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Chaucer and the Hand that Led Him

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In an essay that remains a model of intelligent, discriminating source-and-influence study, Robert A. Pratt¹ some years ago convincingly established Chaucer's comfortable and persistent reliance on a manual 'which aimed to afford spiritual sustenance and moral advice and encouragement (together with illustrative sayings and stories) to preacher, friar, or layman', the *Communiloquium* of the thirteenth-century Franciscan John of Wales – or, if not this particular volume, then its closely similar 'progenitor, cousin, or descendant' – for numerous passages in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*, the *Summoner's Tale*, the *Pardoner's Tale*, the *Nun's Priest's Tale*, and others. It was a reliance on Chaucer's part, Pratt sensitively argued, that not only remained unacknowledged by the poet and the manuscript glosses (which often refer us to the ultimate sources of that which Chaucer found neatly excerpted and catalogued in the compendium before him), but is turned to the purposes of characterization of the various 'false preachers' of the *Tales of Canterbury* who exploit, and appropriate to their own ends, the volume's contents in their particular preachments. At the same time, Chaucer's treatment rather ungratefully satirizes the 'very idea of the book itself, with all its sententious and exemplary morality, and its aim of moral inculcation at all hours and under all circumstances of the day'.² Chaucer is mimicking the preachers' style while at the same time he 'follows the preachers' method and goes to the friars for material and guidance'; indeed, the poet relies for the effectiveness of these characterizations on the friars' success in educating his audience in classical, pseudo-classical, and religious exempla and sayings. To vary the cliché Pratt's title invoked, Chaucer has managed to have his cake and eat it, too.

Not the least important result of Pratt's study is to reduce the number of works that Chaucer knew directly or used as often as previously thought. Comparison of John of Wales's citations with the language of the originals, and comparison of the

order and disposition of the material in the sources and in John of Wales's compendium, serves to relegate the sayings of *Secundus Philosophus* and the *De factis dictisque* of Valerius Maximus to the category of books Chaucer apparently did not know first-hand; it seems, moreover, that in those tales where the *Communiloquium* offers parallels, Chaucer did not spend time poring over Juvenal, Gregory the Great, or John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*. Furthermore, it appears that he took over many of his quotations from the Vulgate from the manual before him, familiar as such verses might have been to him nonetheless.

I know of no subsequent study that substantively alters Pratt's conclusions regarding the value of the *Communiloquium* to Chaucer, or restores to the poet's shelves authors and books that Pratt argued were known to him largely, if not exclusively, through that compendium. Indeed, so persuasive is Pratt's analysis of the contents of the *Communiloquium* in relation to Chaucer's works that most readers, I suspect, will even accept his conclusion that 'the presumption is now very strong that [Chaucer] never had occasion to consult Seneca at first hand'.³ The Pardoner has declared that

Senec seith a good word doutelees;
He seith he kan no difference fynde
Bitwix a man that is out of his mynde
And a man which that is dronkelewe,
But that woodnesse, yfallen in a shrewe,
Persevereth lenger than doth dronkenesse.

(VI[C], 492-97)⁴

But the parallel with the *Communiloquium*, which Chaucer has been following, ceases at line 495, while the letter of Seneca, to which John of Wales explicitly refers, goes on in the very next sentences to offer a close parallel of *PardT*, 496-97:

nihil aliud esse ebrietatem quam voluntariam insaniam. Extende in plures dies illum ebrii habitum: numquid de furore dubitatis? nunc quoque non est minor sed brevior.⁵

[drunkenness is nothing else than self-induced madness. If you prolonged the condition of the drunkard over several days would you have any doubts of his lunacy? At the moment the lunacy is not less but shorter.]

Chaucer may, of course, have gone directly to Seneca at this point, but it is indeed unlikely that he did so, given the absence of any other clear echoes of Seneca's letter in the Pardoner's exposition. Instead, the tag from Seneca may have been included in the particular manuscript of the *Communiiloquium* that Chaucer was using, as Pratt himself suggested; or, bearing in mind the long-lived tradition of mining Seneca for his moral precepts, the idea might have come to Chaucer through some florilegium of which he was reminded by the reference in John of Wales.⁶

