THE WYCLIFFITE TRANSLATORS’ VULGATE MANUSCRIPT: THE EVIDENCE FROM MARK

Certainly the most widely cited passage from English Wycliffite writings must be the biblical translators’ account of their procedures from chapter 15 of ‘The General Prologue’ to the ‘later version’ of their English Bible:

First, þis symple creature hadde myche trauel wiþ dyuerse felowis and helperis to gedere many elde biblis, and oþere doctours and comyn glosis, and to make o Latyn Bible sumdeel trewe, and þanne to studie it of þe newe, þe text wiþ þe glose and oþere doctours as he myȝte gete, and speciali Lyre on þe elde testament, þat helpide ful myche in þis werk.¹

In this passage, the translators describe themselves as aware of textual deviancy among copies of the sacred text and as taking steps to purge of its errors the copy from which they would translate. They produced a workable text for this purpose (as well as, one infers, numerous hints as to how it should be rendered in English) from multiple processes of scholarly consultation. Through collation, word-by-word comparison, of a range of copies – the author claims there were a great many of them – they removed idiosyncrasies from their text. One imagines that, where comparison demonstrated readings to be isolated variations from the remaining evidence, these were purged as scribalisms and replaced with more plausible wording. These decisions might be verified and further textual information obtained through recourse to ancient, holy wisdom, the opinion of the fathers, as available in glosses, here particularly ‘the common gloss’, i.e. Anselm of Laon and Co.’s glossa ordinaria. The processes described appear, as Anne Hudson has argued, acts of extreme textual sophistication.²

In general I concur with this assessment, and particularly with Hudson’s emphasis upon the translators’ scholarly procedures, but I want – as no one ever seems to have noticed that the translators themselves did – to introduce here a slightly more argued and nuanced appraisal. In spite of what would appear acts of extraordinary fastidiousness, the prologue’s claims for the quality of Wycliffite scripture are always relative, never absolute. The author speaks of a Bible ‘sumdeel trewe’, not Jerome’s original. And statements of the value of the English text are always placed within the constraints of comparison:
[L]oke þat he examyne treuli his Latyn Bible, for no doute he shal fynde many biblis in Latyn ful false if he loke many, nameli newe. And þe comyne Latyn biblis han more nede to be correctid, as many as I haue seyn in my liyf, þan haþ þe Englisch Bible late translatid. (lines 2849–52)

In the remainder of the article, I develop – in some cases, from a textual history that would have been closed to the Wycliffite team – the information that will, once again, ratify their wise shrewdness about their activities, as well as some of the limitations they invariably faced. And in a perhaps only loosely related, second portion of the article, I will return to the prominence of chapter 15 in discussions of Lollard scripture and, once again, attempt to introduce a more nuanced approach.

I begin with the Wycliffite author’s comparative gesture, his claim that many Latin Bibles, ‘nameli newe’ (particularly modern ones), are less adequate than the scriptural text to which he has contributed. As all manuscript scholars know, in palaeographical literature there is a huge disproportion between the total population of surviving medieval Bibles and the number of books receiving discussion. A very tiny proportion of surviving Bibles, I would estimate substantially less than 1 per cent, absorbs close to 100 per cent of the scholarly literature. There is a single reason for this fact, and one the Wycliffite translation squad knew very well, the so-called ‘Paris bible’ or, its commonplace portable avatar, the ‘Paris pocket bible’.3

Driven by the demands of academic theological instruction and mendicant preaching practice, the period c.1230–90 saw an enormous investment in Bible production, mainly, but far from exclusively, centred in Paris. This proceeded on a virtually industrial scale; the output was enormous, and its effects lasting. In England there are virtually no fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Vulgates, because products supplied from Paris, northern France, and England during the earlier period continued to meet demand. This book was a triumph, and copies were still being used well into the sixteenth century. Yet just as this production fulfilled several centuries of demand, it also rendered pre-existing Bible manuscripts archaic, save as cultic objects; these, most overtly on the basis of their contents, no longer corresponded to the later medieval concept of ‘(usable) Bible’ and might be seen as superseded and discardable.

However, industrialized production, even of a handicraft item, does have its downsides. By and large, these fall under the heading of ‘quality control’. While there are certainly illuminated and elegant examples, the overwhelming majority of these thirteenth-century Bibles are forgettable and uninteresting books – and, as a result, pass ignored in palaeographical study. But the strongest contemporary claims against these ‘Paris products’ – and Roger Bacon’s onslaught is the most memorable example – was that they were textually slipshod, rife with error.4 Cranked out at pace and in profusion, from whatever exemplar might be at
hand, they could not have been otherwise. It was general common knowledge that copies were untrustworthy, and unpredictably so. Yet this was the ‘new’ or ‘common’ Bible the Wycliffite translators saw everywhere about them as the representative example of that book most important to the Christian life.

It is this state of affairs (and if one publicly known in Paris, likewise in Oxford as well) that the translators are seeking to address in this and similar passages. They knew that contemporary and readily available volumes might all be potentially suspect, and that a project at the level of sophistication that they imagined required something other. The only safe recourse for addressing the text of the Vulgate in any reasonable fashion should have been to ignore anything that resembled a contemporarily usable copy. That would mean avoiding any Bible that showed signs of having been produced during the last century and a half, since the onset of Parisian mass production. To present a responsible English Bible, the Wycliffite team would have to seek scriptural materials elsewhere.

Fortunately, in this pursuit they will have been aided by two perceptions. First of all, contents. ‘Paris Bibles’ are defined, not so much by possessing erratic texts of varying degrees of deviance, but by certain gross features of presentation: a fixed textual order with a generally stable canon of biblical materials and a fixed set of prologues to the biblical books, for example.5 The Wycliffite team, well aware of these features, could use gross content markers both to exclude representatives of the textually suspect ‘new Bible’ and, in the absence of these features elsewhere, to identify copies that should not have been compromised by Parisian production procedures. (However, in gross terms, they accepted certain features of ‘modernity’; although rejecting the Parisian biblical text, they did imitate features typical of Parisian contents, the text order, and the provision of prologues.)

Second, they could also have relied upon a more general perception, and sought books with ‘an appearance of antiquity’. As numerous entries on the order of ‘vetus liber’ in medieval library catalogues would indicate, this is a judgement that competent medieval book-men were well prepared to make. Moreover, there would have been a ready visual aid in eliminating and/or prioritizing individual volumes. The Paris products are universally in the common script of the thirteenth-century university, textura/gothic book-hand; this does not feature in books written before s. xiii in. (at least twenty years before the inception of the Parisian boom in production). At that time, books were customarily copied in a larger and more rounded script, protogothic book-hand.6 The Wycliffite team had to search for books with contents and script-features alien to familiar – and ubiquitous – university products. This step would take them back before the textual rot associated with ‘new Bibles’ had taken hold.

Although by the 1380s such books will have been a fairly small rump minority among available copies, finding examples for the researchers’ initial comparative
exercise may not have been so difficult, given their commitment to measuring readings against the fathers and gloss tradition. Twelfth-century glossed books – and especially those with ‘the common gloss’, which support it with a full biblical rendition – were an obvious place to begin. Copies should have been available in college libraries throughout Oxford, as well as in locations like Hudson’s plausible site for at least the initial stages of the translators’ research, Greyfriars. A few copies may have been ‘personal property’, the reference volumes consulted by lecturers in the Theology Faculty (cf. n. 38). And given that many twelfth-century bibles are large lectern items, some might have been available in college chapels and local churches – and perhaps still in active use in such a context. On the whole, I doubt that the team could have done very much more than this (or that anyone else in their situation could have done, or done the task much better).

I should, however, introduce one caution. There were certainly more accurate representations of Jerome’s original available in the British Isles, manuscripts blessed with much more correct texts than these twelfth-century examples. One might think, at least potentially, that the translators should have consulted them. However, such a view should be qualified, on the basis of two observations. First, the group assumed, a topic to which I will return, that they could often verify Jerome’s authorial Vulgate text from readily available sources, the citations in his exegesis, predictably most valuable for ‘later prophets’:

And in ful fewe bokis þe chirche rediþ þe translacioun of Ierom, as it may be preued bi þe propir origenals of Ierom, which he gloside. (lines 2860–2)

Second, I doubt very much that the Oxford team would have had any way of knowing of these manuscripts with superior texts. Moreover, even in the case of actual knowledge of any one, the team would probably have found access – nearly all of the books would have been in monastic libraries – difficult or impossible. And – an important point to understand – the translators would have had no way of knowing that these books might actually have been of value in any case. Below, I identify a number of readings largely alien to these better textual sources; but the majority of these represents reasonably commonplace Vulgate readings that a wide-ranging comparison of twelfth-century copies would have thrown up on multiple occasions. As a result, the team would have been led to consider them readings beyond suspicion and in need of no further check (although ‘sumdeel trewe’ might be taken as expressing the qualification that, given the impossibility of consulting every potentially relevant book, the translators remained aware that ‘truer’ readings might be out there somewhere).

But how did the Lollard workmen proceed, and to what effect? Obviously, this is an enormous (and largely unapproached) question. It involves, moreover, a wide potential range of textual situations, particularly when Jerome’s source-
language was Hebrew scripture. Such an introductory foray as I intend here, designed to at least broach the issue, can only hope to be extremely selective. The benefit of the effort is to identify some of the problems involved, and to indicate some of the issues at stake and the apparent parameters of the issues raised. Before returning to ‘The General Prologue’ and to the prominence of chapter 15 in past discussions at the end of the essay, I offer some perceptions about the translators’ working method and achievement, predicated on the full evidence from an extended, if not very large, selection.

I have chosen to work with a text from Christian scripture, largely to avoid a variety of difficult problems associated with Jerome’s command of Hebrew (and signalled by the team’s enthusiasm for Nicholas of Lyra’s knowledge of that language). Here, particularly given the familiar Wycliffite claim that ‘God’s law’ is fully revealed in the Gospel, one of the evangelists naturally suggests itself as a subject for treatment. This is a particularly useful area in which to work, since there is an excellent, if ancient, study of the English transmission, including a great deal of detailed analysis.9 The Gospel of Mark, my chosen selection, lends itself to a preliminary study largely because of its brevity, that it can be approached as a totality reasonably efficiently.

