

THE PREDICAMENT OF CHAUCER'S WIFE OF BATH: ST. JEROME ON VIRGINITY

Douglas Wurtele

Dame Alisoun, the Wife of Bath, in probing the question of virginity and chaste widowhood versus fecund wifehood, offers her most striking scriptural proof at the beginning of her monologue. It is the Wedding at Cana (Jn 2:1-11), an example which goes hard against her case. Thus it is in resigned tones that she concedes:

But me was toold, certeyn, nat longe agoon is,
That sith that Crist ne wente nevere but onis
To weddyng, in the Cane of Galilee,
That by the same ensample taughte he me
That I ne sholde wedded be but ones.¹

That homilists over the years have confronted Alisoun with this proof against remarriage is perfectly probable. But an even stronger reason why the Gospel incident has stuck in her mind lies in her fifth husband's practice of reading aloud from the anti-feminist treatises found in his notorious collection.² From Jankyn's reading she has also learned about St. Paul's views on marriage and has been made to accept the Cana incident, where Christ performed his first recorded miracle, as incontrovertible proof of divine disapproval of remarriage. Why has she been assured of the truth of so hard a saying? Jankyn's fireside reading would not have been done from the

Glossa Ordinaria itself, yet whether or not he was aware of the fact, none of the marginal exegetical commentaries or the interlinear glosses and none of the literal and moral *postillae* by his near contemporary, Nicolas de Lyra, made any suggestion that because the Cana episode records the one and only wedding ceremony known to have been attended by Christ a second wedding in any person's life is therefore improper. Yet the particular exegesis reluctantly accepted by the Wife of Bath makes that claim: "for by going once to a marriage," St. Jerome writes, "He taught that men should marry only once."³

It is obvious where Jankyn, Alisoun's biased instructor in these matters, has derived this idiosyncratic interpretation, which is not part of the *Glossa* exegesis. Alisoun herself cites the book over which Jankyn, she recalls, "lough alwey ful faste" (III.672). Part of it included St. Jerome's *Epistola adversus Jovinianum*, and she seems still to hear Jankyn's sardonic voice quoting from the writings of

a clerk at Rome,
A cardinal, that highte Seint Jerome,
That made a book agayn Jovinian. (III.673-75) 4

The Cana interpretation sums up the spirit of Jerome's polemic. As expounded by Alisoun's fifth husband, this book serves better than any other "auctoritee" to explain the resentment and confusion poured out in her inchoate life story. In it Jerome comes down hard on the married state, and in both his later *apologia* for that work and in certain separate *epistolae* restates an unyielding preference for virginity over marriage. The circumstances inspiring his counter-blast against the heretical monk Jovinian, as well as the supplementary documents, would hardly be known to Alisoun, who thus accepts these out of context *dicta* as if they had scriptural validity.⁵ But probably the original context was known to Alisoun's didactic husband as well, needless to say, as the central focus held by Jerome's treatise in the anti-matrimonial propaganda current in Jankyn's Oxford.⁶ Certainly these conditions were known to the author himself, for whom the contextual situation thus provided a rich source of irony.

Apart from the signs of Alisoun's indirect acquaintance with the *Adversus Jovinianum*, a collation can also be made with the many closely identifiable passages in the Wife's discourse that reflect Jerome's extensive citations from Theophrastus.⁷ Other parts as well from Jerome's treatise

have been lodged in the Wife's memory, distortedly as they may have come to her; and some of her allusions resonate with Jerome's opening summary of his antagonist's argument and deployment of scriptural proofs. Thus to a large extent Alisoun is upholding marriage and defending remarriage through the heretic's case that Jerome cites only in order to demolish it. The full extent of the author's ironical manipulation is thus seen when the Wife's protesting speech is put in context with the debate and related also to Jerome's somewhat less polemically voiced *epistolae*.

Jerome's antagonist, having written a pamphlet against asceticism, had been condemned by a council in Milan.⁸ Among other things, Jovinian affirmed that in the sight of God a virgin as such is no better than a married woman. At the time a pagan reaction was going on and the book aroused interest. Jovinian's case, as summarized by Jerome, is essentially that since the merits of married people are equal to those of virgins, their reward in heaven will also be equal, as for all those who have kept their baptismal vows. It is easy to see why the Wife of Bath gives the matter such close attention. Thrice a pilgrim to Jerusalem, she may perhaps be concerned, whether or not in an obdurate state of mind, about the next world. If it is true that a married woman's felicity will then equal that of a virgin, Alisoun's fate, so to speak, lies within her own control: what counts is the keeping of one's baptismal vows, not the technicality of one's married state. Though the precise terms of the Jovinian-Jerome controversy may have been concealed from her, its essence lies at the root of her troubled defence of sexuality -- or more exactly, female sexuality. If the mere fact of her endowment by Nature with a desire for wedlock must tell against her, then she is subject to an injustice that rankles. As purveyed by Jankyn, Jerome's treatise cuts, therefore, to the heart of her predicament.⁹

That treatise, in Fremantle's summary, "gives a remarkable specimen of Jerome's system of interpreting Scripture, and also of the methods by which asceticism was introduced into the Church, and marriage brought into disesteem."¹⁰ In his first book Jerome takes up Jovinian's exposition of Old Testament teaching on fruitfulness, a point also adduced by Alisoun. Central to his counter argument is a closely reasoned, if biased, exegesis of I Corinthians, in which, Jerome maintains, St. Paul put virginity and continence on a higher plane than the married state. He also has recourse to classical methods. First deriding the barbarous language and bombastic yet grovelling style of this "Epicurus of Christianity,"¹¹ Jerome lets loose a

battery of allusion and quotation from classical and late classical writings. Boldly affirming that, unlike Marcion the Gnostic and Manichaeus, he does not at all "disparage marriage" (p. 347),¹² he even concedes with the Apostle that marriage is honourable and the bed undefiled and acknowledges the Creator's injunction (Hebr. 13:4; Gen. 1:28). The point is not that marriage is bad but that virginity is better; and the relativity of this position, which Alisoun grudgingly allows ("Virginitee is greet perfeccion," III. 105), makes Jerome's case hard to refute. Alisoun tries to do this by denying that God ever expressly forbade marriage or that St. Paul commanded virginity. In fact, Jerome never actually makes that claim. Instead, perhaps with some sophistry of his own, he declares, "While we honour marriage we prefer virginity which is the offspring of marriage. . . . Virginity is to marriage what fruit is to the tree, or grain to the straw" (p. 347).¹³ This concealed fallacy the Wife of Bath seems to scent:

And certes, if ther were no seed ysowe,
Virginitee, thanne wherof sholde it growe? (III. 72-73)

Even so, Alisoun's protest falls short of Jovinian's own stand, which Jerome summarizes as "'virgins, widows, and married women, who have been once passed through the laver of Christ, if they are on a par in other respects, are of equal merit'" (p. 348).¹⁴

In the next chapter Jerome attacks this proposition. Jovinian, the "common enemy," by maintaining all to be of equal merit, "does no less injury to virginity in comparing it with marriage than he does to marriage, when he allows it to be lawful, but to the same extent as second or third marriages" (p. 348).¹⁵ This dubious assertion Jerome takes even farther by declaring that Jovinian wrongs even "digamists" and "trigamists," for he puts them on a level with whomongers and fornicators when they have repented; thus, even these, if penitent, are made equal in heaven to virgins. Both Jerome's vehemence and that bestowed by Chaucer on Alisoun stem from something similar: an outraged sense of justice. The saint is appalled by the notion that the heavenly reward for virgins, male or female, will be no better than those granted virtuous married folk, and that penitent "digamists" and "trigamists" will be neither worse off than the former nor better off than repentant fornicators who have not married at all. For her part, Alisoun is presented as a woman outraged at being ranked inferior to one who has not married or has married only once, as if heavenly rewards were

based on nothing deeper than the difference between the once-married and the "digamist" -- or in her case, as Jerome might have put it, the "quinquegamist."

