perfection to which all mankind, married or not, should aspire. The Wife's examples and quotations, therefore, follow Jerome's and for this reason she includes texts which do not help her argument, for example that of the Woman of Samaria (lines 14-22).[22] When she cannot twist the text to her own purposes she rejects it, claiming she cannot understand it:

What that he mente therby, I kan nat seyn;

But that I axe, why that the fifthe man

Was noon housbonde to the Samaritan?

How manye myghte she have in mariage?  (20-23)

The glossator is quick to reply to her question and does so by quoting Jerome: 'Non est vxorum numerum diffinitum . quia secundum Paulum /

Qui habent vxores sic sint tanquam non habentes' ('According to Paul, there is no number of wives defined, since those who have wives are as if they had none'). (Jerome I, 21 15; Jerome I, 17 13, citing 1 Corinthians 7:29.) Another example found in Jerome which the Wife cannot apply is that of Lamech (line 54). The Wife shrugs off this example:

What rekketh me, thogh folk seye vileiny
Of shrewed Lameth and his bigamye"

But the gloss states: 'Lameth qui primus intrauit bigamiam sanguinarius et homicida est et cetera' quoting Jerome I, 20 14. 'Lamech a man of blood and a murderer was the first who divided one flesh between two wives.' The story of Lamech, the blind archer who kills both Cain and his own son, has the briefest of mentions in Genesis, but is expanded in *the Historia Scholastica* and *the Glossa ordinaria* and depicted in the Holkham Bible Picture Book.  Lamech was used by Jerome to show the evils of bigamy, but the Wife cannot turn them to her advantage, as she does the examples of Abraham and Solomon and other Old Testament men who had married more than once.  When the Wife is able to twist a biblical text, she shows her delight: 'Al this sentence me liketh every deel' (line 162) and 'That gentil text kan I wel understonde (line 29).

Here then is a woman, albeit a literary creation, who, like Margery Kempe, hears authoritative texts translated into the vernacular, and uses them to make her case .  The difference is that Margery has a 'cunning clerk' who guides her reading, while the Wife has a wily, ex-clerical, young husband who bends her ear day and night with anti-matrimonial and anti-feminist

quotations. The method she applies is exactly that which her beloved Jankin

'this joly clerk Jankin, that was so hende' must have used (628):

And thanne wolde he vpon his Bible seke

That ilke prouerbe of Ecclesiaste,

Where he comandeth and forbedeth  faste

Man shal nat suffre his wyf go roule aboute

Jankyn as a scholar could have taken his texts directly from the Vulgate, as he appears to have done in the above example from Ecclesiasticus.  But the Wife gives a highly informative description of Jankin's most important source:

He had a book that gladly, nyght and day,

For his desport he wolde rede alway

He cleped it Valerie and Theophraste,

At whiche book he lough alwey ful faste.

And eek ther was somtyme a clerk at Rome,

A cardinal, that highte Seint Jerome,

That made a book agayn Jovinian;

In which book eek ther was Tertulan,

Crisippus, Trotula and Helowys,

That was abbesse nat fer fro Parys;

And eek the Parables of Salomon,

Ovides Art, and bookes many on,

And alle thise wer bounden in o volume.

And every nyght and day was his custume,

Whan he hadde leyser and vacacioun

From oother worldly occupacioun,

To reden in this book of wikked wyues,

He knew of hem mo legendes and lyues

Than been of goode wyues in the Bible. (669-687)

The book would have been in Latin and would have been one of the many Books of Wikked Wyves which circulated especially round student communities.[23]  The aim of such books was basically to keep the male undergraduates at college and not lose them, as they would have to leave if married.  A few manuscripts of such compilations exist today and six have almost the same texts in them as in Jankin's book, so we can only suppose that there was hundreds circulating, thereby adding fire to the antimatrimonial sentiment rife at this time.[24]  Such books were deliberately in Latin and intended for a small, select male student audience and never to reach the laity far less wives and it certainly had no place in the married household of Jankyn and Alisoun.  We can only assume that Jankyn in his daily readings ('gladly, nyght and day', 669) made quick translations into English for his wife's benefit, a state of affairs which she found intolerable:

And whan I saw he wolde never fyne

To reden of this cursed book al nyght,

Al sodeynly thre leves have I plyght

Out of his book, right as he radde…. (788-91)

And we all know the result of this domestic disturbance.