In this essay I wish to suggest, however, that with regard to another author and text, the *Communiiloquium* did indeed serve as the stimulus to the poet to consult the actual source catalogued and excerpted in the manual, and that it was this earlier source which for a time guided the poet in his construction of a section of the homiletic material near the beginning of the *Pardoner's Tale*. The source I have in mind whose use in the *Pardoner's Tale* seems never to have been suggested by scholars is Jerome's Letter 22, to Eustochium ('De virginitate servanda'), the famous letter composed no later than Spring 384 as part of Jerome's public campaign in Rome for asceticism, a program sanctioned and encouraged by Pope Damasus himself. Never intended as a merely private correspondence, this *libellus* on virginity, the conduct of daily life, and the practices of false 'virgins' and preachers, also contained the famous account of the author's dream of ten years earlier, in which Jerome, dragged before the tribunal of God Himself, and asked what he was, replied that he was a Christian, only to hear the crushing pronouncement, 'Mentiris . . . Ciceronianus es, non Christianus; "ubi thesaurus tuus, ibi et cor tuum"'. [You are lying. You are a Ciceronian, not a Christian; 'for your heart is where your treasure is'.] The dreamer was pardoned only after swearing a great oath, 'Lord, if ever again I possess worldly books, if ever I read them, I shall have denied You'.⁷ Jerome's letter was immediately a *cause célèbre*,⁸ and became the most copied of all his *epistulae*: I count from Lambert's census no fewer than 258 extant manuscripts dating from the seventh to the sixteenth century which contain the letter (either as part of the collected *Epistulae*, or in a briefer anthology, or singly) of which some 102 were produced before 1400, and of which, it should further be noted, thirty-two and eighteen manuscripts, respectively, are to be found in England.⁹ That Chaucer knew this readily accessible treatise is suggested by a clear quotation from it in *ParsT* 345, in a section of that tale where Chaucer has departed from his source, Raymund of Pennafort's *Summa de poenitentia*, and for which no other source, which might contain the quotation from Letter 22, has been identified.¹⁰

Pratt established beyond a doubt Chaucer's use of John of Wales in the homiletic passages of the *Pardoner's Tale* on the strength of *Communiloquium* I.iii.3,

Prover. xxxj, dicitur Noli regibus o *lamuel dare vinum*, quia *nullum secretum* ubi *regnat* ebrietas, ne forte bibant et obliviscantur *iudiciorum* dei et cetera; unde et principes gentiles *abstinebant* se a gula et luxuria, precipue ut *triumpharent* de inimicis

[Proverbs 31, it is said Give not wine to kings, o Lamuel, because there is no secret where drunkenness reigns, lest they drink strongly and forget the judgment of God, etc.; for which reason even the princes of the gentiles abstained from gluttony and lechery, especially so they might triumph over enemies]

which he found echoed in *PardT* 560-61, 573-78, and 583-87. Furthermore, this same chapter of the *Communiloquium* declares, '*prohibetur libido luxurie et gule que est ei annexa*' [transl.], which is carried over by Chaucer in the passage:

And right anon thanne comen tombesteres
Fetys and smale, and yonge frutesteres,
Syngeres with harpes, baudes, waferes,
Whiche been the verray develes officeres
To kyndle and blowe the fyre of *lecherye*,
That is annexed unto glotonye.

The hooly writ take I to my witnesse
That luxurie is in wyn and dronkenesse,

(VI[C], 477-84)

with the phrase 'luxurie is in wyn' called into being from a similar idea, 'in vino inquit est luxuria', in *Communiloquium* IV.iii.7. And this latter chapter, significantly enough, goes on to introduce the exemplum of Lot in a form echoed by the very next lines of the *Pardoner's Tale*.¹¹

But also in this chapter of the *Communiloquium*, Jerome's letter to Eustochium is explicitly identified as the source of 'in vino . . . est luxuria'.¹² If Chaucer, as I believe he did, took John of Wales's cue at this point and opened

Jerome's letter, he would have found not only, as he might have expected, the very quotation 'vinum, in quo est luxuria' (Eph. 5.18) but also, just a few lines above, an account of Jerome's imagining in his desert cell the appearance of dancing girls, 'saepe choris intereram puellarum', who keep the fires of lust surging in a mind burning with desire, though the flesh had been subdued almost to death,

mens desiderio aestuabat . . . et ante hominem suum iam carne
praemortua sola libidinum incendia bulliebant.¹³

[(my) mind was burning with desire . . . and the fires of lust
bubbled within me, though my body was already as good as
dead.]