From chapters five to forty Jerome injects into his refutation of Jovinian's misuse of St. Paul a stream of references to the Epistles, in particular I Corinthians 7. In all, close to a hundred Pauline citations and allusions are made in Book I; correspondingly, the Wife's own arguments are strewn with similar echoes. Jovinian, of course, had also leant heavily on injunctions in Genesis, for example, "Wherefore a man shall leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall be two in one flesh" (Gen. 2:24) and the pre-lapsarian order to "increase and multiply, and fill the earth" along with its post-diluvian counterpart (Gen. 1:28, 9:1).¹⁶ One of these will be picked up by the Wife of Bath, as will Jovinian's reference to Christ's *dictum*, "What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder" (Matt. 19:6). In scathing tones Jerome goes on with the further citations made from scripture by the heretic, who "praises Samson, I may even say extravagantly panegyricizes the uxorious Nazarite. . . . What shall I say of Solomon, whom he includes in the list of husbands, and represents as a type of the Saviour?" To Jovinian's mention of certain favourable *dicta* of St. Paul (for example, I Tim. 5:14, Hebr. 13:4, I Cor. 7:39), Jerome replies, "Surely we shall hear no more of the famous Apostolic utterance," for in the same document St. Paul adjures those who have wives to be as if they had none. "It can hardly be," he taunts his adversary, "that you will say the reason why he wished them to be married was that some widows had already turned back after Satan: as though virgins never fell and their fall was not more ruinous" (p. 349).¹⁷ Of course, both Samson and Solomon were quite properly regarded, typologically, as precursors of the Saviour; and of the ambiguities in the Pauline utterances Alisoun is depicted as being well aware. For these reasons it is important not to disregard the derisory tone in Jerome's polemic because the Wife of Bath, compelled by Jankyn to absorb all or part of Book I, has evidently been oppressed by both the brutality of the invective and the force of the argument.¹⁸

It is in his sixth chapter that Jerome promises to make use of St. Paul's decrees to the Corinthians, these being regarded "as the law of Christ speaking in him" (p. 350).¹⁹ Practised *rhetor*, Jerome then sets out to turn his opponent's ally against him: "In the front rank I will set the Apostle Paul, and, since he is the bravest of the generals, will arm him with his own

weapons, that is to say, his own statements" (p. 350).²⁰ The counter-attack consists essentially of Jerome's exegesis of I Corinthians, harmonized with a wealth of other Pauline utterances. It takes up some ten lengthy chapters, with bits of which Jankyn seems to have tormented Alisoun. Even so, the polemicist's rebuttal is only half-complete. For the next ten chapters or so he calls up counter-evidence from the Old Testament, liberally supported by the Gospels. Almost every citation made by Jovinian is turned against him. A typical example comes from Judges: "Whereas he [Jovinian] prefers the fidelity of the father Jephthah to the tears of the virgin daughter, that makes for us. For we are not commending virgins of the world so much as those who are virgins for Christ's sake, and most Hebrews blame the father for the rash vow he made, (p. 363).²¹ The distinction made here points to Chaucer's contrivance of the shiftings resorted to by Alisoun in her own case for the married state. Where she might argue that to a virginal spinster who has not borne children there should be ascribed no more merit than to a married woman who has obeyed the divine command, the reply obviously is that involuntary virginity is not at issue. Jerome's case is that voluntary virginity has more merit than fruitful marriage precisely because it demands a willing sacrifice made for love of God. Hence, as Alisoun is made to admit, in no way can even the chaste matron equal the woman who remains a virgin for Christ's sake.

After a series of effectively varied biblical citations (I. 28-35) drawn in large part from the Book of Proverbs and the Song of Songs, then both attributed to Solomon,²² Jerome asks, "But you will say: 'If everybody were a virgin, what would become of the human race?'" (p. 373).²³ It is not a true question but a mere rhetorical trick. The Wife's parallel question, however, comes from the heart:

Telle me also, to what conclusion
 Were membres maad of generacion,
 And of so parfit wys a wight ywrought? (III. 115-17)

For Jerome the reply is obvious. First, "upon this principle there will be nothing at all for fear that something else may cease to exist"; secondly, and devastatingly, "you are afraid that if the desire for virginity were general there would be no prostitutes, no adulteresses, no wailing infants in town or country. . . . Be not afraid that all will become virgins: virginity is a hard matter, and therefore rare, because it is hard" (p. 373).²⁴

Again, in knocking down his opponent's case, Jerome both vilifies the consequences of marriage and extolls the heroism of virginity. Logically inconsistent or not, this counter-argument permits a return to St. Paul and to the other Apostles (I. 36-40). Jerome then turns to philosophical and historical examples from pagan sources, early and late, that illustrate both the merits of virginity and the woes of marriage. His grounds for denigrating marriage have shifted somewhat, from moral inferiority to social inconvenience, for here occurs the notorious section attributed to Theophrastus (I. 47). But it is in the concluding sections (I. 48-49) that appear, through Jerome's *exempla* on vicious wives, the most striking signs of Alisoun's brooding over the reading she has had to endure.

In that disconsolate and disorganized brooding, naturally only a fraction of the Pauline citations in the *Adversus Jovinianum* crop up as part of her discourse, but, more important, all the Pauline citations or allusions that she does deploy appear also in Jerome's treatise.²⁵ This, indeed, is what one would expect if that discourse reflects memories of the anti-feminist fulminations, Jerome's included, that her mind has stored up. It is also to be expected that the order in which Chaucer shows how these echoes leap from memory into articulation on the pilgrimage would be all jumbled up out of sequence. Further, since the case for virginity as superior to marriage rests so firmly on I Corinthians 7, that is what Jerome must focus upon. Naturally, then, the bulk of Alisoun's allusions stem from that document's admonitions and concessions on the rights, duties, and relative worth of the married state. The erasing of ambiguities by the rational patristic exegete and their deepening by Chaucer's Wife of Bath, a "hopelessly carnal and literal" exegete,²⁶ come out in the contrast between Jerome's orderly exposition and Alisoun's agitated complaints. The Apostle's crucial teachings (verses one to nine) receive systematic treatment in the whole of Jerome's own seventh chapter, with frequent reversions to the same section all through Book I. In that particular chapter, however, he quotes all of it in proper sequence. Alisoun herself cites verses from this opening section more frequently than other Pauline writings. But her references pour out incoherently.²⁷ Significant *dicta* from later portions of St. Paul's seventh chapter appear sporadically in her discourse,²⁸ contrasting again with Jerome's treatment where they come in systematic order as well as *passim* to lend constant support for his consistently favourable ideas on the status of married persons.

All of Alisoun's inchoate citations occur in Jerome's exposition, some of them, such as verses 7 and 39, more than once. While this collation does

not prove that Alisoun absorbed the Pauline *dicta* only from Jankyn's reading based on *Adversus Jovinianum*, it does show that she is made to deploy only those fragments.²⁹ An instructive contrast between Jerome's conclusions from this evidence and Alisoun's antithetical views comes early in her prologue. At this point she seems scarcely aware of her pilgrim audience. Using the respectful pronoun, as if directly addressing one of the *praedicatores* who have afflicted her life, she expostulates:

I woot as wel as ye, it is no drede,
 Th'apostel, whan he speketh of maydenhede,
 He seyde that precept therof hadde he noon.
 Men may conseille a womman to been oon,
 But: conseillyng is no commandement. (III. 63-67)

St Paul's actual words are "Now, concerning virgins, I have no commandment ["praeceptum"] of the Lord: but I give counsel ["consilium"], as having obtained mercy of the Lord, to be faithful" (I Cor. 7:25). Alisoun's version omits the following qualification, on which Jerome, for his part, lays stress: "I think therefore that this is good for the present necessity: that it is good for a man so to be." The Apostle then reminds those who now have a wife not to seek "to be loosed," but advises those now "loosed from a wife" not to seek to be married. Possibly Alisoun ignores the qualification because it tells against her case, but, possibly, too, because its vagueness makes it seem ambiguous or irrelevant. Though she may not grasp the fact, in St. Paul's age the apparent imminence of the Second Coming lessened the urgency to replenish the species, while in Jerome's age, some three centuries later, this indifference about procreation to some extent remained, though not necessarily for the same reason. But by the Wife of Bath's time the matter was different. The Providential plan required the creation of virtuous Christians through chaste marriage. In effect, then, Alisoun is reiterating Jovinian. "'See,' says he," in Jerome's paraphrase, "'the Apostle confesses that as regards virgins he has no commandment of the Lord, and he who had with authority laid down the law respecting husbands and wives, does not dare to command what the Lord has not enjoined'" (p. 355).³⁰ But, Jerome replies, the Apostle knew that if the Lord had commanded virginity, "He would have seemed to condemn marriage, and to do away with the seed-plot of mankind, of which virginity itself is a growth"³¹ (p. 355). A command is imposed only on one from whom obedience can be exacted, Jerome explains, and not to one who has

freedom to comply or not. Jerome finds St. Paul's words unambiguous: the virgin life is better, hence can be recommended; but if it were commanded that would entail punishment for disobedience. Since some must marry, that cannot be; for if they did not marry, the "fruit" of virginity would not grow from the "root" of marriage. The virgin state is thus offered as a favour, not prescribed as a law; it is a reward for those candidates who can run the course. That the Wife of Bath knows about Jerome's metaphor she makes explicit, while implicit in her whole *apologia* is awareness of his inescapable conclusion: "And therefore Christ loves virgins more than others, because they willingly give what was not commanded them" (p. 355).³² But there, so to speak, lies the rub. Though bold enough to cite the very *dictum* of St. Paul which underpins Jerome's logic, the Wife takes care to avoid this overmastering argument for divine preference. All she can do is register a barely concealed protest against its unfairness.