I have begun in a predictably obvious and unimaginative way. I have read the Wycliffite ‘later version’ Mark (and my comments address only this version) against the standard editions of Jerome’s Vulgate.10 As I compared the two texts, I simply noted all those places where the Middle English did not adequately represent the Latin text, whether because of differences in verb tense or variations of singular and plural or in some larger deviation, most usually supply of additional materials. I have allowed my experience of Middle English translatorial usage to guide my sense of legitimate variation in determining whether the English proffered by the Oxford team is an acceptable rendition of the Latin. Thus, for example, I readily accept in Mark ii.15 two uses of the phrase ‘at the mete’ as a proper representation of the Latin stem -cumbere, rather some form of intrusion (or a response to the insistence of the glossa ordinaria that the verse describes a ‘convivium’).

On this basis, I find that most of the Wycliffite translation is unproblematic and an extremely accurate rendition of the Latin Gospel of Mark. The team failed to provide Jerome’s text on only about fifty-five localized occasions. But this raises a fundamental problem: many of these deviations were the product of activities the translators could not have known or taken into account. The Wycliffite team produced a fine Vulgate translation, but not, in many lections, a translation of Jerome’s Vulgate (much less of the underlying tanakh or koiné).11 At this point, I turn to address the full evidence offered by their handling of the text of St Mark’s Gospel. The wisdom of the team’s reticence in offering an account of a book ‘sumdeel trewe’ will emerge in the discussion.
A number of the translators’ readings that vary from Jerome’s original fall into a sequence of definable classes, which I now take up in turn. The first such group, readings incorporated into Jerome’s Vulgate from the text(s) called *vetus latina*, illustrates an overall ignorance no medieval scholar could have managed to efface. In the quotation with which I began, the translator says that the team made what appears a reasonable and intelligent inference – that ancient textual readings might be confirmed by studying the citations provided by the fathers, including Jerome himself. The holy wisdom of those propagating these biblical readings would stand as a warrant that the readings truly represented God’s word, as communicated by Jerome.

This is an intelligent view and certainly a reasonable procedure for determining the anteriority of readings. Unfortunately – and what the translators could not know – it runs afoul of history. For when Jerome’s text was released in Rome at intervals during the late fourth century, it was not the only Bible version in town – indeed, it was an interloper. Nor did Jerome’s Vulgate sweep the field with any immediacy. As a result, the fathers were prone to cite any convenient translation – and no father necessarily the same one consistently. Rather than the hopes the Wycliffite translators reposed in them, the fathers’ evidence as to the scriptural text is just as murky – perhaps more so, since they appear figures of authority, rather than deviance – as that of the error-happy Paris scribes whose work the translators were seeking to avoid.12

But the situation is more complicated still. Some readings honoured by patristic citation, regardless of source, entered Jerome’s Vulgate text early on. Given the current state of scholarship on the source of these citations, the biblical version(s) known as *vetus latina*, my conclusions here must be seen as very tentative.13 But over one-fifth of the deviations between Jerome’s Vulgate and the translation produced in Oxford, at least thirteen examples, reflects an ancient layer of non-Vulgate readings circulating as the Vulgate. In the following list of examples I cite, as I will do regularly throughout, the locus in Mark, the reading that Jerome had provided, the translators’ rendition, and the reading the translators followed instead of Jerome’s. The examples include:

Mark i.2  uiam tuam; thi weye … bifor thee; uiam tuam ante te
Mark ii.20  in illa die; in tho dayes; in illis diebus
Mark ii.24  faciunt; thi disciplis doon; faciunt discipuli tui
Mark vi.13  et sanabant; and thei weren heelid; et sanabantur
Mark vii.4  a foro; thei turnen a\textsuperscript{3}en fro chepyng; a foro redeuntes\textsuperscript{14}
Mark vii.7  doctrinas precepta; the doctrines and the heestis; doctrinas et precepta\textsuperscript{15}
Mark ix.23  aiebat credo; seide Lord Y bileue Lord; aiebat Domine credo
Mark xi.1  cum adpropinquarent; whanne Ihesus cam; cum adpropinquaret
Mark xiv.7  non semper habebitis; 3e schulen not euermore haue; non semper habebitis
Mark xiv.20 intingit; puttith the hoond; intingit manum
Mark xiv.21 traditur: schal be bitrayed; tradetur
Mark xiv.24 effunditur; schal be sched; effundetur
Mark xiv.27 in nocte; in me in this nyȝt; in me in nocte

These examples will indicate one rather interesting feature of Vulgate transmission. Bacon’s denigration of the Paris text, while it was a great deal more broad ranging, saw the problem as one of textual degeneration, *stricto sensu*: in the production of the Paris Bible, persistent copying had persistently generated scribal error and a false text. This passing coalescence of Vulgate and *vetus latina* represents a different sort of activity altogether. Rather than inherently degenerative, those who intruded readings like this into Jerome’s text must have considered themselves improving it, rendering the Vulgate more acceptable in a world of competing biblical versions. In addition to that degeneration to which all texts are subject, active recension of a well-intended variety plays an integral part in the history of Jerome’s text.

Readings of this engaged and ostensibly ameliorative type are evident in two other sources of variation between the Wycliffite English and Jerome’s Vulgate. One group of readings, by and large reinforcing the influence of the *vetus latina* on the text, results from an activity part of the general effort at transforming the Carolingian Church. In this ‘reformation’, the contemporary biblical text received revisions, an effort conventionally associated with late eighth-century efforts undertaken by Alcuin. In the Wycliffite translators’ Vulgate, most of the activity associated with this behaviour merely ratified readings earlier derived and introduced into Jerome’s text from the *vetus latina*. Eight of thirteen examples in the preceding list also form part of the Carolingian recension. But five further distinctively ‘Alcuinian’ readings, introduced in active revision, are also reflected in the translators’ text:

Mark vii.15 communicant hominem; defoulen a man; coinquinant hominem (similarly, and not considered separately Mark vii.18 defoule, 20 tho defoulen, 23 defoulen)
Mark x.7  propter hoc; and seide for this thing; et dixit propter hoc
Mark x.33 et scribis; to scribis and to the eldre men; et scribis et senioribus
Mark xiv.41 traditur; schal be bitraied; tradetur
Mark xvi.19 Dominus; the lord Ihesu; Dominus Ihesus

Another small class of variation, responsible for contributing six readings to the Wycliffite rendering of the Vulgate Mark, represents a behaviour analogous to that the translators were undertaking and is legitimately ‘exegetical’. The fathers
were keen to draw attention to synoptic parallels, and to use parallel renditions intertextually: the language in which similar events were narrated across the three synoptic Gospels was brought into harmony. As a result, on scattered occasions, materials proper to an account in one of the Gospels became part of the text in its parallels, where it had not occurred in Jerome’s original. This activity is fitful, yet persistent, across copies of the Vulgate and seems in the main to reflect scholarly activities subsequent to Alcuin’s revision of the text. Examples of this procedure in the Wycliffite translation include:

- Mark iv.4  uolucre; briddes of heuene; uolucre celi, from Luke viii.5
- Mark iv.10  parabolas; to expowne the parable; parabolam exponere
- Mark viii.32  increpare eum; to blame hym, and seide, Lord, be thou merciful to thee, for this schal not be; increpare eum dicens absit a te, etc., from Mt xvi.22
- Mark xii.33  corde; herte, and of al the mynde; corde et ex tota mente, from Matt. xxii.37
- Mark xiv.27  oues; the scheep of the flock; oues gregis, from Matt. xxvi.31
- Mark xv.29  edificat; bildist it a3en; re-edificat, from Matt. xxvii.40

Readings like these may require some further interrogation. While a number of them appear in Vulgate manuscripts long before the thirteenth century, equally a number involve tiny adjustments, for instance the concluding pair of this list (and cf. nn. 15, 23, 25, and 32) and may well have occurred to a good many Vulgate scholars, including the Wycliffite translators, independently.

Among them, these three groups of readings account for twenty-four variants, about 40 per cent of the total sample of variations between Jerome’s text and that provided English readers. In none of these instances, I think, can the translators have been faulted, or expected to know that they might have doubted their text. Even the intrusions from other Gospel locales I have just mentioned are apt to have appeared unexceptional – all relying on distinctively biblical diction, offering apparently fuller, more perfected texts.

But the overwhelming contributor of variations from Jerome’s text is provided by precisely what the translators promise in their ‘General Prologue’ statement, reliance upon glosses. The most efficient way, after all, of achieving the end-product they desired, a text accurate and ‘open’, that is self-explanatory, should have been to use a glossed biblical text, not simply a conspectus of readings gathered from selected dispersed manuscripts. Such glossed books are focused through a rendition of the text. They provide explanatory notation, often ascribed as the opinion of one or another father (thus, in the translators’ opinion, verifiably ancient and trustworthy), in subordinate materials arranged interlinearly, in the margins, or in both.

The evidence strongly implies that the translation-team most normally
consulted a biblical text attached to some version of the *glossa ordinaria*. They routinely relied upon its account of Jerome’s text, what one might consider the ‘text proper’. But they equally, as a way of ‘opening’ that text, used gloss materials as, in effect, substitutions for or clarifying extensions to readings specifically Hieronymian (cf. nn. 14, 17, and 19). In essence, they often construed the conventional ‘id est’, used by glossators to introduce a comment, as indicating a rendition equally powerful (and implicitly clearer, more ‘open’) than the exact term in Jerome’s *textus receptus*.