It is a striking scene, to be sure, which Chaucer transforms into the actual appearance of 'tombesteres/ Fetys and smale' (*PardT*, 477-78) and their ilk who, as the agents of the devil, 'kyndle and blowe the fyr of lecherye' (*PardT*, 482). And it should be noted that this same association of fire with wine and lechery – an imagery which, conventional as it may be, is not made by John of Wales in his exposition, had been earlier made by Jerome a few lines below the section just quoted, where that writer, in speaking of the effect of wine on a youthful nature, says 'Quid oleum flammae adicimus? Quid ardenti corpusculo fomenta ignium ministramus?'¹⁴ [Why do we cast oil on the flame; why do we give fuel to a body that is already on fire?]

Both John of Wales and the letter of Jerome upon which he is drawing move directly at this point to biblical exempla of wine's destructive power; both the *Communiloquium* and the letter first cite the example of Noah, exposed in his drunkenness (which Chaucer chooses not to include), before passing on to Lot in an allusion that, while stressing the patriarch's ignorance of his drunken incest, as the Vulgate account may be said to, nonetheless somewhat surprisingly enlists him as proof that 'luxurie is in wyn and dronkenesse':

Lo, how that dronken *Looth*, unkyndely,
Lay by his doghtres two, *unwityngly*;
So *dronke* he was, he *nyste* what he wroghte.
(VI[C], 485-87)

Pratt saw that these lines clearly echoed John of Wales's '*Loth vero per temulentiam nesciens libidini miscet incestum, . . .*' [Lot, in truth, on account of drunkenness,

ignorant of sensual desire, engages in incest] which, while undoubtedly true, does not explain their curious use here in a preachment against winebibbing. I submit that the resolution of this apparent contradiction lies in the careful distinction Jerome offers in the letter – none of which is carried over by John of Wales in the *Communiloquium* – of guilt mitigated by ignorance, with moral error nonetheless unaffected by the fact of Lot's inebriation:

Lot, the friend of God, after he had been saved upon the mountain as the one man found righteous among all those thousands, was intoxicated by his daughters. They may have thought that the human race had ended and have acted rather from a desire for offspring than from love of sinful pleasure; but they knew full well that the righteous man would not abet them unless he were drunken. [D]enique, quid fecerit ignorauit; et – quamquam uoluntas non sit in crimine, error in culpa est. [In fact he did not know what he was doing; but although there be no wilfulness in his sin the error of his fault remains] As the result he became the father of Moab and Ammon, Israel's enemies, who 'even to the fourteenth generation shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord forever'.¹⁵

Chaucer, moving between the two texts open before him, would have found in the letter the rationale he needed to include the exemplum without its undermining the speaker's intended homiletic point. Now the fact that Chaucer borrows the exemplum for the Pardoner's hypocritical 'moral tale' from John of Wales's manual for preachers is not without its irony, of course, but that the particular emphasis which the Pardoner puts on the exemplum derives from Jerome's exhortations to virgins unsophisticated in the ways of the world to resist the evils of drink, lest they be seduced and corrupted, becomes an even more telling comment on its appropriator, a cunning and ruthless exploiter who seeks only to 'wynne'. Perhaps not coincidentally, then, the Pardoner's confessed desire for profit at the expense of the innocent and vulnerable,

... the povreste page,
Or of the povereste wydwe in a village,
Al sholde hir children sterve for famyne,

finds its natural expression and resolution in the image of him as drinker and lecher:

Nay, I wol drynke licour of the vyne
And have a joly wenche in every toun.

(VI[C], 449-53)

Indeed, the Pardoner's pausing before his Prologue to 'drynke and eten of a cake' (VI[C], 322), in addition to its undeniable parody of the Eucharist,¹⁶ clearly seems to picture the symbolic opposite of how Jerome in the letter alludes to Daniel: "'desideriorum uir" appellatus est, quia panem desiderii non manducauit et uinum concupiscentiae non bibit'¹⁷ [he is called 'the man of desires', because he did not eat the bread of desire or drink the wine of lust].

Passing from the evils of drink to those of gluttony, the Pardoner offers the conventional example of Adam having lost paradise for himself and his descendants through overeating:

Adam oure fader, and his wyf also,
Fro Paradys to labour and to wo
Were dryven for that vice, it is no drede.
For whil that Adam fasted, as I rede,
He was in Paradys; and whan that he
Eet of the fruyt deffended on the tree,
Anon he was out cast to wo and peyne.