In that attempt she is not deterred by Jerome's successful use of the Pauline epistle from using it herself. Her other and more sparing biblical insertions come mainly from Genesis and Proverbs and from St. Matthew's Gospel and St. John's. Here occurs a higher incidence of allusions not originating in *Adversus Jovinianum*, but very few of these bear on marriage as opposed to virginity or on the ways of wives. Of those that do, nearly all appear in Jerome's treatise. Conversely, a great many of his citations from Genesis and Proverbs, St. Matthew and St. John go untreated by the Wife of Bath.³³ Even so, there are enough references to Proverbs common to her discourse and Jerome's treatise to show as convincingly as with those stemming from I Corinthians 7 that it is through the biased filtration of the *Adversus Jovinianum* that Alisoun has absorbed these anti-feminist parables also.³⁴

Besides this kind of indirect biblical evidence on which the Wife's views run counter to Jerome's, his treatise contains a good deal of deliberately anti-feminist material to which Alisoun can offer nothing by way of reply except indignation. Jerome does not scruple to round out his first book with an assortment of maxims against marriage supposedly written by Aristotle's pupil Theophrastus, even though they present in themselves no logical case at all against Jovinian. These too Chaucer presents as having rankled in Alisoun's mind; they have embedded themselves, sometimes with literal accuracy, in her monologue beginning, "'Sire olde kaynard'" (III. 235). Here she throws back at the "olde lecchour," vaguely identified as one of her first three husbands, a whole series of accusations made supposedly

by him or by others. No less than fourteen times she uses the formula "Thou seyst" or "seistow" (III. 248-302), followed by one of these recriminations which for the most part have stuck in her memory through Jerome's summary of the Theophrastan maxims. The "lorel" of a husband says on going to bed that "no wys man nedeth for to wedde" (III. 274). As Jerome puts it, Theophrastus asserts that "a wise man therefore must not take a wife" (p. 383).³⁵ Alisoun's "olde lecchour" is said to lament that "to wedde a povre woman, for costage" is a misfortune, although if she does have money and noble birth it is torture "to soffre hire pride and hire malencolie" (III. 248-52). These complaints match Jerome's citation of Theophrastus: "To support a poor wife is hard: to put up with a rich one is torture" (p. 383).³⁶ The Wife of Bath's old husband observes that oxen, asses, horses, and dogs are all tested out at different times, as well as basins and ewers, spoons and stools, pots and clothes; but until they are wedded "folk of wyves make noon assay" (III.285-91). This reflection by the Wife's "olde dotard shrewe" matches Jerome's reporting of Theophrastus: "Horses, asses, cattle, even slaves of the smallest worth, clothes, kettles, wooden seats, cups and earthenware pitchers, are first tried and then bought" (p. 383) but not so with wives.³⁷ This absurd list, except for the anachronistic slave-buying, Alisoun takes seriously enough to reproduce almost verbatim, putting it, truthfully or not, in the mouth of an earlier husband than Jankyn. Elsewhere Theophrastus' tone shifts from the petulant to the sardonic: "If a woman be fair, she soon finds lovers; if she be ugly, it is easy to be wanton. It is difficult to guard what many long for. It is annoying to have what no one thinks worth possessing" (p. 383).³⁸ These observations, perhaps more sharply than any others, offend Alisoun, who will work them indirectly into the dilemma posed by her Loathly Lady. Here she amends them slightly, perhaps because she herself no longer qualifies as fair:

'And if that she be foul, thou seist that she
 Coveiteth every man that she may se,

 And seyst it is an hard thyng for to welde
 A thyng that no man wole, his thankes, helde.' (III. 265-66, 271-72)

Similar echoes are infused in the *sermocinationes* (III. 235-378) attributed by Alisoun to one (or all) of her chiding husbands. Of course, some of these Theophrastan echoes may have reached her through the *Romaunt*, for

example, or Deschamps' *Miroir de Mariage*.³⁹ But it is equally likely that the *Adversus Jovinianum* has been, so to speak, Alisoun's main source book, thanks to her fifth husband's determination to inflict his learning upon her.

This is particularly true of the third and most offensive element in Jerome's anti-feminist material. Neither the Bible nor Theophrastus but pagan literature supplies his evidence about truly wicked wives. That Alisoun inserts their names into her discourse may or may not bear on her possible guilt feelings over the mysterious death of her fourth husband, as Beryl Rowland has persuasively surmised;⁴⁰ here the grisly list need merely be seen as further signs of Alisoun's enforced education by Jerome through Jankyn. His biblical passages, moreover, she introduces only with generalized formulae such as "I pray yow, telleth me," "For wel ye knowe," "Telle me also" (III. 61, 99, 115), phrases meant not so much for her pilgrim audience as for "clerkes" in general. The Theophrastan slanders, which strike closer to the bone, she associates more specifically with one or all of her old husbands, transferring to them sentiments drawn literally from Jankyn's book yet, in spirit, typical of all their cavillings. But the stories of wicked wives, also drawn from Jerome's treatise, she ties quite specifically to Jankyn and his book. His habit of reading from that notorious anthology to his captive audience of one is both the source of her knowledge and the catalyst for her outraged sense of injustice. Alisoun mentions this book frequently; she alludes to its contents, in particular Jerome's section, and recounts some of the extracts read out by Jankyn. His Bible, which she mentions once ("and thanne wolde he upon his Bible seke," III. 650), must be a different volume, unless she is using "Bible" derisively to refer to the same *florilegium*, perhaps a prized relic from his Oxford days. His "Bible" could hardly have comprised the *Glossa Ordinaria* itself or contained the *postillae* of Nicolas de Lyra;⁴¹ perhaps it consisted only of the *Libri Didactici*, of which Ecclesiastes forms part, as well as Ecclesiasticus and Proverbs. From these the Wife has picked up most of her biblical echoes not drawn indirectly from *Adversus Jovinianum*. What form, then, this "Bible" took or what else was bound into the codex, are questions not easily answered; but it seems certain that much of the recital of vicious wives (III. 713-87) comes from the *Adversus Jovinianum* section of the other book. Between that particular source for Alisoun's recollections and her present complaints lies a correspondence closer even than with her other reminiscences.

Having added Theophrastus to the biblical evidence in the attack on Jovinian -- indeed, on marriage -- Jerome calls upon pagan history and, as we would say, myth. The two wives of Socrates, he relates, "planned an attack upon him, and having punished him severely, and put him to flight, plagued him for a long time" (p. 384).⁴² Jerome describes the shower that followed the thunder merely as "dirty water" ("aqua immunda"); Alisoun's less delicate version reports Jankyn's account of the

care and the wo

That Socrates hadde with his wyves two;

How Xantippa caste pisse upon his heed. (III. 727-29)

Jerome then cites the unchaste wife of Sulla, the impure wife of Pompey, the violent wife of Cato, and the fractious wife of Philip of Macedon. That none of these notorious cases is mentioned by the Wife of Bath may be because in her recollection of Jankyn's reading these women have been crowded out by worse ones. For now Jerome goes on to speak of truly evil wives. In pretended *occupatio* he asks, "Why should I refer to Pasiphaë, Clytemnestra, and Eriphyle, the first of whom, the wife of a king and swimming in pleasure, is said to have lusted for a bull, the second to have killed her husband for the sake of an adulterer, the third to have betrayed Amphiarus, and to have preferred a gold necklace to the welfare of her husband" (p. 385).⁴³ Jankyn's recital of these atrocities, losing nothing in translation for his own wife's benefit, seems to have stirred in Alisoun more distress than anything else in misogynistic literature. Of "Phasipha" she pleads "Spek namoore," for the story of "hire horrible lust and hir likyng" is a "grisly thyng"; of "Clitermystra" and the "lecherie" that "falsly" brought death to her husband she relates that Jankyn read out "with ful good devocioun"; and of "Eriphilem" Alisoun's husband "hadde a legende" that told how for "an ouche of gold" she betrayed Amphiorax, "for which he hadde at Thebes sory grace" (III. 733-46). Apart from changing Eriphyle's necklace to a brooch, Alisoun recalls Jankyn's readings so sharply that she even reproduces the central crimes done by each woman in precisely the same order as they appear in Jerome's version. There is an even closer correspondence: just as his account gives the name of only one husband, Eriphyle's so does Alisoun also mention only Amphiarus by name but neither of the other two unfortunate husbands.⁴⁴