Much of this evidence is, in the context of materials I have presented above, repetitive. The Laon scholars who constructed the *glossa* – and presumably the biblical text necessary to display it – could not be immune to those vicissitudes of the Vulgate text I have already described. Thus, in a glossed manuscript, the Wycliffite team will have found powerful confirmation of a variety of non-Jerome readings they will almost certainly have known from other textual sources. All thirteen of those readings I have cited that early entered Vulgate tradition from the *vetus latina* appear here, as do four of those peculiar to the ‘Alcuinian’ recension (only Mark x.7 is absent). Similarly, two of the ‘synopsizing’ intrusions I have discussed (Mark iv.4 and xv.29) appear in the *glossa*, and, by communicating them, it would have confirmed the translators’ mistaken faith in two obviously scribal readings they adopted and that I will discuss further below (Mark i.15 and ii.21).

One could not, however, have predicted the weight of further gloss material that underwrites translatorial departures from the text Jerome had written. In twenty-five further examples, the Wycliffite Mark reproduces, in one way or another, the gloss as if it were Jerome. The majority of these readings is relatively straightforward; the team chose, as the readings of the Vulgate, that form of the text they discovered in their glossed manuscript. Examples include:

- Mark i.6 pilis cameli; heeris of camels; pilis camelorum, Lyra’s lemma
- Mark ii.1 post dies; aftir ei3te daies; post dies octo
- Mark iii.19 qui et tradidit; that bitraiede; qui tradidit
- Mark iii.26 non potest stare; he schal not mowe stonde; non poterit stare
- Mark iv.10 parabolas; the parable; parabolam
- Mark iv.32 ascendit; it waxith into a tre; ascendit in arborem
- Mark v.35 ueniunt; messangeris camen; ueniunt nuncii
- Mark v.35 ab archisynagogo; to the prince; ad archisynagogum
- Mark v.41 Talitha; Tabita; Tabitha
- Mark ix.32 esset; thei weren; essent
- Mark x.29 aut matrem aut patrem; or fadir or modir; aut patrem aut matrem
- Mark xii.25 angeli; aungels of God; angeli Dei
- Mark xiv.37 uigilare; wake with me; uigilare mecum
Mark xiv.43  et lignis; staues sent; et lignis missi
Mark xiv.61  filius benedicti; the sone of the blessid God; filius benedicti Dei
Mark xiv.62  uiutuus; of the vertu of God; uiutuus Dei
Mark xv.29  templum; the temple of God; templum Dei
Mark xvi.7  precedit; schal go bifor; precedet
Mark xvi.14  resurrexisse; he was risun fro deeth; resurrexisse a mortuis

Far more interesting is the remaining material the translators derived from glossed manuscripts. In these instances, the Wycliffite Bible presents as biblical text the gloss materials gathered to explain the text. These examples, some rather complicated, include:

Mark ii.2  ut non caperet; so that thei miȝten not be in the hous. The translators follow the interlinear comment on ‘caperet’, ‘scilicet domus’; cf. Lyra ‘scilicet domus in qua erat Christus’.
Mark viii.12  si dabitur; not be ȝoun. The translation has been directed by the glosses; the interlinearis reads, ‘id est non dabitur, sicut ille est, si Dauid mentiar’; the marginal gloss, ‘Augustinus [de concordia euangelistarum, 1603 only] In Marco [ita, 1603 only] scriptum esse dicit et signum non dabitur ei’; and Lyra, ‘Si dabitur etc, id est non dabitur, quia accipitur “si” pro “non,” sicut Psalmi, Quibus iuraui in ira mea si introibit in requiem meam’ (Ps. xciv.11).26
Mark viii.38  qui me confusus fuerit; that knoulechith me; qui me confessus fuerit
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Mark viii.38  qui me confusus fuerit; that knoulechith me; qui me confessus fuerit

In strictly logical terms, this linked pair of readings could appear in the immediately preceding list, as simply lexical substitutions. The two probably reflect a single error by a Carolingian scribe who interpreted Jerome’s reading as an abbreviated form of ‘confessus’; since the same verb must appear twice in the verse, ‘confitebitur’ followed as a necessary adjustment. Obviously enough, given their appearance in the glossa, the erroneous pair of readings is widespread.27 The translators will have felt that the first reading was clearly confirmed by the interlinear gloss ‘corde ore opere’. However, this is still probably a scribalism, and both readings exercise Lyra a great deal.28 But the translators necessarily ignored his counsel, however wise: this verse might be construed a major support for sectarian views of the nature of penance – its direction to and absolution by God alone, rather than requiring any sacramental ministrations by a priest.29

Mark xii.6  dicens; and seide perauenture; dicens forte (or similar). The translation attempts to capture the qualification attributed to the parable’s speaking father (= God) in the interlinearis, where ‘dicens’ is glossed ‘per ironiam’. The marginal gloss comments more extensively, ‘Quia reuerebuntur. Non hoc ignorando dixit, quia omnia nouit, sed semper ambigere dicitur
Deus, vt libera voluntas homini reseruetur.’
Mark xiii.26 in nubibus; in clodus of heuene; in nubibus celi. The marginal gloss to ‘Mouebuntur’ (Mark xiii.25) cites Jerome, ‘Ad iram vindicte quando mittentur a filio hominis veniente in nubibus celi cum virtute …’.

These many variants indicate clearly the Wycliffite translators’ fulfilment of the comparative exercise they had promised. These readings represent a massive adherence to a traditional text as transmitted in an authoritative context. Yet equally they indicate that commitment to the ‘letter’ of scripture is, modern notions of fidelity to the contrary, not commitment to any specific verbal form. Rather, just as those who first intruded vetus latina readings, the Wycliffite team are at one with a long tradition of ameliorative respondents to the biblical text. In the Middle Ages, ‘Jerome’ never formed a closed end-point; his inspiration – which rendered his text in persistent evolution – was to generate active explanatory response.

One can contrast the showing to this point, the Wycliffite translators’ successful effort at accurately transmitting an authoritative version, with seven readings scattered through Mark that seem to me pretty certainly of scribal genesis. These had intruded into – and in spite of their care, remained in – the group’s corrected master copy. I offer a list of examples, with brief commentary:

Mark i.15 adpropinquauit; schal come ny3; adpropinquabit. This must be a pre-Carolingian variant, misconstrued by later scribes (and beyond any recognition procedures one can attribute to the Wycliffite team, indeed any later medieval reader). In late Latin, the grapheme /b/ can represent both ‘b’ and ‘v’ (e.g. St Vibiana is just ‘Vivian’); later scribes, unaware of this convention, have construed a spelling variant for the perfect as if an unambiguous future.
Mark ii.8 spiritu suo; bi the Hooli Goost; spiritu sancto. A confusion over abbreviated forms (here further attracted to the common phrase); the same confusion, although in reverse, appears in the next example but one, although early attestation in Vulgate textual tradition implies that the errors are independent of one another.
Mark ii.21 panni rudis; of newe clooth; panni noui. The scribe responsible for this reading sought to assimilate ‘rudis … ueteri’ to ‘nouellum … ueteres’ in the following verse. I have mentioned this variant above as having been at least encouraged, if not supported, in the marginal gloss the translators will have consulted (cf. n. 22).
Mark viii.38 angelis sanctis; his aungels; angelis suis
Mark ix.39 aduersum uos pro uobis est; a3ens vs is for vs; aduersum nos pro nobis est. This trivial variant, for which I know no Latin analogues, is very likely a translational choice made by the Wycliffite team itself, predicated on
an erroneous response to the opening pair of minims, e.g. ‘nobis’ or ‘uobis’? 30
Mark xiv.68 et gallus; and anoon the cok; et statim gallus. Imported from
the use at Mark xiv.72. Wordsworth and White’s variants indicate that
the intrusion was recommended by one of the thirteenth-century Parisian
correctors.
Mark xv.28 reputatus; ordeyned; deputatus. As quite routinely happens in
all texts, scribes are prone to substitute one prefix for another.

On the whole, this is a remarkably small total in the circumstances, but a single
example likely to be one for which the team is responsible, and indicates the
general care with which this whole operation was conducted.

However, although erroneous, these readings have a further value. In textual
traditions, error is definitional. At least as a working postulate, errors are
transmitted vertically, from one erroneous copy to all those others that have used
it, and eventually its progeny, as an exemplar. Errors thus potentially define a
textual source. It is thus worth indulging in a move I have to this point usually
avoided, examining the readings of individual copies of the Vulgate. Persistent
agreements with one or another manuscript in readings like these might indicate
some range of copies to which the Wycliffite team had access in their work.

Moreover, this consideration seems to me a necessary one, for the translators
should be taken at their word, that they had ‘gedere[d] many elde biblis’. Although their obvious recourse to the glossa might explain their inclusion of
various readings, one should believe that the team might well have subjected
that text to the same tests as they did their master working-copy. Its readings,
in some range of instances, should have seemed powerful, not simply on the
authority of the gloss itself, but because the group knew them from other sources
they had collated as part of their search procedures. Thus, any assessment of
the translators’ underlying copy/ies needs to examine, not simply the erroneous
readings here, but readings which, although available in the gloss, appear derived
from a narrow range of potentially available copies.

Hence I offer the raw data from the fullest collation of individual copies
available to me, that provided by Wordsworth and White. There the errors
discussed above appear in the following copies only:

Mark i.15 HÔIKVXW; Mark ii.8 ELW; Mark ii.21 E; Mark viii.38 KV, cf.
suis sanctis HÔ; Mark xiv.68 known to me only from a Parisian corrector; 31
Mark xv.28 D[E+P]GKQRTV and cor.vat.

With these one may conjoin a range of readings that I have cited neutrally above,
examples that do not seem of any very wide distribution in collated Vulgate
manuscripts. These include five of the variants I have above described as ‘synoptic’,
concording with the textus receptus of Mark materials from other Gospels:
In addition, there is a range of readings, certainly available to the translators from their inclusion in the glossa (where all have been noted above), but of apparently limited occurrence in the general tradition of transmission:

Mark ii.1 W; Mark iv.10 parabolam DW; Mark iv.32 cor.vat. only; Mark v.35 KW; Mark viii.4 BOX, cf. cum uenirint HOT; Mark viii.38 confitebitur HOTW, cf. confitetur Y; Mark xii.6 W; Mark xiii.26 DL; Mark xiv.34 cor. vat. only; Mark xiv.37 W; Mark xiv.43 B[M+T]OHΘ; Mark xiv.62 W; Mark xv.29 Dei J; Mark xvi.7 HΘW; Mark xvi.14 cor.vat. only.