(VI[C], 505-11)

As has long been known, the source of these lines is most certainly Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum* 2.15, in which, after noting the divine prohibition of eating from one tree in the Garden as evidence that abstinence from food was required to sanctify the blessedness of paradise, Jerome states: 'Quamdiu jejunavit Adam in paradiso fuit: comedit et ejectus est statim duxit uxorem, . . .' which appears as a gloss, with citation to Jerome's treatise, in both the Hengwrt and Ellesmere manuscripts. *PardT*, 508-11 offer a close translation, though it should perhaps be borne in mind that the 'wo and peyne' to which Jerome is referring in his diatribe against Jovinian is rather pointed and specific. For the quoted passage continues, '... ejectus statim duxit uxorem. Qui jejunos in paradiso virgo fuerat, satur in terra matrimonio copulatur' [he was no sooner cast out than he married a wife.

While he fasted in paradise he remained a virgin; sated on earth, he bound himself with the tie of marriage]. In this context, *Adv. Jov.*, in longing for a return by abstinence to the Paradise lost through gluttony, is really advocating, beneath the figure, a 'return' to pre-lapsarian virginity (which Jerome understands in more than merely literal terms) from the post-lapsarian state of marriage. This is not at all to the purpose of the Pardoner, who had earlier announced his marriage plans to the Wife of Bath and the other pilgrims and, regardless of the effect of her tale of marital woe, hardly desires to live as a virgin.

I suggest that for this passage in the *Pardoner's Tale* Chaucer was reminded of the lines in *Adv. Jov.* by a passage in Letter 22 only a short paragraph below the lines he read regarding Lot:

Alioquin ad exemplum horum poteris tibi ipsa colligere,
quomodo et primus de paradiso homo uentri magis oboediens
quam Deo in hanc lacrimarum deiectus est uallem . . .

[In any case the examples I have given will enable you to understand why the first man, obeying his belly more than God, was cast out of Paradise into this vale of tears.]

It is somewhat surprising that although Jerome directs these remarks to the unmarried Eustochium, he does not turn the exemplum here against the institution of marriage, but speaks more literally to condemn gluttony and approve simple fare, no matter what he might have thought would have ultimately befallen the virgin who gives herself over to sumptuous feasting. Chaucer, with both texts before him, returns to Letter 22 from his translation of the lines of *Adv. Jov.* (to which the letter had led him in the first place) to render 'lacrimarum . . . uallem' by the general and non-specific 'wo and peyne', and by so doing portrays the Pardoner as unwilling to imagine mankind's own responsibility in returning to innocence. For according to the Pardoner, Adam's gluttony, the 'original of oure dampnacioun,/ Til Crist hadde boght us with his blood agayn' (VI[C], 500-01) and all the other stains of even the 'moost enveloped in synne', can be easily absolved by the pardons he has available for sale.

The section on gluttony, as has been carefully detailed by Lewis,¹⁹ is greatly indebted to the *De miseria condicionis humanae*, at least part of which treatise Chaucer claims elsewhere to have translated. In particular, *De Miseria* 2.17.21-26, Innocent's quotations of Ecclesiasticus 37.32-34 and 1 Cor. 6.13, are translated by

PardT, 513-16, 522-23, with the intervening material,

Allas, the shorte throte, the tendre mouth,
Maketh that est and west and north and south,
In erthe, in eir, in water, men to swynke
To gete a glotoun deyntee mete and drynke,
(VI[C], 517-20)

quite clearly drawn from Innocent's lines earlier in the same chapter,²⁰ as are *PardT*, 534-36 (from *De Miseria* 2.18.2-5) and *PardT*, 537-46 (from *De Miseria* 2.17.5-14). But I suggest that it was Jerome's letter to Eustochium that again served as Chaucer's imaginative stimulus and primary source. In the same short chapter in which Jerome declaims concerning Adam's expulsion from Paradise, he explicitly quotes first 1 Cor. 6.13 (reflected, as we have seen, in *PardT*, 522-23) and then Phil. 3.19, 'Quorum deus venter est', to which latter verse Chaucer restores its full context by translating Phil. 3.18-19:

The apostel wepyng seith ful pitously,
'Ther walken manye of whiche yow toold have I –
I seye it now wepyng, with pitous voys –
They been enemys of Cristes croys,
Of which the ende is deeth; wombe is hir god!'
(VI[C], 529-33)

In treating gluttony in the Parson's Tale, Chaucer took over from the abbreviated version of Peraldus's *Summa de vitiis* known as *Quoniam* the quotation from Phillipians, in a context that, as in *PardT* and *De Miseria*, explicitly alludes to Adam's expulsion from paradise on account of that sin.²¹ But in no source or analogue brought forward other than Jerome's letter to Eustochium does the writer move from the Adam exemplum to the citation of *both* biblical verses that Chaucer translates. Chaucer used the outline supplied by chapter 10 of the letter, first modifying the allusion to Adam in light of Jerome's later expression of the expulsion in *Adv. Jov.*; he was likewise reminded by the letter of a similar passage in Innocent's treatise and, possibly because Jerome himself had explicitly stated that his purpose in the letter was not to treat gluttony in any exhaustive fashion, Chaucer culled from Innocent's book a number of striking images (e.g. 'O wombe! O bely!