It seems, then, that Jankyn, seeking to oppress his unruly wife with authorities who denigrate the married state, could have found enough Pauline

precepts, Theophrastan maxims, and pagan *exempla* simply from their citations in the *Adversus Jovinianum* section of his book. Conversely, Alisoun shows no signs of having heard about the virtuous wives whom elsewhere Jerome extols at length (I. 43-46) in some palliation of his anti-feminist strictures. The tragi-comic effect wrought by the ironical poet comes from making this uneasy yet rebellious woman take it all so keenly to heart.⁴⁵ Moreover, for this one-sided view of marriage Jankyn is partly to blame and not simply Jerome himself. Chaucer shows his Wife of Bath as having been taught to take fulminations such as these, enforced by a biased reading of the Apostle, as authoritative declarations on the relative value of marriage and on the propriety of remarriage, instead of polemics designed for a certain effect.

In Jerome's other utterances, notably his non-controversial letters and his *apologia* for the *Epistola adversus Jovinianum* itself, his position is sustained, if sometimes more moderately as in his letter to the Lady Eustochium.⁴⁶ The fact that virginity is to be preferred, he explains, does not mean wedlock is disparaged. As for the injunction in Genesis to be fruitful and multiply, the order is fulfilled "after the expulsion from Paradise Let them marry and be given in marriage who eat their bread in the sweat of their brow" (p. 91).⁴⁷ Our Lord's injunction, he adds, about becoming a eunuch (Matt. 19:11) replaces that command, although it applies not to all men but only to those who make the choice. Virginity is natural to mankind; wedlock is of the post-fallen state.⁴⁸ In the Pauline *dictum* (I Cor. 7:25) virginity is preferred, however, not commanded, "because that which is freely offered is worth more than what is extorted by force" (p. 97).⁴⁹ Under the Old Law the world was empty of people. But that law has now been replaced by the New Law; time is growing short; Nebuchadnezzar -- clearly a figure for the Antichrist -- is once more drawing near. "What to me is a wife," Jerome asks, "if she shall fall as a slave to some proud king? What good will little ones do, if their lot must be that which the prophet deploras?" (p. 99).⁵⁰ As a consequence of the supersession of the old dispensation by the new in which death through Eve is replaced by life through Mary, "the gift of virginity has been poured most abundantly upon women, seeing that it was from a woman it began" (p. 99).⁵¹

If that part of Jerome's letter dealing with the ambiguous behest of St. Paul would have done little to assuage Alisoun's disquiet, his explicit distinction between the old dispensation and the new, for the Lady Eustochium's benefit, might have startled her. Alisoun's pragmatic mind would have noted how Jerome has carried forward the second coming anticipated by the Apostle

into an apocalyptic prophecy of the coming of the Beast. Were Alisoun aware of Jerome's outdated reasons for deeming the replenishment of the species as irrelevant, her reply might well sound scornful. Further on in the same letter Jerome explains why sexual intercourse is baneful: "the apostle bids us pray without easing" but the married man who "renders his wife her due cannot so pray" (p. 103). Herself no mean sophist, Alisoun might have noticed that Jerome at once removes from context the Pauline injunction to pray without ceasing (I Thess. 5:17) so as to equate it syllogistically with virginity: "Either we pray always and are virgins; or we cease to pray that we may perform our marital service" (p. 103).⁵² The dilemma is a factitious one. Judging, however, from Alisoun's glee in relating how her old husbands were made to render up her due, one can say that Jerome's patently unrealistic argument would have further incited her derision.

Similarly, she would not have paid undue heed to Jerome's epistolary comments to a wealthy Roman lady, Furia (LIV, on "Widows"). Carnal intercourse, implanted in men by God for the sake of procreation, is an instinct that can easily overstep its limits: "It is a task for pre-eminent virtue and the most watchful care, seeing that you were born in the flesh, not to live the life of the flesh" (p. 245).⁵³ But in these reflections Alisoun might have found some comfort. The question hinges not on whether the remarriage of widows is bad but whether abstinence is possible. Clearly, for those of "pre-eminent virtue," it is possible. That the merit so gained makes the striving worth while, Alisoun might be prepared to concede but perhaps resentfully. In the same letter Jerome finds practical as well as philosophical reasons against remarrying; he urges the emulation of Anna (I Kings 17:10) and other virtuous widows in the old dispensation. In another letter (LXXVII, "Eulogy of Fabiola") Jerome again deals with the issue and explains away St. Paul's concession, "Better to marry than to be burnt" (I Cor. 7). The "plea of necessity" had to apply to Fabiola, "a young weak woman" who could not remain in chaste widowhood because "she saw another law in her members warring against the law of her mind, and she felt herself dragged like a chained captive into carnal intercourse" (p. 315).⁵⁴ Alisoun would have been interested in this application of the text; when the same one occurs in *Adversus Jovinianum* (I. 7), Jerome applies a different and, one might say, less natural interpretation. There he deems it not so much a concession as a lesser evil, to avoid the worse evil of fornication:

If it is good not to touch a woman, it is bad to touch one: for there is no opposite to goodness but badness. But if it be bad and the evil is pardoned, the reason for the concession is to prevent worse evil. But surely a thing which is only allowed because there may be something worse has only a slight degree of goodness. . . . As then he who touches fire is instantly burned, so by the mere touch the peculiar nature of man and woman is perceived, and the difference of sex is understood. (p. 250)³³

Jerome's use of the passive mood to render St. Paul's observation on burning is central here, for he actually seems to mean that a man is "burnt" by fornication; hence marriage, though no great good in itself, is of course preferable. But his interpretation is not nearly so rigorous when he applies the same text to the question of the widow Fabiola's sexual desires. The distinction is an important one, and the Wife of Bath is shown as being unaware of it. In a sense Jerome expects more in the way of continence from husbands than of wives, and the *Adversus Jovinianum*, from which Jankyn's reproaches have been drawn, is aimed at men, not at women. Jerome makes the distinction explicit enough: "So long as I do the husband's part, I fail in continency. . . . If we abstain from intercourse, we give honour to our wives: if we do not abstain, it is clear that insult is the opposite of honour" (p. 351).⁵⁶ In the document that has given so much pain to Jankyn's truculent but troubled wife, male, not female, chastity is, so to say, the burning issue. Even in the letter about Fabiola, whose spiritual guide Jerome was, the same point comes out: "With us what is unlawful for women is equally unlawful for men," compared with the unchecked license permitted to pagan Romans, "and as both sexes serve God they are bound by the same conditions" (p. 315).⁵⁷ Possibly, then, Jerome did not expect as much of women as of men, who are the ones, after all, enjoined by St. Paul to pray unceasingly. Certainly he held to the principle that the virtuous widow must prefer chastity to remarriage. His letter about another noble Roman lady, Marcella (CXXVII), extolls her as the exemplar of Christian widowhood, who put those women called "Gentile widows" to shame by her modesty and chastity.