Before turning to an analysis of these readings, a word developing my comment on Mark xiv.68 above, ‘a Parisian corrector’. A reading like this, just like three other examples of ‘cor.vat.’ cited immediately above, indicates that the translators certainly knew in some form correction materials developed in Paris. Moreover, in other examples here, readings from Parisian ‘correctoria’ support a range of otherwise narrowly attested readings adopted by the translators: the otherwise isolated W at Mark ii.1, iv.10, xiv.37, and xiv.62;32 DL at Mark xiii.26; QL at Mark xiv.27; and J at Mark xv.29 Dei. One should probably conclude that, just like the translators, the producers of W certainly consulted correction materials in some form as part of preparing their text. I will take up in more detail below the issue of whether such recourse to Parisian corrections in W and the Wycliffite translation represents activities independent or conjoined.

However, I think that these ‘correctoria’ were apt to have been of quite limited usefulness for the Wycliffite team. They were designed – the efforts are usually associated with Hugh of St Cher in the 1240s and later – to deal with the first explosion of error-strewn Parisian copying.33 In the readings I have surveyed, the correctors seem mainly engaged in attempting to reassert glossa ordinaria readings against a spate of modernizations. But this correctorial activity, of course, only duplicated that already independently undertaken by the Wycliffite translators. Thus, in virtually all the remaining readings in my sample for which I have evidence (always excepting the possibly contentious Mark viii.38), the correctors’ suggested readings correspond to the gloss, and thus the Wycliffite text: at Mark iv.4, xvi.33, and xiv.61. The only exceptional examples are Mark vii.15 (see n. 17), and the reassertion of the ancient reading, ignored in the Wycliffite Bible, Mark xv.29 ‘edificat’.

To return to the sample of erroneous or narrowly attested variants. There are altogether twenty-seven of these. While their attestation could be described as ‘scattering’ – twenty manuscripts (of twenty-eight on which Wordsworth and White offer information) have at least one of the readings – there is some, perhaps happy, coalescence of the data. Wordsworth and White’s W appears twelve times
here, their $\Theta$ eight times (usually with $H$, which occurs seven times, in every case but one with $\Theta$, which suggests that its evidence may be derivative), their $K$ four times (and cf. nn. 18 and 27 above).

Wordsworth and White assign these sigla to the following manuscripts:\textsuperscript{35}

- **W** British Library, Royal MS 1 B.xii, produced in Salisbury 1254
- **$\Theta$** Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS lat. 9380, from Orleans, 788×821
- **H** British Library, Additional MS 24192, s. ix or x, from ‘Ardennensis’ (= ? Gembloux)
- **K** British Library, Additional MS 10546, produced for Charles the Bald, 840×76

Ostensibly, three of the copies appear unsurprising. They represent northern French books, descendants of which certainly will have come to England with ‘the Norman monastic plantation’. But $\Theta H$ imply a different scenario. Following Glunz, features distinctive to the pair reflect corrections of the ‘Alcuinian’ recension undertaken s. ix in. by Theodulf of Orleans. In addition to being a bishop, Theodulf was the abbot of Fleury-sur-Loire, a monastery instrumental in inspiring the tenth-century Anglo-Saxon Benedictine revival, and descendants of these volumes will have been in English circulation for up to two centuries before the Conquest.\textsuperscript{36}

But the Royal MS, that single copy collated most proximate to the Wycliffite copy-text, is considerably more provocative.\textsuperscript{37} This is a one-volume pandect, but apparently, given its variation in both text-order and provision of prologues, produced from a pre-‘Paris Bible’ (although a book certainly showing the types of developments, s. xii ex.–xiii in., that Light identifies as underlying those more usual productions). In his dated colophon, its scribe, William de Hales, says he made the book for ‘Magistro Thome de la Wyle, quem uocauit Magister Radulphus de Hehham, tunc cancellarius, ad regimen scolarium Sarisburiensium’. In other words, the book was produced as a teaching text for the cathedral school (or conceivably, one of the several theological colleges associated with the cathedral).

But, although the Royal MS was ‘finished’ in Salisbury, the exemplar underlying the volume was not necessarily a local product. De la Wyle is described as ‘called’ to the Salisbury post that the book was to serve, and the person who summoned him, Ralph Hegham/Hecham, was a product of Oxford – and might well have brought de la Wyle, and the text prepared for him, from there to Salisbury. And although Thomas, who was also a Salisbury prebendary canon, does not seem to have left any Oxford traces, he was clearly a member of a local clerical dynasty, two other recorded representatives certainly Oxonians, and supplying prebendaries and chapter officials until as late as 1341.\textsuperscript{38}

This confluence of data probably implies that, however assiduous their
collations, the Wycliffite translators may have reposed trust most normally in local Oxford books. Thus, any search for their specific sources might begin by concentrating upon biblical books produced in the century c.1130–1230 and potentially available in Oxford late in the fourteenth century. However, it remains possible, since Salisbury was a secular cathedral, thus of reasonably open access (unlike a monastic house), and fairly persistently drew its canons from a pool of Oxford talent, that the translators might have been able to consult its books, as well as local ones. Certainly, Salisbury’s reputation for textual fastidiousness, most notable in the liturgical use associated with the cathedral, would have been well known and attractive.

One can provide, from Glunz’s wonderfully extensive, if necessarily selective, account, further local exemplification of some of these readings. He offers parallels to three of the clearly erroneous readings in the Wycliffites’ Vulgate from eleventh- and twelfth-century English copies; these potentially indicate the general availability of such lections, since the books conveying them come from dispersed monastic houses – Winchester Cathedral, Durham, Reading, and perhaps Christ Church, Canterbury. Similarly, Glunz discusses four of the ‘synoptic readings’ of narrow dispersal mentioned above; all appear in Cambridge, Trinity College, MS B.5.5, again from Christ Church, probably copied during Becket’s episcopacy, as well as examples in books from Winchester and St Albans. Since Glunz’s interest was in the developing transmission history, he offers much less extensive accounts of narrowly attested variation; however, it is instructive that two of the very few variants of this class he discusses appear in Oxford, Brasenose College, MS 5, customarily taken to be an early product of the Catte Street Oxford booktrade.

A showing like this suggests that, in spite of heavy reliance on the gloss, the translators could and did have access to some narrow range of ‘trustworthy manuscripts’. (Ironically enough, these will remain identifiable, at least initially, only on those occasions when the translators’ trust in them was misplaced.) So far as my evidence goes, these may have been locally available books (and perhaps specifically locally manufactured products pre-dating the Paris infection). The team may have allowed these to confirm other readings and, in extremely isolated instances, to override all other information at their disposal. Moreover, particularly marked in the conjunction of their behaviour with that of the producers of Royal 1 B.xii, the translators were conversant with ‘modern’ biblical scholarship and, in isolated instances, allowed such correctoria to identify anterior readings that may have been very narrowly attested in their other materials.

Although I have stated my arguments here definitively, this clearly remains a vast and complicated subject, one requiring a great deal more expansive treatment in detail across a range of situations. But the evidence I amass does, however sketchily, affirm as historically accurate the translators’ claims about
their procedures, and most particularly the reliance upon the standard gloss. Moreover, one feature common to nearly all these gloss-derived readings deserves note: most customarily these involve the insertion of qualificatory materials, a basic principle underlying the translators’ avowed goal of ‘opening’ the text, rendering it clearer and more readily explanatory. Finally, one odd example, on which I expend a great deal of ink above, Mark viii.38 (see nn. 27–9), might suggest the need for a more expansive investigation. It would appear that, on very isolated occasions, the text – while there is no question of it not being a literal representation – may have been selected to confirm specifically sectarian exegesis.43

But as I say, this study remains only suggestive. The next step forward, it seems to me, would be to create a list of relevant Vulgate manuscripts for further investigation. This would involve gathering all those early copies of *biblia* – not just full pandects, but glossed single books as well – that one could associate with twelfth-century or very early Oxford production or could place in Oxford during the later fourteenth century.44 Initially, study of these should not be directed toward identifying the translators’ basic copy; indeed, all these books will predictably include defining individual readings that differ from those of the translation, because corrected out through multiple-copy consultation. Rather, such a collection will provide a data-set that should offer clues as to how the translators sought to eliminate readings they felt non-original. Here particularly contested readings, those revealing substantial diversity or relatively balanced weight of attestation, might be expected to be particularly revelatory.

As a concluding move, I return to the point at which I began, the issue of the unique recourse to ‘The General Prologue’, chapter 15, that has marked a great deal of past study. The preceding presentation, while preliminary only, certainly affirms conventional opinions about the Wycliffite biblical translators and their explanation of their procedures in ‘The General Prologue’, chapter 15. The team was conscientious and meticulous, ‘academic’ in their approach, and committed to assimilating and weighing information from a variety of sources. Yet there seems to me, as the team’s own modesty (‘sumdeel trewe’, a translation only ‘more trewe’ than bad thirteenth-century Paris products) indicates, a certain limitation that might be placed on this praise. Just as is frequently the case in studies of *Piers Plowman*, one runs the risk of confusing our ‘academicism’ with theirs.45 As my preceding argument suggests, the Wycliffites’ awareness of the parlous state of contemporary Bibles and the need for textual corrections was scarcely revolutionary. And the procedures they followed to address this situation were not original either; indeed, as they were aware, they placed themselves as modest continuators of processes of textual renewal that had been inherent in responses to Jerome’s Vulgate from its first publication.
These are perceptions that, it seems to me, might be extended to our reception of ‘The General Prologue’ as a documentary totality. We read the text climactically, as capped and centred in a flamboyant conclusion – and a flamboyantly ‘academic’ one. Certainly, there is good reason for this. The work so very obviously belongs, it would appear, within a recognized academic genre. Prologues ad auctorem or ad opus are a widespread feature of sophisticated medieval literary life. Moreover, given that this is a prologue to a biblical book, it readily interfaces with further ‘academic’ pursuits; the work proves resonant in the context of Jerome’s own prologues, following the explosion of Parisian Bible production staples of late medieval biblical presentation. These, of course, include their own meditations on source materials and methods – and have a lengthy historical backlog of imitators.