The Wife gives a detailed account in over a hundred lines (669-786 of the contents of this book and, as she heard it recited daily, it is not surprising that she knew all the texts by heart in particular Jerome's *Contra Jovinianum*.

We must remember that we are dealing with a fictional character and Chaucer could have endowed her with any amount of learning, but it would appear a subtle authorial decision to make her learning come from her husband's book. The Wife, therefore, uses the same rhetorical device as that employed by compilator of the Book of Wikked Wyves, namely taking texts out of context and twisting them for one's own didactic purpose. On this occasion the same texts are used to argue for exactly the opposite case. This would explain why she bothers to mention the examples, such as that of the Woman of Samaria, which do not suit her argument.

Ironically, the character of Jankyn also finds his source in Jerome. He is described as a handsome young man with 'his crispe heer shynynge as gold so fyn' (304). Such a description might be passed over had it not been for the marginal gloss which states 'et procurator calamistratus  et cetera' ('the curled darling who manages her affairs') in the Ellesemere and Rawlinson MS glosses. The quotation is from Jerome, 1, 47, where Theophrastus paints a picture of the married whore who nags her husband, insists on flattery and demands respect be paid to her *procurator calamistratus,* otherwise known as a gigolo or toyboy. Theophrastus portrays the worst kind of married woman, who makes her husband's life hell, sells sex to him and has a boyfriend on the side . This is the character who develops into La Vieille in Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose* and on whom the Wife of Bath is based. There is layer apon layer of source material here, and it is to Chaucer's credit that out of a stereotype he creates such a lively, three-dimensional character. Irrespective of her moral status, he makes the Wife one of the most successful rhetoricians, turning the antifeminist and antimatrimonial sentiments and *exempla* from his sources to her advantage. At the same time

Chaucer is able to convey how such a lay person would acquire detailed knowledge of Latin sources, thereby demonstrating the 'trickle down' effect which must have been prevalent amongst the laity in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.  If one were to speculate, then one might imagine that the Wife's maid would pick up some of these quotations and use them herself at yet another remove from the original text.

Chaucer then uses a broad spectrum of applications of the Bible, apparently being less interested in teaching the Bible to his audience, as occurs in *Cursor Mundi* or *Piers Plowman*, than in investigating how specific characters and social classes might interpret the Bible and use it in their attempt to tell the best Tale.  Some are like the ass listening to the harp, hearing and not understanding, and some are totally deaf to the Word.  At one extreme is the Parson quoting the Bible carefully and explaining it well, and at the other a character like the Miller who is verging on the pagan:

I crouche thee from elves and fro wightes!'
Ther-with the night spel seyde he anon-rightes
On foure halves of the hous aboute,
And on the thresshfold of the dore withoute:
'Jhesu Crist and seynt Benedight,
Blesse this hous from every wikked wight,
For nightes verye, the white paternoster!
Where wentestow Seynt Petres soster?' *The Miller's Tale* lines 3478-86

At best he knows the popular renditions of the biblical narratives:
'Hastou nat herd', quod Nicholas, 'also..

The sorwe of Noë with his fellowshipe,

Er that he mighte gete his wyf to shipe?

Him hadde be levere, I dar wel undertake,

At thilke tyme, than alle his wetheres blake,

That she hadde had a ship hirself allone.' *The Miller's Tale,* 3538-43

This knowledge of biblical and legendary is that which is found in the cycle plays, popular art and literature, such as the *Cursor Mundi*. It is the encyclopaedic world history in which biblical, patristic, legendary are all interwoven.