Yet for all Jerome's biases in favour of such behaviour as Marcella's, his letters reveal elements that might have mitigated for Alisoun the heavy-browed asceticism of *Adversus Jovinianum*. Even more helpful to her would have been his celebrated letter to Pammachius, in response to whose initiative

Jerome undertook the refutation of Jovinian. In a subsequent letter to this friend (XLVIII),⁵⁸ he defends himself against charges of using this refutation to praise virginity excessively and to depreciate unjustly the married state, as if "to preach up chastity till no comparison is left between a wife and a virgin is equivalent to a condemnation of matrimony" (p. 66).⁵⁹ Precisely so: and if Jerome's summary of the charges against him is fair, these seem indeed to have anticipated the Wife of Bath's grievances of a millenium later. *Apologia* aside, however, clearly no compromise can exist between his views and those of Jovinian and hence those ascribed by the poet to Alisoun. Where the heretic would make the married state equal to virginity, Jerome makes it inferior. Later he will make it unequivocally plain that in this rejection of equality lies no mere metaphysical distinction; its consequences are quite practical. By means of false dichotomy the agreement of Jerome's current audience is demanded: "Either my view of the matter must be embraced, or else that of Jovinian. If I am blamed for putting wedlock below virginity, he must be praised for putting the two states on a level" (pp. 66-7).⁶⁰ To support the case for inequality, which like-minded rigorists would continue to make even in the Wife of Bath's day, Jerome draws upon familiar analogies. In a large house there are vessels of silver and gold as well as some of wood and earth -- a Pauline analogy (II Tim. 2:20) reluctantly acknowledged by Alisoun:

For wel ye knowe, a lord in his houshold,
He hath nat every vessel al of gold;
Somme been of tree, and doon hir lord servyse. (III. 99-101)

This distinction Jerome reiterates in his analogy between wheat and barley. Both are created by God, but the former stands for virginity, the latter for marriage; fornication, he adds, is therefore equivalent to cow-dung: "If any one thinks it hard or reprehensible that I have placed the same interval between virginity and wedlock as there is between fine corn and barley," let him, Jerome says, read St. Ambrose on widowhood (p. 74).⁶¹ As with the unfair distinction between vessels of gold and of wood, this one Alisoun also feels constrained to accept. What Chaucer shows her as finding well-nigh unendurable are the consequences drawn by Jerome from his analogies for the relative worth of things similar in superficials but different in essentials.

Having insisted on these distinctions, Jerome can insist even more strenuously in this "liber apologeticus" than in the treatise itself that

in no wise is he condemning the marriage state. Can a man who speaks of marriage as silver, even while comparing virginity to gold, be said to condemn marriage? The disclaimer sounds no less specious than the subsequent *interrogatio*: "Do I listen with gladness to the praise of marriage, and do I yet condemn marriage?"⁶² Not content with pretending to praise marriage by denying that he condemns it, Jerome also denies that he has proscribed second or subsequent marriages by widows. His detractors should know that he allows second and third marriages "in the Lord," under St. Paul's proviso (I Cor. 7:39). But again a rhetorical question undermines the ingenuousness of the protestation: "If, then, I have not condemned second and third marriages, how can I have proscribed a first?" (p. 69).⁶³ Concession or not, Jerome's contempt is scarcely veiled: "I do not condemn digamists nor yet trigamists, nor even, to put an extreme case, octogamists. I will make a still greater concession: I am ready to receive even a whoremonger, if penitent" (p. 70).⁶⁴ A little later the odium in which he regards the remarriage of widows becomes, by associative reference, unmistakable: "Let a woman have an eighth husband if she must; only let her cease to prostitute herself" (p. 77).⁶⁵

Even if the Wife of Bath had knowledge of these ambiguously phrased concessions by the "cardinal, that highte Seint Jerome," her sensitivity to contempt, however veiled, would remove from them any breath of consolation. What is worse, the concessions are negated by Jerome's contrasting insistence on the practical consequences drawn from those distinctions between gold and wood, grain and barley. Between virgins and wives, widowed or not, the distinction turns on an everlasting qualitative discrimination. The ultimate eternal rewards in heaven for virgins and the others can no more be the same than was their relative merit in the temporal world: "I allow that marriage, as well as virginity, is the gift of God, but there is a great difference between gift and gift" (p. 68).⁶⁶ It is reasonable that "the places prepared for virgins and for wedded persons are different from those prepared for trigamists, octogamists, and penitents" (p. 70).⁶⁷ But the scale of values for rewards is even more refined than at first appears. Though there is Gospel sanction for marriage, "those who are married cannot receive the rewards of chastity so long as they render their due one to another" (p. 71).⁶⁸ To make the gradation unmistakably clear, Jerome recalls a definition in *Adversus Jovinianum*: virgins are the first fruits unto God, and widows and wives who live in continence rank in second and third place respectively. But in assigning this order of future reward, Jerome complains, "we are

charged by the frenzy of a heretic with condemning marriage altogether" (p. 71).⁶⁹

Whether or not Alisoun herself displays the "frenzy" ascribed by Jerome to his contemporary, certainly much of her bellicosity has grown out of a sense of injustice over the divine plan which Jerome and his latter-day disciples such as Jankyn presume to elucidate not only from the Pauline teachings but also from Providential rewards. For Jerome, virginity is a gift, the highest at Divine disposal; therefore if virgins receive the supreme reward now, it is as a kind of foreordained prize that theirs will be the greatest felicity in the afterlife. The Wife of Bath's sense of justice detects the unfairness in this disposition. It is out of a yearning to control her destiny that she has for so long made her aggressive efforts to control her earthly affairs. Yet here, where her ultimate and everlasting destiny is at stake, all possibilities of control are denied her. Married at the barely canonical age, probably by parental decree, she can never attain the ranks of virginity. Thus because of the control exercised by others, the supreme heavenly gift can never be hers; she can never occupy first place. Alisoun, as the *General Prologue* emphasizes, strives always to be first; but in the only place where being first ultimately matters, she is forever ruled out. Moreover, even the second place accorded by Jerome to continent wives cannot be hers. As she laments, a foreordained natal conjunction of stars predisposed her nature to the enjoyment of carnal intercourse. Hence she cannot be a continent wife, even if the first three husbands had permitted her to live, as Jerome puts it, as their sister; for regardless of his assumptions, in all real life marriages the importunate partner is not necessarily always the female. Still further, she cannot even remain a chaste widow and hence must fall somewhere between his contemptuous categories of triggamists and octagamists. Alisoun is sometimes accused of blaming the stars for her lecherous disposition instead of rising about these naturally ingrained tendencies as Aquinas advocates. But from her point of view, where is the justice in this kind of heavenly arrangement, outlined so approvingly by Jerome and expounded so effectively by Jankyn?

Were this all in Jerome's case to arouse Alisoun's sense of injustice, it would be bad enough. But a worse side remains. It is responsible not only for her protests but also for much of her underlying unease. Behind Jerome's advice on continence lies barely concealed antipathy for carnal intercourse in itself, something removed from his advocacy of chastity to win divine rewards. Only an ascetic with an ingrained abhorrence for coition

could address a lawfully wedded man in the following detailed elaboration on St. Paul's words (I Cor. 7:21):

If you have a wife, and are bound to her, and render her her due, and have not power of your own body -- or, to speak yet more plainly -- if you are the slave of a wife, do not allow this to cause you sorrow, do not sigh over the loss of your virginity. Even if you can find pretexts for parting from her to enjoy the freedom of chastity, do not seek your own welfare at the price of another's ruin. Keep your wife for a little, and do not try too hastily to overcome her reluctance. Wait till she follows your example. If you only have patience, your wife will some day become your sister. (p. 69)⁷⁰

Jerome's conviction that coition is something forced on husbands by their wives may conceal his own distaste for it; he even reminds them that "it is in your power, if you will, to mount the second step of chastity" (p. 71).⁷¹ Yet he claims not to be expounding the law as it applies to husbands and wives but simply discussing "the general question of sexual intercourse -- how in comparison with chastity and virginity, the life of angels, 'It is good for a man not to touch a woman'" (p. 73).⁷² Always he sees the wife as luring the husband into coition, for it is she who suffers the flames of desire. Hence while St. Paul would prefer that married women and widows abstain, "if they cannot contain, and are tempted to quench the fire of lust by fornication rather than by continence, it is better, he tells them, to marry than to be burnt" (p. 76).⁷³

But for a woman like the Wife of Bath, all this makes for cold comfort. The price of not being burnt comes high. What Jerome tells her through didacts like Jankyn is that the concession means that "marriage is only a degree better than the evil to which it is preferred" and cannot therefore attain "that unblemished perfection and blessedness which suggest a comparison with the life of angels" (p. 76).⁷⁴ Faced with this verdict, small wonder if Alisoun looks with bitter scepticism on ecclesial avowals by "clerkes" that marriage is not meant to be condemned. Small wonder, too, if Chaucer, alive to the implications that his creature Alisoun might not suspect, found irony in Jerome's equally vehement denial of being a disciple of Manichaeus, who, he complains, is stabbing him in the back.⁷⁵

More than any other body of *dicta*, these arguments have succeeded both in aggravating the Wife of Bath's anxieties about her spiritual state and in outraging her sense of temporal justice. Jankyn has made good use of the *Adversus Jovinianum*, as well, possibly, of the *Liber Apologeticus*. From the utterances in these treatises, as well as those even in the letters to and about virtuous widows, it seems clear that while Jerome's writings have been regarded as the prototypes of anti-feminist literature, the problem for Alisoun goes deeper than that. By his unconcealed preference for absolute continence on the part of men and, to facilitate that state, on the part of women as well, he reveals that what he really opposes is carnal intercourse itself. This the sharp eye of Geoffrey Chaucer would not have missed. Behind Alisoun's crudely articulated perception of the wrongness of these long standing misogynistic views, then, lies the perception of a poet whose ironical view of life has made him choose this earthy yet spiritually aroused woman to voice a protest against Jerome himself.