I would suggest, however, that such approaches to ‘The General Prologue’, as well as its customary centrality to Wycliffite studies alone, prove both pauperizing and perhaps obscuring. For in fourteenth-century vernacular English culture prologues are a great deal less restrictive than the academic model would allow. Moreover, from 1303 on, when Robert Manning of Bourne first used the word in English, prologues are a well-nigh ubiquitous feature of that culture. Rather than strictly scholarly/academic or genre-conditioned, the Wycliffite example might be seen as participating in this larger movement and be brought into productive contact with rather better assimilated ‘literary’ efforts like Chaucer’s, Langland’s, or Gower’s.

These three familiar examples share at least one common move. They all begin in the very antithesis of the depersonalized (and received) academic, with a gesture personal and experiential: ‘shoop me in shroudes’, the Tabard inn, the royal barge on the Thames. This rather broadly marks what one might identify as ‘the moment I came into writing’, that point at which I constructed myself as an author. Implicitly, all three then offer a motivation for the entire following project, as something new, unexpected yet compelled. And most importantly, they use this moment of ‘prolongation’ or ‘delay’, the postponed ‘text itself’, to define that project’s rules of engagement. The prologue-space actively deploys the modus dictandi by which the subsequent writing is to engage and compel its readers.

The historical point to be made about this – and about the conjunction of the Lollard Bible with other ‘literary’ monuments – is that ‘prologuing’ testifies to two situations. First: to the past (thirteenth-century) infrequency of response-demanding large ‘literary’ monuments in English (as opposed to works simply ‘directive’/‘instructive’). Second, and following from this: to the need to instruct an audience as to what sort of verbal object it is entering, and what kinds of engagement that object will demand. Thus, Langland, for example, focusing his project as ‘voice’ itself, the oral clash of opinion, at a moment early in his
prologue displays hoary social platitude erupting into unresolved cacaphony (B Prol. 112–45).

These circumambient vernacular conventions suggest to me that, its transmission to the contrary, the Wycliffite ‘General Prologue’ is a necessary prequel, or ‘prolonged’ approach, to the Wycliffite Bible. And further: that its customary interests – like all the other examples, it is constructing an appropriate readerly response to the uncommented (biblical) text that will ensue – are quite removed from the ‘academic’. Having stated this proposition, I turn to address three supportive issues: the text’s transmission, its status as text, and its audience-constructing efforts.

My arguments above, that ‘The General Prologue’ forms a planned and necessary prequel to the translation, suggest what manifestly appears not to be the case.50 Such a view is belied by the transmissional evidence; very few of the numerous copies of Lollard scripture include it (and not all those either provide the complete text or place the work in the prominent introductory position for which I suggest it was intended). The obvious reason for the text’s reduced presence in manuscript is its stridently sectarian commentary, which, although dispersed, is utterly integral to the general argument advanced, the need for free unsupervised reading of a vernacular biblical text.

I think the paucity of copies might best be seen as a difficulty about the underlying conception of the document. It was, for its author(s), imperative to justify a public vernacular biblical text. Yet simultaneously, the team’s received discourse of justification was such, at every turn, as to indicate a private (and by this point, persecuted) sectarian animus. The group was thus caught in a double-bind; attaching the prologue, with its full readerly instructions, would subvert the entire project, would render merely clandestine what was composed to address a public potentially universal. ‘The General Prologue’ could not serve its purpose, to explain the necessity of this book, without undermining that purpose altogether.

One might further suggest that, at least in the initial processes of promulgating Wycliffite scripture, suppression of this explanatory document may not have been perceived as thoroughly disastrous. These initial efforts are very apt to have been aimed at a coterie, most probably an audience known to the translators. Thus, the possibility of face-to-face oral instruction might have rendered the absence of the prologue less debilitating – or the immediate audience for early copies might have been one of converted sophisticates not actually requiring the information proffered in the text.51

This perception interfaces with a second: I think one might wonder, this point about the Prologue’s potential destructiveness having become clear during the compositional process, whether this is an abandoned text. (Such a view would explain, inter alia, why the Prologue shows such fitful transmission along with
the translation it was plainly to introduce.) Here, two passages seem to me especially provocative:

Pe Profetis han a general prologe for alle, and for I declaride sumdel þe Grete Profetis and in parti þe Little Profetis, and þenke soone to make an ende, wiþ Goddis helpe, of þe glose of þe Smale Profetis, I þenke now to passe ouer wiþouten any tariyng. (lines 2079–82; similarly of Job at lines 1963–5)

Isidere in þe firste book of Souereyn Good touchiþ þese reulis shortliere, but I haue hym not now, and Lire in þe begynnnyng of þe Bible touchiþ more openli þese reulis, but I haue him not now, and Ardmacan in þe begynnnyng of his book De Questionibus Armenorum ȝyueþ many good groundis to vndurstonde hooli scripture to þe lettre, and gostli vndurstondyng also, but I haue him not now. (lines 2359–64)

At least as far as we know Wycliffite writings today, the first passage only makes sense as presupposing the reader’s access to the translated Bible itself. Most of ‘The General Prologue’, after all (lines 131–1570, 1838–2165), is taken up with book-by-book summaries of the entire tanakh – except for ‘later prophets’. As the author says, they have their own (original) prologue. But a direction to it can scarcely be described as helpful to the reader (or as filling the gap in the prologue’s argument), were the prologue itself not attached to the full Bible; there this explanation of the prophets, into which are inscribed two references to ‘The General Prologue’, appears well past the middle. Similarly, the references to further explanatory materials on the prophets (as well as that to Job) can, in our knowledge, only refer to glosses, embedded and marginal, in the biblical texts themselves.52

The second passage presents a different scenario altogether. It is a rather backhanded acknowledgement of Hudson’s persuasive point in her essay of 2011. There Hudson points out, of the Bible, as well as four other extensive and central Wycliffite texts, that all must have required carefully pre-planned cooperative labour from many hands. (Cf. the ‘dyuerse felowis and helperis’ mentioned in the quotation with which I began.) That is, there was a rota, a specific set of tasks to be accomplished, with individual contributors presumably responsible for analogous activities within assigned portions of the project, e.g. one person to check ‘many elde biblis’ for readings in 2 Regum, another the same for Daniel.

The discussion in the second passage looks to me very much like a relict of comparable procedures. That is, the passage evokes a prior understanding, namely, that following upon its biblical summary, at line 2166, the ‘Prologue’ would turn to a discussion of exegetical practice/rules, derived from a fixed shortlist of authorities. The ‘Prologue’ author, at this point, knows this rota, but for whatever reason, ‘[he] ha[s] not now’ the books to fulfil it. Essentially, this is a mark of incompletion. One might qualify that initial conclusion by suggesting that the ‘Prologue’, like the ‘later version’ itself, was produced in a sequence of ‘rolling revisions’, or, like everything else, although written in the
first person singular, it was considered of communal authorship, and the author here was leaving instructions for a collaborator with a better stocked library to fill in the deficiencies of his own.

Yet this is not the full story of these absent books. A little later, following a plunge into unrelated polemical materials, to some of which I will return below, the author comments:

Neþeles, for Lire cam late to me, see what he seîþ … (line 2555)

What ensues at this point is at least part of the discussion the author could not provide earlier. He offers a large chunk of the promised exegetical discussion from Lyra’s prologue (lines 2555–90). Then, shortly after a chapter break, he asserts:

Seynt Isidere, in þe fi rste book of Souereyn Good, þe xx. c°, setiþ seuenouns reulis … (lines 2600f.)

The passage thus appears to continue, offering materials from a second of the heretofore missing books. But this, it transpires, is something of a red herring, perhaps deliberately suggesting that more of the pre-existing programme has been fulfilled than is actually the case. For as the author makes clear at the end of the protracted discussion, ‘Lire seiþ al þis’ (line 2735). The reference to Isidore, in spite of the customarily precise textual marking, suggestive of direct consultation of originalia, is actually one inherited from Lyra, who thus provides, not only what preceded, but lines 2591–740 as well.

The one further comment I would offer about this matter would point yet again to a thesis of textual abandonment. The author never obtained either Isidore or Fitzralph to insert their opinions (although he seems to pretend that he has the first), and readers were left to be content with half the job, reproduction of Augustine and Lyra’s statements of the exegetical basics. But in belatedly providing Lyra, the author executed a rather disconcerting textual loop. Materials that were apparently planned to interface proximately now appear significantly disengaged from one another (about 200 of Dove’s text lines apart) – and moreover, marked in the text as so estranged simply because of a compositional accident, the absence of books. This strikes me as the kind of unnecessarily confusing argumentative clutter a writer clears up when preparing a text for ‘publication’. That that job wasn’t apparently accomplished implies to me that at the end of the day, promulgation of ‘The General Prologue’ was not considered, and that the text we fitfully receive had been preserved in a messy in-transit form, and with no immediate plans for a ‘finished’ version.

Finally, I return to the text itself to address the larger question I introduced above: if prologues exist in fourteenth-century vernacular productions to orient and indoctrinate readers into the demands of the work to follow, what is this example of the genre supposed to be doing?
I have already indicated in passing the two great foci of the work – to provide an overview of *tanakh* and an explanation of basic exegetical rules for dealing with the biblical text. But whatever the care, length, and sophistication of the whole, the prologue strongly presupposes readers with a relatively limited amount of biblical knowledge. Merely to take one (repetitious) example: the narrative summaries of biblical books persistently sound as if they were constructed for an audience aware of biblical episodes, far from all of them prominent ones, but not aware of their ordering and positions vis-à-vis one another in the ongoing scriptural history of Israel. Much of the discussion reads to me like a narratively ordered topical index: ‘Yes, you can read about Noah in the Bible; the story appears in Genesis, which is the first book – and it’s right next to the story of the tower of Babel’ (cf. lines 139–41, describing Gen. 6–11).