O stynkyng cod,/ Fulfilled of dong and of corrupcion!' [*PardT*, 534-35]) to supply graphic elaboration on Jerome's schematic outline.

If I have succeeded to this point in demonstrating Chaucer's use of a fairly concentrated section of Jerome's rather extensive letter, perhaps I may be allowed to speculate on how other parts of the letter may have been imaginatively transformed by the poet. Chaucer may have been struck by a passage toward the end of the letter (ch. 32) in which Jerome denounces avarice on the strength of 1 Timothy 6.10 – in Jerome's reading 'Radix malorum omnium est avaritia' – in order to introduce a brief exemplum in which a hundred gold coins left by a monk at his death cause dissension among his brothers until it is decided that this dangerous treasure should be buried with its original owner. Has Chaucer actively substituted for this meagre, straightforward vignette the splendid and complex tale of the revellers who kill, and are killed, for the gold they discover beneath the tree in illustration of the same scriptural text? We cannot know; but if he did so, it was an alteration that further enriched the irony of an avaricious preacher warning of cupidity's fatal attractions in a tale told both for and about himself.

Much closer, however, to those passages of the Letter dealing with drinking and gluttony – indeed, only a few lines beyond the sections Chaucer seems to have worked from *ad seriatem* – is a reference to the discomfited Sampson, portrayed by Jerome in the conventional fashion as a victim of lust:

Sampson leone fortior, saxo durior et qui unus et nudus mille est
persecutus armatos, in Dalilae mollescit amplexibus.²²

[Samson was stronger than a lion and harder than rock; alone he
chased a thousand armed men; but in Dalila's arms he was
softened.]

The Pardoner, apparently reminded of a drunkard's nasal exhalations by the sound of the biblical hero's name, turns the allusion to a new purpose:

And thurgh thy dronke nose semeth the soun
As though thou seydest any "Sampoun, Sampoun!"

.....
That whan a man hath dronken draughtes thre,
And weneth that he be at hoom in Chepe,
He is in Spaigne, right at the toune of Lepe –

Nat at the Rochele, ne at Burdeux toun –
And thanne wol he seye "Sampsoun, Sampsoun!"
(VI[C], 553-72)

The inappropriateness of the biblical adaptation here – the Pardoner himself admits '[a]nd yet, Good woot, Sampsoun drank nevere no wyn' – plus the repetition of the (not very funny) punch line just after we hear that 'dronkenesse is verray sepulture / Of mannes wit and his discrecioun', might be seen to add some additional circumstantial support for the old critical view that for all the Pardoner's railing against drink, his own train of thought has perhaps been temporarily derailed by the insidiously creeping 'wyn of Spaigne'.²³ Be that as it may, one wonders how, and why, this adaptation of the Samson allusion has been made. Pratt discovered in the *Communiloquium* (I.iii.3) a citation to Proverbs 31 that went beyond the treatment of the same material in Innocent's *De miseria* and Chaucer's own Melibee by quoting along with the second half of Prov. 31.4 ('nullum secretum ubi regnat ebrietas') the first half of the verse ('Noli regibus o lamuel dare vinum') and the first half of the next verse ('ne forte bibant et obliviscantur'), all three of which are clearly echoed by the Pardoner:

Prov. xxxj, dicitur Noli regibus o *lamuel dare vinum*, quia
nullum secretum ubi regnat ebrietas, ne forte bibant et
obliviscantur *iudicorum* dei et cetera; unde et principes gentiles
abstinebant se a gula et luxuria, precipue ut *triumpharent* de
inimicis

In whom that drynke *hath dominacioun*
He kan *no conseil* kepe, it is no drede.

But herkneth, lordynges, o word, I yow preye,
That alle the sovereyn actes, dar I seye,
Of *victories* in the Olde Testament,
Thurgh verray God, that is omnipotent,
Were doon in *abstinence* and in preyere.
Looketh the Bible, and ther ye may it leere.