Carleton University

NOTES

¹ *The Wife of Bath's Prologue*, III. 9-13. All references, hereafter cited internally, are from *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F.N. Robinson (2nd ed., Boston 1957).

² Beryl Rowland in "The Wife of Bath's 'Unlawfull Philtrum'", *Neophilologus* 51 (1972) 201-06 speaks of the Wife's "astonishing erudition" and regards her acquaintance "with Patristic and classical authors" as being unaccountable "had not her fifth husband been a scholar at Oxford."

H.S. Bennett in *Chaucer at Oxford and Cambridge* (Toronto 1974) 66, discusses the learning facilities in the Merton College library of Chaucer's day and cites some of the works of St. Jerome available in it.

³ St. Jerome, *Epistola Adversus Jovinianum*, I. 40: "Qui enim semel venit ad nuptias, semel docuit esse nubendum." The text is cited from Vol. II of the Latin edition with French translation of Abbé Bareille, *Oeuvres*

Complètes, 18 vols. (Paris 1877-1885); the English translations are those of W.H. Fremantle in Vol. VI of the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, second series (Oxford and New York 1893). The above translation is from p. 379, the original from p. 564.

⁴ B.J. Whiting in *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*, ed. Bryan and Dempster (Chicago 1941) was able to identify a dozen or more substantial extracts from Jerome's treatise which can be collated with some textual precision against statements made by the Wife of Bath. In recent years much detailed research has been done on the relationship between *Adversus Jovinianum* and the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*. See in particular Robert A. Pratt, "Jankyn's Book of Wikked Wyves: Medieval Antimatrimonial Propaganda in the Universities," *Annuaire Mediaevale* 3 (1962) 5-27, and the same author's "Saint Jerome in Jankyn's Book of Wikked Wyves," *Criticism* 5 (1963) 316-22: the contents of Jankyn's book are analyzed and found to reflect typical material designed to uphold clerical celibacy and persuade young men not to marry; the whole of Jerome's treatise appears not to have been contained in Jankyn's book. My own findings, that Alisoun's citations seem in the main to be focussed on Jankyn's reading, support this view. See also the citations in n. 6 below.

⁵ J.W. Spisak in "Medieval Marriage Concepts and Chaucer's Good Old Lovers," in *Human Sexuality in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, University of Pittsburgh Publications on the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, IV, ed. Douglas Radcliff-Umstead (Pittsburgh 1978) 15-26 points out that the "circumstances surrounding the composition of *Adversus Jovinianum* were quickly forgotten" and that "Jerome soon became regarded as one of the chief misogynists of his time."

⁶ Robert A. Pratt in "The Development of the Wife of Bath" in *Studies in Medieval Literature in Honor of Professor Albert Croll Baugh*, ed. MacEdward Leach (Philadelphia 1961) 45-77 analyzes the three parts of Alisoun's discourse and its sources. Daniel S. Silvia Jr. in "Glosses to the *Canterbury Tales* from St. Jerome's *Epistola Adversus Jovinianum*," *Studies in Philology* 62 (1965) 28-39 mentions the glosses to certain elements in the CT, including *WBP*, that were drawn from Jerome's treatise, in his view by Chaucer himself. The same author, with John P. Brennan, Jr. in "Medieval Manuscripts of *Jerome Against Jovinian*," *Manuscripta* 13 (1969) 161-66 points out how well known was this "most important and central document in the history of Western anti-feminist, anti-matrimonial literature" and how many MSS were located in British and Continental libraries. But in contrast to

the view that the *CT* glosses taken from *Adv. Jov.* were of Chaucer's making, see Graham D. Caie, "The Significance of the Early Chaucer Manuscript Glosses (With Special Reference to the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*)", *Chaucer Review* 10 (1976) 350-60, and the same author's "The Significance of Marginal Glosses in the Earliest Manuscripts of *The Canterbury Tales*," in *Chaucer and Scriptural Tradition*, ed. D.L. Jeffrey (Ottawa 1984) 75-88. Professor Caie takes the view that while these glosses from Jerome on statements put into the *Wife of Bath's* discourse are not merely scribal, neither are they necessarily authorial but rather the signs of editorial supervision.

⁷ Pratt (at n. 6 above) gives particular attention to the problem of the *WBP* elements reflecting Theophrastus.

⁸ For a brief summary of the controversy between St. Jerome and Jovinian, see Jean Steinmann, *Saint Jerome and his Times*, trans. Ronald Matthews (Notre Dame, Ind. 1959). Jovinian's treatise of circa A.D. 390 was brought to the notice of the Bishop of Rome by Jerome's friend Pammachius; it was subsequently sent to Jerome, whose famous reply was written in A.D. 393. See also Anne Kernan, "The Archwife and the Eunuch," *ELH* 41 (1974) 1-25.

⁹ Pratt, in "Saint Jerome in Jankyn's Book . . ." (at n. 4), makes the point that "Chaucer used carefully chosen excerpts in order to color the background and personality of Jankyn" (p. 319).

¹⁰ The analysis that follows of Jerome's treatise expands on the summary preceding the Fremantle translation: Ch. 1-3: introduction; Ch. 4-13: exposition, in St. Jerome's sense, of I Cor. 7; Ch. 14-39: statement of the teaching derived by St. Jerome from various O.T. and N.T. books; Ch. 40-49: denunciation of Jovinian and praise of virginity and single marriages from heathen examples (p. 346).

¹¹ "Epicurum Christianorum" (I. 1; Bareille edn. p. 502). Where the Fremantle translation of a passage is used, the page number to the edition cited above will appear immediately after; the f.n. reference will be to the Latin original in the Bareille edn.

¹² "Neque . . . nuptiis detrahimus" (I. 3; p. 503). Caie, in "The Significance of the Early Chaucer Manuscript Glosses" (at n. 6), takes a relatively generous view of Jerome's *exempla* on wicked wives and his criticisms of the "archetypal 'married whore'" (p. 353) and suggests that the *CT* glossator is reminding the reader that the *Wife* is modelled on this.

¹³ "Sed ita nuptias recipimus, ut virginitatem quae de nuptiis nascitur, praeferamus. . . . Ut poma ex arbore, frumentum e stipula, ita virginitas e

nuptiis" (I. 3; pp. 503-4). "Accept" or "allow" might be a better rendering than Fremantle's "honour," however.

¹⁴ "Dicit virgines, viduas et maritatas, quae semel in Christo lotae sunt, si non discrepent caeteris operibus, ejusdem esse meriti" (I. 3; p. 504).

¹⁵ "Cunctorum in communè Jovinianus hostis est. Nam qui aequalia omnium asserit merita, tam virginitati facit injuriam, dum eam nuptiis comparat, quam et nuptiis, sic eas licitas asserens, ut secunda et tertia matrimonia. Sed et digamis et trigamis adversarius est, ibi ponens scortatores quondam et libidinosissimos post poenitentiam, ubi duplicata et triplicata matrimonia" (I. 4; p. 505).

¹⁶ In this paper all direct quotations from the Bible are from the Douai-Rheims translation instead of the translation given by Fremantle or in any other text, because the former is the closest version literally equivalent to Chaucer's Vulgate.

¹⁷ "Laudat Samson, et uxorium Nazaraeum miris effert praeconiis. . . . Quod dicam de Salomone, quem ponens in catalogo maritorum, imaginem asserit Salvatoris? . . . Et ad Evangelium repente transcendens, Zachariam et Elisabeth, Petrum ponit et socrum ejus, caeterosque Apostolos. . . . Certe cessat hic illud Apostolicum, 'Et qui habent uxores, sic sint quasi non habeant' [where modern Vulgate reads, "ut et qui habent uxores, tanquam non habentes sint"] nisi forte dicetis, propterea vult eas nubere, quia jam quaedam conversae sunt retro post Satanam; quasi ex virginibus nulla cadat, et non sit earum major ruina" (I. 5; pp. 506-8).