A presentation like this implies a readership that has evinced a considerable interest in matters scriptural. But it is equally an audience that has had minimal contact with Scripture as a book. This narrative guide essentially assumes an audience deprived of any extended reading experience, much less of detailed contemplative or intellectual contact with the text. This conception of the audience, of course, underwrites the ongoing (and self-de[con]structive) polemical argument of the entire ‘Prologue’. The book that follows will provide what Latin Bibles have precluded, ‘open’ (free, explanatory) contact with a text approachable because vernacular. But denied contact because of linguistic barriers, the audience imagined, while surely engaged, is not a very knowing one.

Thus, it seems to me that there is a substantial disconnect between chapter 15, ‘the most important final chapter’, and the remainder. Where chapter 15 is technical – and, as I have indicated, technically precise – the remainder is quite deliberately material for beginners. The readiest analogy that occurs to me, not altogether anachronistically, is one descendant of medieval commentative prologues, the standard modern introductions to texts, like those produced by the Early English Text Society. Much in these introductions is engaged in basic groundwork. These discussions, analogous to the Wycliffite explanations of biblical event and exegetical practice, show unfamiliar readers the sine qua non needed to approach with some intelligence the text that follows.

But the conventional conclusion of these introductions is rather different, ‘the scholarly protocols underlying and followed in my edition’, or the like. Just as with ‘General Prologue’ chapter 15, this segment of a modern edition provides a guide to the fundamental rules of editorial accuracy that have underwritten the construction of the text that will follow. In the Wycliffite ‘General Prologue’, as I have demonstrated above, this is a warrant that although in English, and although misrepresenting contemporary Latin Bibles, besmirched with the residues of Paris copying, the following text more than adequately represents the Latin tradition. Moreover, chapter 15 argues that many significant departures from
Latin tradition in the local language deployed in the translation are not arbitrary or falsifying, but have been guided by set grammatical rules. The reader need not fear that his or her textual experience has been compromised by erroneous re-presentation of Latin scripture in English.

I conclude by offering a little further specification of the audience the ‘Prologue’ envisions and seeks to construct for itself. Here the most provocative materials are among the most paradoxical, a thoroughly vertiginous moment that occurs within the textual swerve between the author’s two accounts of exegetical rules (lines 2480–554). It should be, I think, a particular shock to those who wish to read the ‘Prologue’ backward through chapter 15, since it amounts to a total rejection of the academic, and of Oxford in particular.

The author’s intervention here has been occasioned by an effort to enforce the university’s long-standing statutes, which occurred in 1387 or 1388. At issue on this occasion was a regulation designed to forestall passage directly from ‘private’ schools operated by the mendicant orders to inception in the Faculty of Theology. The antidote in this case always was to require, as prerequisite to Theology, completion of the undergraduate Arts curriculum and two years’ service as a regent master. Always at issue was policing the credentials of Franciscan and Dominican youth, not, as the author presents it, keeping lessons in divinity closed to ignorant, if interested, outsiders.

Certainly, given everything one knows or can infer about the Wycliffite project, this is an extraordinary outburst. As Hudson has demonstrated (and as my arguments above affirm), the entire translation project, along with a great swath of Wycliffite textuality, could not have been conceived, much less pursued to its conclusion, without Oxford. Both the techniques employed and the resources needed to execute these ambitious projects were only available in a university context. Moreover, leading figures one might suspect as having been among those probably early involved in these activities – men like Nicholas Hereford, Philip Repyngdon, and John Aston – were, to a man, products of Oxford Arts. And of course, the initial theoretical conception ultimately instantiated in the Arts course appeared in a book the author of the ‘Prologue’ has only just concluded quoting at length and with enthusiasm, ‘Austin … in þe … book of Cristen Þechyng’ (lines 2357f.). Unlike the prologue’s author at this moment, the Bishop of Hippo did not find Arts material despicable ‘heþene mennus errours’ (lines 2536f.), but analogous to the gold the Hebrews pillaged from the Egyptians, pre-Christian knowledge important for unlocking scriptural mysteries.

‘But alas, alas, alas!’ (line 2480). When the author turns to excoriate the evil dons responsible for this atrocity, the closing off of theological instruction, it is almost overdetermined that he should speak in the voice of Amos, ‘On þre grete trespassis of Damask …’ (line 2491, Amos i.3). While it may have been William Tyndale who threatened to make a divine of ‘every lad that followeth the
plough’, this moment is not so far removed. For the author here ventriloquizes one ‘in pastoribus de Thecue’, a herdsman of Tekoa – and an analogue to the holy ‘ydiotae’ of Acts iv.13. One might see in this historical moment of threatened statutory enforcement and in the voice of denunciation it evokes ‘The General Prologue’s ‘experiential moment’, one analogous to Langland’s Wille ‘shaping shrouds’. Even if retrospective, given that it does not actually fall at the inception of the project, but forms an intrusion, even within the prologue itself, this marks the point at which, the lecture halls having been closed, the bringing into existence of a book like the translation that will follow becomes imperative.

Moreover, this ventriloquism underwrites one paradoxical movement of the ‘Prologue’s’ chapter 15. As my entire argument will have indicated, whatever the state of Oxford in 1387/8, the translation here was produced by soberly learned and disciplined activities. But that is not how the translators customarily describe themselves, as the ‘symple creature’ of my opening quotation (line 2802) or ‘idiots’ (line 2906) will indicate. Their activities, as presented in chapter 15, propose that cooperative efforts undertaken by individuals of ‘holy simplicity’, in company with diligent consultation with selected ‘elde gramariens and eld dyuynes’ (lines 2807f.), might be perfectly capable of constructing a purified text.57 After all, one of the team’s most abiding perceptions was that the contemporary available Vulgate text had undergone substantial deterioration precisely because it had been taken over by university instruction and associated mechanisms of book-production.

But if simplicity (even if a misrepresentation) can construct a persuasive and sophisticated text, it is also capable of reading the text constructively. In his onslaught on Oxford, the author offers, as alternative to Oxford Artists, ‘symple men of wit and of fynding’ (lines 2531, 2534).58 He manages twice at least to imply, if not overtly claim, that ‘gramer’, the capacity to read, is the only requirement necessary to approach the (English) scriptural text (lines 2487f., 2489). Perhaps it might be more accurate to suggest that he counts only on grammatical knowledge and grace: ‘God boþe can and mai, if it likiþ him, spede symple men out of þe vniuersite as myche to kunne holy writte as maistres in þe vniuersite’ (lines 2533–5). Rather illogically, it ultimately doesn’t matter whether theology lecture halls have guards at the doors. The instruction offered there – and in Oxford, it was Latinate, thus in any event outside the Bible audience’s ken – is distracting and unnecessary. In this, it resembles the Paris Bible. But the ideal literate evoked here, devout, unsupervised, and non-Latinate, sounds to me suspiciously consonant with the audience I have described as addressed in ‘The General Prologue’s biblical summaries.

Moreover this depiction of private lay study is also consonant with the prologue’s persistently repeated descriptions of readership. The document stands as a protreptic, an invitation to, or initiation into, a scholarly life. But this is
a scholarship that, unlike the activities narrated in chapter 15, is founded on non-scholarly tools (including the simple ability to read). The first – and then to be persistently repeated – evocation of this programme is succinct enough:

Cristen men and wymmen, elde and jonge, shulden studie faste in þe newe testament, for it is of ful autorite and opene to vndurstonde of symple men as to þe poyntis þat ben moost nedeful to saluacioun … and ech place of hooli writt, boþe open and derk, techiþ mekenesse and charite, and þerfor he þat kepþ mekenesse and charite haþ þe trewe vndurstonding and perfeccioun of al hooli writ. (lines 75–81)\(^5^9\)

Simple holiness of life, humble charity, reads and comprehends the text the Wycliffites so fastidiously constructed. For this mirrors in ‘open’ action all that God had wished to say in the book in the first instance. Rather than Oxonianism, one might consider that the Wycliffite ‘General Prologue’ imagines The Open University and its programme of ‘lifelong learning’.

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NOTES

1. *The Earliest Advocates of the English Bible*, ed. Mary Dove (Exeter, 2010), p. 80, lines 2802–7. All further references to ‘The General Prologue’ are from this source, by line number.

2. See ‘Five problems in Wycliffite texts and a suggestion’, *MÆ*, 80 (2011), 301–24; and note Hudson’s remark about my citation, ‘a remarkable comment on textual criticism which is hard to parallel elsewhere’ (p. 304).


4. All recent discussions are predicated upon Beryl Smalley’s general comments, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 3rd edn (Oxford, 1984), pp. 327–35, but see further nn. 31 and 33 below for the earlier studies on which she relies and some impressive recent accounts.

5. For these features, see N. R. Ker’s account of Lambeth Palace Library, MS 1364, *Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries*, 5 vols (Oxford, 1969–2002), I, 96f. One has to equivocate slightly on the issue of the biblical canon communicated; there is a narrow range of variation, e.g. the presence of ‘the prayer of Manasseh’ (after 2 Par) or of 3 Ezra, as well as the number and distribution of prologues.


7. For a fine introduction (although not to local, English copies), see Christopher de Hamel,

These, in the main, will have been books associated with early Irish-Northumbrian work, and most usually, manuscripts of the Gospels only. In order to avoid awkward periphrases, I use ‘Jerome’ throughout to mean ‘the author(s) of the Vulgate’; for my sample, Mark, this locution – although according with the translators’ perceptions – is slightly misleading, since in the Gospels, Jerome only revised an earlier Latin translation on the basis of his consultation of the Greek.