And over al this, avyseth yow right wel

What was comaund unto *Lamuel* –
Nat Samuel, but Lamuel, seye I;
Redeth the Bible, and fynde it expresly
Of wyn-yevyng to hem that han *justice*.

(VI[C], 560-61, 73-78, 83-87)

Pratt concluded that '[d]espite his double protestation . . . the Pardoner had not been reading the Bible at all; here as elsewhere he appears to have been indebted to John of Wales'.²⁴

It may be, however, that only after encountering Proverbs 31.4 in Innocent's treatise did Chaucer work from the fuller citation supplied by John of Wales. For the quotation of Prov. 31.4, which in the *Pardoner's Tale* is rather widely separated from the echoes of its companion biblical verses, appears in Chaucer, in a passage that leads directly into the Samson material, in an order of presentation identical to that of Innocent's treatise:

Quid turpius ebrioso, cui feto in ore, tremor in corpore, qui
promit stulta, prodit occulta; cui mens alienatur, facies
transformatur? 'Nullum enim secretum ubi regnat ebrietas'.²⁵

[What is more unsightly than a drunkard, in whose mouth is a
stench, in whose body a trembling; who utters foolish things,
betrays secrets; whose reason is taken away, whose face is
transformed? 'For there is no secret where drunkenness
reigneth'.]

O dronke man, disfigured is thy face,
Sour is thy breeth, foul artow to embrace,

.....
Thou fallest as it were a styked swyn;
Thy tonge is lost, and al thyn honeste cure,
For dronkenesse is verray sepulture
Of mannes wit and his discrecioun.
In whom that drynke hath dominacioun
He kan no conseil kepe; it is no drede.

(VI[C], 551-61)

This short chapter in the *De miseria* ends with Innocent's allusion to two biblical figures, Jonadab and John the Baptist, who, like Samson, 'drank nevere no wyn':

Filius Rechab et filius Zacharie vinum et siceram et omne quod
inebriare poterat non biberunt.²⁶

[The Son of Rechab and the son of Zachary did not drink wine
or cider or anything that could inebriate.]

Chaucer chose not to reproduce these particular exempla; instead, guided by the citation of Prov. 31, he most probably turned to, or recalled, the biblical source itself. And in that famous chapter (which goes on to present the oft-quoted description of the *mulier fortis*), Lemuel's mother warns not only of the evils of drink, but of the dangerous surrender, through lust, of a man's virility:

Ne dederis mulieribus substantiam tuam, et divitias tuas ad
deledos reges.

Noli regibus, o Lamule, noli regibus dare vinum, quia nullum
secretum est ubi regnat dare vinum.²⁷

[Give not thy strength unto women, nor thy ways to that which
destroyeth kings]

Under the influence of these lines, Chaucer thus substitutes for the virtuous teetotallers mentioned in the *De miseria* an allusion to Sampson, recalled comically through drunken snores, to illustrate the 'lecherous thyng' that is wine. Chaucer may have found all he needed for this happy invention in John of Wales, who offers the pithy comment 'Amor enim mulieris eneruauit potentiam Sampsonis',²⁸ but it is at least as likely that the more striking and vivid phrasing of the allusion in Jerome's letter served as the poet's immediate stimulus for the Pardoner's flight of fancy, an idiosyncratic appropriation of traditional material that, amusing as it is, cannot fail to call the reader's attention to what has been suppressed, the image of the man effeminized through lust.

And in this regard, I suggest that Chaucer may have been guided by Letter 22 in the construction of the Pardoner's character in a larger and more fundamental respect, i.e. by the scathing portrait Jerome supplies of the effeminate, lustful parasite-prelate. It is a characterization to which Jerome often returns in his