¹⁸ It is not, of course, my intention to present Alisoun of Bath as if she were existing in her own right, but rather as a complex character portrayal by Chaucer, who employs techniques of what today might be called intertextuality and sub-textuality to create the illusion of a "real" human being not necessarily to be denounced for exegetical distortion or lauded for assertiveness but simply to be studied as one on whom the pressure of second-hand learning and the burden of guilt alike weigh heavily. For a corrective to the view that the Wife is "undimensional" and that Chaucer was not interested in realistic characterization," see the seminal article by Beryl Rowland, "Chaucer's Dame Alys: Critics in Blunderland?" *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 73 (1972) 381-95. Of Chaucer she writes: "The overt artistic intention, as well as the effect, is to persuade us that he was writing from life" (p. 382).

¹⁹ "Quidquid autem statuerit, hoc Christi in eo loquentis legem putemus" (I. 6; p. 508).

²⁰ "Opponam in prima fronte apostolum Paulum, et quasi fortissimum ducem, suis telis, id est, suis armabo sententiis" (I. 6; p. 508).

²¹ "Porro quod praefert Jephthe patris fidem, lacrymis virginis filiae, pro nobis facit. Et nos enim non tam virgines saeculi quam eas quae propter Christum sunt virgines, praedicamus; et a plerisque Hebraeorum reprehenditur pater voti temerarii" (I. 23; p. 533).

²² James L. Boren in "Alysoun of Bath and the Vulgate 'Perfect Wife'," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 76 (1975) 247-56 is concerned with the *encomium mulieris fortis* (Prov. 31:10-31) and the way in which the Wife of Bath appears as a spiritual antithesis to the exemplary woman, turned "up-so-down" in Alisoun.

²³ "At dices: Si omnes virgines fuerint, quomodo stabit humanum genus" (I. 36; pp. 552-3).

²⁴ "Hac ratione nihil omnino erit, ne aliud esse desistat. . . . Vereris, ne si virginitatem plures appetierint, cessent lupae, cessent adulterae; ne infantes in urbibus villisque non vagiant. . . . Noli metuere ne omnes virgines fiant: difficilis res est virginitas, et ideo rara, quia difficilis" (I. 36; p. 553).

²⁵ The scriptural references, from the most direct citation to the most indirect allusion, are identified in the Robinson edition. The only Pauline reference by the Wife, if in fact it is one, for which a counterpart in *Adv. Jov. I* has not been traced, is her apothegm, "He hath nat every vessel al of gold; / Somme been of tree, and doon hir lord servyse" (III. 100-1). This seems, as Robinson suggests, to reflect II Tim. 2:20: "But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth." It turns up, however, in the *Liber Apologeticus ad Pammachium pro Libris contra Jovinianum*"; see below, n. 61.

²⁶ Cf. D.W. Robertson, Jr., *A Preface to Chaucer* (Princeton, N.J. 1963) 317. For a strongly supportive view, see Edmund Reiss, "Biblical Parody: Chaucer's 'Distortions' of Scripture," in *Chaucer and Scriptural Tradition* (at n. 6), especially 57-8: "In the course of perverting Jerome's arguments in the *Adversus Jovinianum*, the Wife blatantly misuses both the Old and New Testaments."

²⁷ In l. 46 she alludes to v. 9; in l. 81 to v. 7; in l. 84 to v. 6; in l. 87 to v. 1; in l. 103 to v. 7 again; in l. 130 to v. 3; and in l. 158 to v. 4.

²⁸ In l. 47 she alludes to v. 39; in l. 51 to v. 28; in l. 65 to v. 25; in l. 147 to v. 20; in l. 156 to v. 28 again; and in l. 161 to Eph. 5:25,

one of her exceedingly scarce Pauline recollections not picked up from I Cor. 7.

²⁹ An example of the Wife's citation of Proverbs (30:16) from her recollection of a quotation by Jerome rather than directly from the Bible occurs in her "olde" husband's likening of "wommenes love to helle" (III. 371). The Vulgate "Infernus et os vulvae" he changes to "Infernus, et amor mulieris," and hence the comparison to hell in the Wife's memory is made to "woman's love" instead of "mouth of the womb."

³⁰ "Ecce, inquit, Apostolus profitetur de virginibus, Domini se non habere praeceptum; et qui cum auctoritate de maritis et uxoribus jusserat, non audet imperare quod Dominus non praecepit" (I. 12; p. 517).

³¹ "Si virginitatem Dominus imperasset, videbatur nuptias condemnare, et hominum auferre seminarium, unde et ipsa virginitas nascitur" (I. 12; p. 518). In the Fremantle trans. it is unclear where Jerome's supposed quotation from Jovinian, a kind of *sermocinatio*, actually ends. In the Bareille edn. and in PL 23.237C it ends immediately before Jerome's own comment beginning "Si virginitatem Dominus imperasset. . ."

³² "Et ideo plus amat virgines Christus, quia sponte tribuunt, quod sibi non fuerat imperatum" (I. 12; p. 519).

³³ All of the Wife's allusions to or citations from Matthew and John are found also in *Adv. Jov.* except possibly her reference to barley loaves in l. 145, from Jn 6:9; Jerome, however, may have the metaphor in mind in l. 7: certainly he alludes to it in his letter to Pammachius (XLVIII. 14). This fact further suggests (see n. 25 above) that since all the Wife's Pauline references are found also in these two epistles it is from Jankyn's reading of Jerome that she has derived her distorted apprehension of the Apostle's teaching.

³⁴ This is not the place to comment on the accuracy of the Wife's biblical interpretation or on the ironical effects produced by the author in making Alisoun the victim of one-sided and even distorted interpretations of the evidence. For a recent discussion of the Wife of Bath's treatment of the Pauline epistles, see Russell A. Peck, "Biblical Interpretation: St. Paul and *The Canterbury Tales*," in *Chaucer and Scriptural Tradition* (at n. 6) 143-70.

³⁵ "Non est ergo uxor ducenda sapienti" (I. 47; p. 571).

³⁶ "Pauperem alere, difficile est; divitem ferre, tormentum" (I. 47; p. 571).

³⁷ "Equus, asinus, bos, canis, et vilissima mancipia, vestas quoque, et lebetes, selide ligneum, calix, et urceolus fictilis probantur prius, et sic emuntur" (I. 47; p. 571).

³⁸ "Pulchra cito adamatur, foeda facile concupiscit. Difficile custoditur, quod plures amant. Molestum est possidere, quod nemo habere dignetur" (I. 47; p. 572).

³⁹ Mary Carruthers, in "The Wife of Bath and the Painting of Lions," *PMLA* 94 (1979) 209-22, writes (p. 211): "In taking on Jerome as she does, Alisoun is not engaging in new sport but is making a rich joke at the expense of a notoriously ill-tempered saint's most notoriously ill-tempered work." Among the "deportment books" at which, with other bodies of "marital lore," Alisoun is directing her "most amusing darts," this critic reminds us of moral works such as the *Ménagier de Paris* as the source of further strands in the makeup of the Wife's discourse.

⁴⁰ See "On the Timely Death of the Wife of Bath's Fourth Husband," *Archiv* 209 (1972) 273-82.

⁴¹ On the question of the *postillae*, see my "Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Nicholas of Lyre's *Postillae Litteralis et Moralis super Totam Bibliam*" in *Chaucer and Scriptural Tradition* (at n. 6) 89-108.

⁴² "Novissime verterunt in eum impetum, et male mulctatum fugientemque diu persecutae sunt" (I. 48; p. 573).

⁴³ "Quid referam Pasiphaen, Clytemnestram, Eriphylam? quarum prima deliciis diffluens, quippe regis uxor, tauri dicitur expetisse concubitus; altera occidisse virum ob amorem adulteri; tertia prodidisse Amphiarum, et saluti viri monile aureum praetulisse!" (I. 48; p. 574).