This is H. H. Glunz, History of the Vulgate in England from Alcuin to Roger Bacon (Cambridge, 1933). Glunz is responsible for highlighting passim the influence of the vetus latina, of ‘synopsizing’ tendencies among the manuscripts, and of the importation of commentary readings. Although his historical thesis was wrong (Glunz sought to prove Peter Lombard’s responsibility for the glossa ordinaria and to associate the work with the Paris schools), his range of examples and his analytic power at explaining them remain laudable.

I have used Novum Testamentum Domini Nostri Iesu Christi latine secundum editionem Sancti Hieronymi, ed. John Wordsworth and Henry J. White, 3 vols (Oxford, 1889–1954), I, 189–268; and Robert Weber et al., Biblia sacra iuxta vulgatum versionem, 4th edn (Stuttgart, 1994), pp. 1574–605. The texts of the two editions differ only very marginally, yet enough so to imply that even the earliest, and apparently quite accurate copies may have incorporated interlinear materials (see n. 20 below, or Mark ix.14 in Wordsworth and White). For the Wycliffite text, I of course follow The Holy Bible, ed. Josiah Forshall and Frederick Madden, 4 vols (Oxford, 1850), IV, 87–140. I hope that my readers will not be insulted by my repeating the translators’ injunction, ‘Loke þat he examyne treuli his Latyn Bible’; most modern Vulgates are not medieval at all, but reproductions of the ‘Clementine recension’ (Clement VIII, 1592). I apologize in advance for the rather negative bent of the following pages, an emphasis on what the translators ‘got wrong’, rather than the overwhelming majority of instances in which they transmitted an excellent text. But, as I will argue at the end of this evidentiary display, only deviation is of value for constructing text-historical statements.

The first term is that proper to refer to Hebrew scripture. It is an acronym indicating the contents of the whole: ‘torah’ (the law, the Pentateuch) + ‘nevim’ (prophets, the remainder of the Octateuch and the later prophets) + ‘ketuvim’ (writings). In my analysis, I assume that the Wycliffite team limited their researches to biblical materials, narrowly speaking; I have not investigated (as future students might) the possibility that they may have derived readings from the liturgical renditions of various biblical passages.

The translators were aware of this situation from Augustine (see ‘The General Prologue’, lines 2920–31), but raise the issue as a polemical argument in favour of new translation(s). It did not occur to them that these practices might have influenced the Vulgate, and believing in the integrity of patristic authors (and their representation of the text), they had no mechanism by which to assess the resulting individual textual variants. For an excellent introduction to the problem, see H. A. G. Houghton, The Latin New Testament: A Guide to its Early History, Texts, and Manuscripts (Oxford, 2016).

I have simply identified those Wycliffite readings varying from Jerome’s text and appearing in the vetus latina copy presented by Wordsworth and White at the foot of their pages (the ‘Evangelario purpureo’, Brescia, Biblioteca civica Queriniana, s.n.). This
sample version breaks off around Mark xiv.70, and includes a further major lacuna at Mark xii.4–xiv.32. Although but a single witness, it is still more complete than the ongoing Evangelium secundum Marcum, ed. Jean-Claude Haelewyck, Vetus Latina 17 (Freiburg i. B., 2013–), currently four published fascicles extending to Mark vi.16.

14 Not to prejudge my developing argument, but I would note that the glossa ordinaria offers ‘redeuntes’ outside the text, as an interlinear gloss to explicate ‘a foro’.

15 Although a tiny variant, and in all likelihood just a ‘commonsense’ intrusion, this may represent that ‘synopsizing’ class of reading discussed below; cf. Matt. xv.9.

16 I have simply identified those readings common to the Wycliffite translation and the Latin forms marked with the siglum ĭ in the collations of the Stuttgart edition. The eight readings from the vetus latina retained in this version are Mark i.2, ii.20, ii.24, vii.7, xiv.20, xiv.21, xiv.24, and xiv.27 in the preceding list.

17 This sequence of interdependent readings has every appearance of being a scribal response to the original – confusion over minims (probably in the presence of some abbreviation, and with no small stimulus from ‘coinquinare’ earlier in the verse). Again, not to prejudge the argument, at least two of these uses – presumably an instruction that all are to be construed similarly – are marked in the interlinear materials of the glossa ordinaria so as to suggest, without enforcing any choice between them, that ‘coinquinare’ and ‘communicare’ are competing readings here. In addition, at least one Parisian corrector (see further below) suggested with approval ‘communicant’ for the initial example.

18 The Stuttgart edition adapts the reading as Jerome’s; Wordsworth and White report its occurrence in their sigla K Ɗ W and nine further copies (a mark for insertion but no supplied reading in H) (and absent in Amiatinus and eight others).

19 Again, the glossa ordinaria offers some powerful support. The extensive marginal treatment here includes a reference to the verse from Luke, and, when the gloss offers an allegorization of Mark’s birds, it uses the phrase ‘volucres celi’, rather than Mark’s actual text.

20 The textus receptus (‘asked him the parables’) appears incomplete, and this reading is clearly an intruded gloss. However, it may be only an isolated extension of a series of such, partially inspired by other Gospel loci. The Stuttgart editors take the ‘scire’ of the following Mark iv.11 also to be a glossing intrusion, and the common variant for that infinitive, ‘nosse’, has been derived from the synoptic parallels Matt. xiii.11, Luke viii.10. For ‘parabolam’, see further below.

21 For the glossa and Nicholas of Lyra, I have followed two early printed versions: Biblia latina cum glossa ordinaria: facsimile reprint of the editio princeps (Strassburg, 1480/1), introd. Karlfried Froelich and Margaret T. Gibson, 4 vols (Turnhout, 1992), here IV, fols 90–137 (now also available online at http://glossae.net/fr/node/163) and Bibliorum sacrorum tomus primus (-sextus) cum Glossa ordinaria (as well as Lyra), 6 vols (Venice, 1603), here V, 481–664. Since I have relied upon these early modern prints (and have made no independent search, as future students should do, for manuscript copies of the glossa), while the majority of my examples is common to both prints, I have taken readings witnessed by only one of them as evidence potentially available to the translators in their broader survey of materials.

22 In the latter case, the exact phrase ‘nouus pannus’ appears in the gloss only, not the biblical text.

23 And a further tiny example of ‘synopsizing’; cf. Matt. iii.4.
Cf. the vetus latina ‘dicentes que est hec parabola’.


Reading ‘Psal.’ in the 1603 print as ‘Psalmi’, shorthand for either ‘illud Psalmi’ or ‘ille versus Psalmi’.

See Glunz, History, pp. 52, 135, 146, 239, and 290f. The last citation, from corrections entered in Cambridge, St John’s College, MS C.24/74, at Guisborough (OSA, NRY), s. xiii/xiv, indicates that this reading was a cause célèbre as an indicator of Parisian Vulgate corruption. While this certainly underwrites Lyra’s frustrated comments (see the next note), the target was slightly unfortunate. The reading had been included in a minority of Vulgates for centuries (eight of Wordsworth and White’s copies including HKW) and was scarcely unique to sloppy Parisian copying.

Cf. ‘Qui enim me confusus etc. Hec est uera litera, quia sic habent antiqui libri et correcti, et eciam Greci. Et hoc patet per illud, quod habetur Luc. 9[.26] vbi eadem sententia ponitur per alia verba sic, Qui me erubuerit et meos sermones’. (Notice the appeals both to ancient books – and here to the koiné as well – and to synoptic argument.) And immediately thereafter Lyra yet again: ‘Et filius hominis etc. Hec est vera litera, quia sic habent Greci et antiqui. Et patet per istud quod habetur Luce 9 capitulo, vbi dicitur Et filius hominis erubescet eum, id est non recognescet eum de suis, sicut homo non libenter recogniscit illum de quo erubescit. Et per talem modum loquendi dicit Hieronymus de quadam sancta, “Quia non est confusa Christum, Christus non confudetur eam’.

Nec est curandum, si est in propria locutio secundum regulas grammaticae, quibus non subiacet theologia’. As Anne Hudson points out to me, ambivalent reception of Lyra, whatever the praise for his helpful account in my opening quotation, is widespread in the translation. Although recognizing Lyra’s superiority to Jerome as Hebraist, the team virtually never allowed his readings to replace Jerome’s in the central biblical text; they are instead provided as marginal glosses only (cf. ‘The General Prologue’, lines 2853–60, and n. 51 below, but see also n. 23 above and the text it modifies).

On the theological issues, see Hudson, The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History (Oxford, 1988), pp. 294–9. Wycliffe’s practice suggests that he would have read the verse in concord with, not its synoptic parallel at Luke ix.26 (as did Bacon and Lyra), but the nearly verbatim restatement at Luke xii.8; see Tractatus de Blasphemia, ed. Michael H. Dziewicki, Wyclif Society 20 (London, 1893), ch. 10, p. 143, lines 13–15, where the latter verse is adduced in support of a basic (sectarian) definition of ‘confessio’. This verse might also have influenced the Carolingian misrepresentation of Mark viii.36.

I am grateful to Hudson, among many other kindnesses, for suggesting to me a range of relevant discussions in Wycliffe’s Latin; see also ‘De eucharistia et penitencia’ (Wyclif Society 19) and Sermones 1.46, 2.18 (Wyclif Society 11/1 and 2, respectively). The doctor evangelicus only rarely argues from ‘proof-texts’ (John i.29 is entirely sufficient for his argument that absolution comes from God alone); he prefers to ‘found’ his argument in biblical narrative episodes, e.g. accounts of Peter, Paul, and the Magdalene.

Cf. the discussion of Mark ix.29, in my concluding list of oddments, n. 43; this is a further example, analogous to that reading, of seeking to join Jesus’s actions with those of his disciples (rather than, as Mark does, emphasizing their befuddled estrangement from his divinity).