writings, but one which perhaps finds its most striking depiction in the letter to Eustochium, where he warns his correspondent, and other unsuspecting females, of those seducers, 'quibus feminei contra apostolum crines, hircorum barba . . .' [wearing their hair long like a woman's, contrary to the apostle's precept, and with a goat's beard] and those others, would-be presbyters and deacons, who care only 'si bene oleant, si pes laxa pelle non folleat. crines calamistri uestigio rotantur'²⁹ [if they are well scented, if their shoes fit without a crease. Their hair shows traces of the curling iron]. In Letter 52.5 readers and acolytes are similarly described as with hair made wavy from the curling iron, while monks and priests ingratiate themselves to the faithful with 'lover's nonsense' like 'Mel meum, lumen meum meumque desiderium' [My sweetie, my light, and my desire]. In Letter 54.13, the widow Furia is cautioned to avoid the society of 'wanton long-haired dandies', and never to be seen in the company of a 'curled steward', a 'handsome foster-brother', or 'a fair ruddy footman'. In Letter 130.19, explicitly citing his earlier letter to Eustochium, Jerome again inveighs against those same fancily styled and well perfumed youths. And in *Adv. Jov.* this same figure is turned against Jovinianus himself, whom Jerome pictures as clad in linen and silk, strutting like an exquisite, ruddy of cheek, sleek of skin, with hair smoothed down behind; indeed, Jovinianus leads a veritable swine-herd of such finely coiffed fellows, not to mention their female counterparts: 'Amazons . . . venientes contra se viros ad pugnam libidinum provocantes'. [Amazons . . . who challenge the men who come against them to a battle of lust.]³⁰

In an important essay³¹ that exposes the inherent weakness of the evidence to support the theories of the Pardoner's supposed eunuchry, hermaphroditism and/or homosexuality, C. David Benson convincingly argued that the 'real perversion of this pilgrim is not sexual but moral', and that the 'vague and contradictory hints of sexual peculiarity' presented in one part of his portrait exist 'to prepare us for the more serious ecclesiastical corruptions to follow',³² which constitute the real subject of his presentation in the *Tales*. In a largely complementary study, Richard Firth Green,³³ while accepting Benson's contention that the thrust of the characterization is away from the Pardoner's sexuality *per se* and in the direction of its moral import, finds implicit in Benson's argument evidence that the Pardoner's *heterosexual* lechery is portrayed through the 'long-established tradition that equates sexual intemperance with physical debilitation'.³⁴ I suggest that a powerful influence on Chaucer in this regard was exercised by the effeminate heterosexual caricature Jerome supplies in his various letters, chiefly Letter 22. In debunking the Pardoner's supposed homosexuality, Benson shrewdly notes among other

heterosexual details the similarity of the Pardoner's 'smal' voice and that of the curled, effeminate, and desperately heterosexual Absolon, as well as the early understanding, in the *Tale of Beryn*, of the Pardoner as 'a randy, if silly, heterosexual whose quest for a "joly wenche in every toun" causes him to be thoroughly duped'.³⁵ I suggest that the figure as it came to Chaucer from Jerome proved extremely adaptable to various medieval satiric traditions: to the courtly-love tradition, as the squire manqué; to the antifraternat tradition, as the lecherous opportunist ingratiating himself to women under the guise of religious solicitude; and to the *de casibus* tradition, as the strong man destroyed through a woman's wiles.

It needs to be pointed out, however, that while the General Prologue's comparison of the Pardoner to a 'mare' offers scant support for his alleged homosexuality – and, indeed, conventionally suggests the (heterosexual) lasciviousness of women³⁶ – the comparison of a him to 'a geldyng' almost inescapably suggests the metaphor, if not the fact, of eunuchry. But how is it possible to understand eunuchry in the context of feminizing heterosexual intemperance?³⁷ Once again, Jerome points the way. In virtually every one of the letters quoted above that employ the figure of the effeminate parasite-prelate, and in *Adv. Jov.* as well, that image is paired, or may be said to alternate, with that of the eunuch or the company of eunuchs in attendance on the lady or the ruler. In Letter 22.16 the same rich widows who ride in their litters behind a row of eunuchs [*ordo semivir*] are exploited by flattering clergy; in Letter 54.13 the same figure of the train of eunuchs characterizes the woman who employs them as a bride fit for Nero or Sardanapallus, the classical example of the effeminized heterosexual dissolute; in *Adv. Jov.* 1.47, quoting Theophrastus's 'golden book' on marriage, Jerome describes the position of the hapless husband, forced to pay respect to the lady's maid, her curled dandy, and 'the eunuch who ministers to the safe indulgence of her lust'. Jerome may be said to explain himself on this matter in Letter 130.13: 'Again in selecting for yourself eunuchs and maids and servingmen look rather to their characters than to their good looks; for, whatever their age or sex, and even if mutilation ensures in them a compulsory chastity, you must take account of their dispositions, for these cannot be operated on save by the fear of Christ'.³⁸ As with Chaucer's Pardoner, the literal, physical condition exists largely as emblem of an interior spiritual or moral state; in Fleming's happy phrasing with regard to another of Chaucer's characters, '[t]he visual effects are coherent in their verisimilitude, but they are controlled by external iconographic reference'.³⁹ In such a context, even

that *rarissima avis*, the *eunuchus ex nativitate*, is not inevitably a virgin, and may conceivably be very much a seducer.