⁴⁴ The Wife goes on to mention other wives whose evil deeds Jankyn related, "Iyvia" and "Lucye," who slew their husbands, also the unnamed wives of "Latumyus," who slew themselves (III. 747-61). These events are related in *De Nugis Curialium*, the one surviving work of Walter Map (c. 1140-c. 1209). The dating of the single extant MS. is somewhat late, but that is no reason why it might not have been found in the eclectic compilation which Chaucer envisages Clerk Jankyn as having retrieved from his Oxford career. For further information on the place of Walter Map's treatise in the construction of Alisoun's discourse, see R.A. Pratt (at n. 6) 76-7, and the same author's "Jankyn's Book of Wikked Wyves" (at n. 4) 9-14.

⁴⁵ For a strongly sympathetic treatment of the Wife of Bath, see, as well as Carruthers (at n. 39), Gloria K. Shapiro, "Dame Alice as Deceptive

Narrator," *Chaucer Review* 6 (1972) 130-41, where Alisoun is described as being "far more convincing as a Christian than Chaucer's Prioress. Dame Alice's religious conviction is real, and it is an important part of her" (p. 141). Such views, contrasted with those expressed, for example, in *Chaucer and Scriptural Tradition* (at n. 6), give some idea of the range of opinion extended to the Wife of Bath in modern criticism.

⁴⁶ The translation of the letters is from the Loeb edn., trans. F.A. Wright (London 1933), with letter and page numbers of the trans. given in the text; the original Latin in the notes is from the same edition.

⁴⁷ "Hoc expletur edictum post paradisum. . . . Nubat et nubatur ille, qui in sudore faciei comedit panem suum. . . ." (XXII. 19).

⁴⁸ Contrary to Milton, whose polemical methods are not altogether unlike Jerome's, it is here maintained that in Paradise Eve was a virgin, assuming married relations only after the fall (XXII. 19).

⁴⁹ "Quare non habet domini de virginitate praeceptum? Quia maioris est mercis, quod non cogitur, quia, si fuisset virginitas imperata, nuptiae videbantur ablatae. . . ." (XXII. 20).

⁵⁰ "Quo mihi superbissimo regi servitura coniugia? Quo parvulos, quos propheta conploret. . . ." (XXII. 21).

⁵¹ "Ideoque et ditius virginitatis donum fluxit in feminas, quia coepit a femina" (XXII. 21).

⁵² "Quod cum apostolus sine intermissione orare nos iubeat et, qui in coniugio debitum solvit, orare non possit, aut oramus semper et virgines sumus, aut orare desinimus, ut coniugio serviamus" (XXII. 22).

⁵³ "Grandis ergo virtutis est et sollicitae diligentiae superare, quod natus sis in carne, non carnaliter vivere. . . ." (LIV. 9).

⁵⁴ "Videbat aliam legem in membris suis repugnantem legi mentis suae et se vinctam atque captivam ad coitum trahi" (LXXVII. 3). The Greek of I Cor. 7:9 is considered by some to be a present infinitive passive, and there are several schools of thought as to its interpretation. On the principle that Chaucer knew only the Vulgate ("quam uri") and that Douai-Rheims renders literally how the Latin would have been understood, I have followed consistently the sense of "to be burnt" rather than "to burn," although whether or not the Apostle had hell-fire in mind is a vexed question.

⁵⁵ "Si bonum est mulierem non tangere, malum est ergo tangere; nihil enim bono contrarium est, nisi malum. Si autem malum est, et ignoscitur, ideo conceditur, ne malo quid deterius fiat. Quale autem illud bonum est,

quod conditione deterioris conceditur? . . . Quomodo igitur qui ignem tetigerit, statim aduritur; ita viri tactus et feminae sentit naturam suam, et diversitatem sexus intelligit" (I. 7; p. 509).

⁵⁶ "Quam diu impleo mariti officium, non impleo continentis. . . . Si abstinemus nos a coitu, honorem tribuimus uxoribus; si non abstinemus perspicuum est honori contrariam esse contumeliam" (I. 7; pp. 510-11).

⁵⁷ "Apud nos, quod non licet feminis, aequè non licet viris et eadem servitus pari condicione censetur" (LXXVII. 3).

⁵⁸ This letter (XLVIII) not being included in the Loeb edn., I revert here to the Fremantle trans. (*Nicene and Post-Nicene*, vol. VI) and the Bareille edn., vol. I, for the original Latin.

⁵⁹ ". . . aiunt condemnationem quodammodo esse matrimonii, in tantum pudicitiam praedicare ut nulla videntur inter uxorem et virginem comparatio derelinqui" (XLVIII. 2; pp. 184-85).

⁶⁰ "Medium esse nihil potest: aut mea sententia sequenda est aut Joviniani. Si reprehendor quod nuptias virginitati subijcio, laudetur ipse qui comparat" (XLVIII. 2, p. 185).

⁶¹ "Quod si cui asperum et reprehensione dignum videtur, tantam nos inter virginitatem et nuptias fecisse distantiam quanta inter frumentum et hordeum est, legat S. Ambrosii de Viduis librum . . ." (XLVIII. 14; p. 197).

⁶² "Quidquid, inquam, de laude dixerit nuptiarum, libenter audimus. Laudari nuptias libenter audimus; et nuptias condemnamus" (XLVIII. 11; p. 193). On Jerome's difficulties over the treatise that, some thousand years later, has caused Chaucer's character so much difficulty, see Carruthers (at n. 39) who writes: "The *Adversus Jovinianum* got him into a great deal of trouble at the time it was written, so much so that his friend Pammachius withdrew from circulation and destroyed as many copies of the treatise as he could lay his hands on" (p. 211).

⁶³ "Qui secundas et tertias non damnavi, primum potui damnare matrimonium" (XLVIII. 6; p. 188).

⁶⁴ "Non damno digamos, imo nec trigamos, et si dici potest, octagamos. Plus aliquid inferam; etiam scortatorem recipio poenitentem" (XLVIII. 8; p. 191). Jerome is here repeating a statement made in *Adv. Jov.* I. 15.

⁶⁵ "Habeat cui libet octavum maritum, et esse desinat prostituta" (XLVIII. 18; p. 203). In the foregoing sentence but not in this one (despite his statement) Jerome is repeating sentiments voiced in *Adv. Jov.*, I. 15.

⁶⁶ "Concedo et nuptias esse donum Dei, sed inter donum et donum magna diversitas est" (XLVIII. 4; p. 187). On the question of the preference in

which virgins were held, see Morton Bloomfield, "Some Reflections on the Medieval Idea of Perfection," *Franciscan Studies* 17 (1957) 213-37, esp. 226.

67 "Puto non me crudelem iudicabit et rigidum, qui alia loca virginitati et nuptiis, alia trigamis, et octogamis, et poenitentibus legerit praeparata" (XLVIII. 9; p. 191).

68 "Sed tamen easdem in suo officio permanentes, praemis castitatis capere non posse" (XLVIII. 10; p. 192).

69 ". . . et haeretico furore dicimur damnare nuptias?" (XLVIII. 10; p. 193).

70 "Etiam si habes, inquit, uxorem, et illi alligatus es, et solvis debitum, et non habes tui corporis potestatem; atque (ut manifestius loquar) servus uxoris es, noli propter hoc habere tristiam, nec de amissa virginitate suspires. Sed etiam si potes causas aliquas invenire dissidii, ut libertate pudicitiae perfruaris, noli salutem tuam cum alterius interitu quaerere. Habeto paulisper uxorem, nec praecurras morantem; expecta dum sequitur. Si egeris patienter, conjux mutabitur in sororem" (XLVIII. 6; p. 189).

71 "In potestate vestra est, si velitis, secundum pudicitiae gradum scandere" (LXVIII. 11; p. 193).

72 "Vides igitur non de conjugibus nos exponere, sed de coitu simpliciter disputare, quod ad comparationem pudicitiae et virginitatis, et Angelicae similitudinis, bonum est homini mulierem non tangere" (XLVIII. 14; p. 196).

73 "Vult Apostolus inuuptas et viduas absque coitu permanere, et ad exemplum sui provocat, et feliciores vocat si sic permanserint. Si autem se continere non possunt, et ardorem libidinis, non tam continentia volunt quam fornicatione restinguere, melius est nubere quam uri" (XLVIII. 17; p. 201). I depart again from the Fremantle translation "to burn" in preferring the Douai-Rheims passive.

74 "Si autem nubere melius est, quod malo praefertur, non est germanae et purae integritatis, nec ejus beatitudinis quae Angelis comparatur" (XLVIII. 17; p. 201).

75 The allusion to Manichaeus, identified with Dualism, comes in XLVIII.