I know detail of the Parisian corrections only from Wordsworth and White’s collations

32 This last, although a tiny intrusion, might be construed another ‘synopsizing’ reading, cf. Luke xxii.69.

33 Cf. Smalley, The Study, p. 335; and Hudson’s comments in the forthcoming The Wycliffite Bible: Origin, History, and Interpretation, ed. Elizabeth Solopova (Leiden, 2016). Hudson’s account demonstrates that the selective principles on which my study is based (the ‘later version’ only) may have largely excluded those occasions on which the translators most normally used Parisian correctional materials. Hudson shows that this occurred in converting the original version of the translation into the ‘later version’.

34 Glunz, History, p. xx, groups this pair as unique among the manuscripts presented by Wordsworth and White; see further below, including examples drawn from Glunz’s pp. 126–48.

35 Their list of copies, with comments, appears at I, xi–xiv; they refer to ready evidence that might be used to extend or qualify my argument in the collations of English copies assembled by Richard Bentley, c.1720, at I, xxvi–xxvii. Many of their comments are in need of reassessment, given more recent study; cf. Glunz, History, p. xx and Houghton, Latin New Testament, passim (e.g. the Brescia ‘vetus latina’ at p. 216).

36 For an extensive treatment, see Richard Marsden, The Text of the Old Testament in Anglo-Saxon England (Cambridge, 1995), full index references at p. 507 s.v. ‘Theodulf’, a concise introduction to this recension at pp. 18–22.

37 See the published descriptions, George F. Warner and G. P. Gilson, Catalogue of Western Manuscripts in the Old Royal and King’s Collections, 4 vols (London, 1921), I, 12–13 (and the image, IV, plate 8); Andrew G. Watson, Catalogue of Dated and Datable Manuscripts, c.700–1600, in the Department of Manuscripts, the British Library, 2 vols (London, 1979), I, 149 (no. 855); and the image, II, plate 150.


39 The best-known examples, although ‘after Arundel’, concern the conciliar team gathered by Bishop Robert Hallum (1407–17). Among the talent then assembled was Richard

40 See, for Mark i.15’s future tense, Glunz, *History*, pp. 51, 142; for Mark ii.8 ‘suis’, pp. 195, 264; for Mark viii.38 ‘suis’, pp. 142, 174, 187. While I do not cite the results explicitly, I have checked all Glunz’s assignments of books to religious houses against more recent studies, most notably N. R. Ker, *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain: A List of Surviving Books*, 2nd edn, Royal Historical Society Guides and Handbooks 3 (London, 1964) and its various supplements.

41 For Mark vi.13, see Glunz, *History*, pp. 117, 121, 135, 146, 239; for Mark xii.33, xiv.27, and xv.29 re-edificat, see pp. 146, 239.

42 For the few examples discussed, see for Mark ii.1, Glunz, *History*, pp. 175, 178, 271; for Mark iv.10 parabolam, pp. 135, 146, 238; for Mark v.35, pp. 135, 146, 175, 178, 183, 187, 189, 192, 195, 238 (!); for Mark xii.6, p. 271; for Mark xiv.37, p. 239; for Mark xv.20 Dei, p. 239.

43 While this discussion completes my presentation of the translators’ procedures, a small pool of oddments remains. For the sake of completeness, I address these three undiscussed examples here. One of these readings, rather than access to a deviant Vulgate, may be a place where Forshall and Madden’s text contains an English transmissional error:

‘Mark xiv.34 uigilate; wake 3e with me; uigilate mecum.’ I know only one bit of Latin evidence for any such added phrase here. However, an analogous example, three verses later, appears in the list of *glossa*-derived readings above. Both here and in Mark xiv.37, the addition appears at the end of a period, and in both ‘mecum’ follows a form of the verb ‘vigilare’. This appears to me most readily explicable as a situation in which a scribe early in the Wycliffite tradition anticipated a subsequent reading and doubled it, in a similar verbal context. Obviously, following this interpretation, ‘with me’ here should be removed from any future edition of the Bible. But there is an alternative explanation. I have noted the single Latin parallel just above, as a reading offered only as a Parisian correction. Thus, it may resemble another doubled erroneous intrusion of much the same sort, Mark xiv.68, also recorded, in my sample, only in Parisian ‘correctoria’.

The remaining two examples are utterly anodyne, I think. They both correspond to readings in the same pair of rather peripheral ancient Vulgate manuscripts (the Book of Kells [Q] and a tenth-century Spanish copy [T]). But both represent rather pernickety textual adjustments that seem to me capable of having occurred independently and unpredictably anywhere in the tradition.

Mark ix.29 voulebat; thei wolden; voulebant. The reading has probably been dragged into conformity with the *glossa*’s Mark ix.32 ‘essent’ (for earlier ‘esset’). Contrast the *vetus latina* adjustment of Mark xi.1 (a group action ascribed in this account to Jesus alone), and further cf. the discussion of Mark ix.39 (and n. 30) above.

Mark xv.45 corpus Ioseph; the bodi of Ihesu to Ioseph; corpus Ihesu Ioseph. This is simply a finicky clarification of the Vulgate, an effort to ensure that a reader consulting the original understands that indeclinable ‘Ioseph’ is clearly dative, and that she or he not be needlessly confused into thinking the noun genitive.

44 Just a couple of examples: Oxford, St John’s College, MS 48 (a full bible, s. xiii med., but following neither Parisian order nor prologues, probably property of an Oxford Franciscan, c.1380); or MS 43 (Peter Lombard’s gloss on the Pauline epistles, s. xii ex., produced at Bury St Edmunds, but deposited in an Oxford loan-chest shortly after 1400).


48 Manning clearly knew the word ‘prologue’ only as a written term, presumably from his source Le Manuel des péchés. Rhyme shows that he interpreted the form as ‘prolong’ (Anglo-Norman ‘prologue’ read as if ‘prologne’). This is at least a provocative misreading in light of my subsequent argument, since it might imply that Manning took the word to mean ‘a delay or postponement [of the onset of the text]’. For a further discussion of vernacular prologues, with a particular emphasis on early examples, see London Literature, 1300–1380 (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 148–53 (and for an effort, analogous to that undertaken here, at joining Wycliffite interests with general literary culture, pp. 305–13). To the early examples there discussed, one could add Genesis and Exodus, The Prick of Conscience, and Richard Rolle’s Psalter (the one truly boilerplate vernacular academic prologue, largely inspired by Peter Lombard’s).


50 For the materials of this paragraph, see Hudson, Premature Reformation, p. 238 and esp. nn. 56f. (and with greater detail, Dove, Earliest Advocates, pp. xxiv–xxx).

51 The classic example of the latter would be the earliest known Bible-owner, Thomas of Woodstock (British Library, MSS Egerton 618+617, before 1397); cf. Hudson’s presentation of the biographical evidence, Premature Reformation, pp. 12, 112. But a number of early, elaborately decorated – as Thomas’s volumes are – manuscripts of the Bible might imply that they were books intended for similarly engaged and well-placed individuals with developed textual skills.

52 For discussion of these references, see Dove, Earliest Advocates, pp. 193 nn. 1963–5, 194 nn. 2079–82. For the prologue to prophets, see Forshall and Madden, Holy Bible, III, 225f. (and Dove, Earliest Advocates, pp. 86–8); and for a sample of the kind of materials apparently referred to, Forshall and Madden, II, 672–735 (Job glossed). The prologue to prophets refers directly to ‘The General Prologue’ as projected to precede Genesis, at Dove’s lines 53f.; and the comment at lines 20–2 on the historical situation of individual prophets echoes the narrative materials in ‘The General Prologue’ that treat Kings and Chronicles.

53 It is at least worth noticing the non-descriptive rubric ‘prolog for alle þe bookis of þe Bible’. ‘The General Prologue’ offers no such guide as I have been describing for Christian scripture, only addressed in the canonical statement at lines 72–9. Implicitly, the author(s)
felt this considerably more familiar, probably on the basis of routine liturgical and homiletic use. Moreover, given the limited circulation of materials from *tanakh*—most Wycliffite Bibles, particularly after a swell of early pandects, are heavily skewed to the Christian scripture endorsed here—only a relatively limited sample of the surviving Bibles might have been expected to see the text as relevant.

54 I hope that Anne Hudson will forgive me for quoting in a critical spirit *Premature Reformation*, p. 243. In any event, I am sure she meant this statement in the qualified sense ‘most important in understanding Wycliffite textual activities’, the subject I have argued at some length in the first portion of this article.

55 A return to the exemplary study, Hudson, ‘Five problems’, here pp. 309ff.

56 See Dove, *Earliest Advocates*, p. xxiv (and particularly n. 31). Indeed, numerous entries in episcopal registers allow serving priests parochial leave (and the right to appoint a vicar) in order to attend university. It seems unlikely that these individuals were coming up for anything other than ‘auditing’ theology lectures (most likely ‘cursory’ introductions to specific biblical books), although they might have expected to benefit simply from the wide provision of occasions for hearing ‘practical divinity’, sermons, around the university. But of course, since they require ecclesiastical approval, such behaviours would scarcely count as free/open in a sense the prologue would approve.

57 For further examples of the translators claiming ‘unlearnedness’, see lines 2801, 2881, 2882, 2888, 2892, 2901 (and contrast the ‘I’ of passages I have cited above—‘The General Prologue’ also shows a wavering subject-position that presumably a final revision never undertaken should have harmonized). The grammarians and divines mentioned may, of course, not have been generous old dons, above the sectarian fray, but books, e.g. standard glossaries like William Brito, Huguccio of Pisa, or ‘Januensis’ (Giovanni Balbus of Genoa). This might suggest another area for further research: the extent to which one or another of these authors might have guided the translators’ lexical choices (perhaps particularly in explicating technical terms scattered through *tanakh*).

58 For similar locutions in ch. 15, see lines 2794, 2798, 2868. ‘Fynding’ here draws attention to the fact that university attendance required significant financial support, often from a patron; cf. Chaucer’s Clerk at ‘General Prologue’, lines 293–302 or Wille at *Piers Plowman* C 5.35–41.

59 The passage implicitly indicates why the exegetical rules are so prominent in a prologue to *tanakh*, for that is the scripture of ‘derk’ foreshadings, passages only properly understood on the basis of rules for reading.