And between the two extremes are all those characters, keen to win Harry Bailey's prize, who deliberately twist their biblical knowledge for their own ends. We have the Man of Law who seems to think that David was not alone in the lions' den and that the others were eaten by the lion. Perhaps we are meant to view the rest of this character's statements as suspect if he is capable of such an error. Chaucer, then, skilfully conveys just the right amount of biblical knowledge and understanding to reflect a fictional character's educational and moral status. From such textual and intertextual material, we can glean much knowledge of the 'trickle down effect' of and grasp of theological texts amongst late fourteenth-century laity.

Endnotes:

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[1] 1 Ancrene Wisse, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd. London: Nelson, 1959, pp. xxv-xxvi.

[2] 2 Ibid., p. xxvii.

[3] See Edmund Reiss, 'Biblical Parody: Chaucer's 'Distortions' of Scripture' in*: Chaucer and the Scriptural Tradition*, ed David Lyle Jeffrey. Ottawa, University of Ottawa Press, 1984, p. 48.

[4] Ibid, p. 52.

[5] For comments on lay literacy and the Bible see Janet Coleman, *Medieval Readers and Writers*. London: Hutchinson, 1981, pp. 204-9.

[6] Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers*. London, the Hambledon Press, 1984, p. 121.

[7] Michael Clanchy, *From Memory toWritten Record*. London, Edward Arnold, 1979, pp.175-201.

[8] Quoted from David Fowler, *The Bible in Early English Literature*. London, Sheldon Press, 1977, pp. 146-8.

[9] Ibid, pp. 165-193.

[10] Robert A. Pratt, 'Chaucer and the Hand that Fed Him', *Speculum* 41 (1966), 619-42.

[11] Derek Pearsall, *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer*. Oxford, Blackwell, 1992, p. 242.

[12] Ibid, pp. 242-3. For an excellent overview of how the Bible was used in the Middle Ages, see Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*. Oxford, Blackwell, 1952.

[13] Coleman, p. 176.

[14] See Pearsall, pp. 163-5, A.J.Minnis, ed. *The Medieval Boethius: Studies in the Vernacular Translations of De Consolatione Philosophiae*. Cambridge, Brewer, 1987. Examples are to be found in MS Cambridge University Library 1i.3.21 fols 13$^r$-14$^v$ and MS Oxford, Bodlean Library, Rawl. G. 41, fol. 1.

[15] Coleman, p. 194.

[16] Piers Plowman, Passus 5 lines 39-41.

[17] This example is taken from Coleman, p. 181; see also Pearsall, p. 21.

[18] Coleman, pp. 204-5.

[19] See my detailed comments on the manuscript glosses in 'The Significance of Marginal Glosses in the Earliest Manuscripts of *The Canterbury Tales*'. *Chaucer and the Scriptural Tradition.* Ed. D. L. Jeffrey. Ottawa, Univ of Ottawa Press, 1984, pp. 75-88, and "The Significance of the Early Chaucer Manuscript Glosses (with special reference to *The Wife of Bath's Prologue', Chaucer Review* 10 (1975), 350-360. In these articles I suggest that Chaucer was the author of a number of these glosses. See also Daniel S. Silvia, Jr, 'Glosses to *The Canterbury Tales* from St. Jerome's *Epistola Adversus Jovinianum'. Studies in Philology* 62 (1965), 28-39.

[20] See Smalley, pp. 366-7.

[21] See Caie, 'The Significance of Marginal Glosses in the Earliest Manuscripts of *The Canterbury Tales*', pp. 76-7.

[22] The glosses at lines 11, 13, 23, 28, 46, 50, 52. 54, 55, 57, 73 etc. are all attributed to Jerome's work

[23] Jankyn called the book "Valerie and Theophraste", referring to Walter Map's *Epistola Valerii ad Rufinum de non ducenda uxore* (The letter of Valerius to Rufinus advising him not to marry), a work contained in the late 12$^{th}$ cent *De nugis curialum*; 'Theophraste' refers to the *Liber aureolus de nuptiis* (The Golden Book on Marriage) by Theophrastus, a work preserved only in St Jerome's *Contra Jovinianum* ( Book 1, 47.

[24] See Pratt, 619-42.