Also in Letter 130.13 Jerome sees the threat of such characters in their loose talk and buffoonery, which is intended to undermine the virgin's self-restraint and place her in jeopardy, for '[a]bandoned men often make use of a single light expression to try the gates of chastity'. As elsewhere in this letter, Jerome has consciously in mind his earlier letter to Eustochium (ch. 24), where he warns:

Ne declines aurem tuam in uerba mala. saepe indecens aliquid loquentes temptant mentis arbitrium. si libenter audias, uirgo, quod dicitur, si ad ridicula quaeque soluaris, quidquid dixeris, laudant; quidquid negaueris, negant.

[Do not incline your ear to mischievous words. Men often make an indecent remark, that they may test a virgin's real purpose. If you hear it with pleasure and are ready to relax at a joke, they approve of all you say, and anything you deny they also deny.]⁴⁰

Can we deny that in the Pardoner's performance, which builds toward the explicit proposition to sell the phony relics, an analogous seduction is undertaken? Harry Bailey, perhaps too smugly confident of his position vis-à-vis the physically repellent Pardoner, encourages his 'beel amy' to '[t]elle us som myrthe or japes right anon' (VI[C] 319); later, and still hopelessly literal in his defense against the Pardoner's coaxings, he will resort to the threat of a mutilation that 'ensures . . . a compulsory chastity', as if merely to 'unman' the seducer physically could render him harmless. But the *gentils*, who already on the pilgrimage have heard without demur more than one risque fabliau, would have gladdened Jerome's heart in reacting with an unexpected, and rather maidenly, prudishness to the Host's invitation: 'Nay, lat hym telle us of no ribaudye!' (VI[C], 324)

NOTES

I am grateful to C. David Benson (University of Connecticut) and Ernest Gallo (University of Massachusetts) for helpful comments on an earlier version of this essay.

¹ Robert A. Pratt, 'Chaucer and the Hand that Fed Him', *Speculum*, 41 (1966): 619-42; for the *Pardoner's Tale*, esp. 631-35. I quote here from p. 619. For the *Communiloquium*, see the recent work by Jenny Swanson, *John of Wales: A Study of the Works and Ideas of a Thirteenth-Century Friar* (Cambridge, 1989), esp. pp. 63-166. Swanson determines that the *Communiloquium*, extant in two recensions in 144 MSS, was most probably produced between c. 1265 and 1269-70.

² Pratt, 'Chaucer and the Hand that Fed Him', p. 640.

³ Pratt, 'Chaucer and the Hand that Fed Him', p. 635. I should note that John V. Fleming, 'Anticlerical Satire as Theological Essay: Chaucer's *Summoner's Tale*', *Thalia*, 6, 1 (1983), 21, note 19, remarks that Pratt's title echoed a phrase of Beryl Smalley which, given the poet's extensive use of fraternal materials in that tale, is 'at best unhappy' and inappropriate; but Fleming (p. 15) agrees with Pratt on the strong probability that the Senecan exempla in *SumT* (just as those of the *PardT*) came to the poet indirectly, from the preacher's manual.

⁴ All references to the *Tales* are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, General Editor, Larry D. Benson, General Editor (Boston, 1987).

⁵ *Seneca 17 Letters*, ed. and trans. C. D. N. Costa (Warminster, Wiltshire, 1988), pp. 68-69 (Letter 83.19). Costa compares Seneca's Letter 59.15: 'ebrietas quae unius horae hilarem insaniam longi temporis taedio pensat' [drunkenness, which balances the gay madness of a single hour with a time of weary tedium].

⁶ See in this regard the valuable chapter 'The Letters in the Literature of the Twelfth Century', in L. D. Reynolds, *The Medieval Tradition of Seneca's Letters* (Oxford, 1965), pp. 112-24.

⁷ For this letter, see especially J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies* (New York, 1975), pp. 42-43, 100-03; and David S. Wiesen, *St. Jerome as a Satirist* (Ithaca, 1964), pp. 119-28. For Eustochium herself and Jerome's association with her and other virtuous Roman women, see Jo Ann McNamara, 'Cornelia's Daughters: Paula and Eustochium', *Women's Studies*, 11 (1984), 9-27; Elizabeth A. Clark, *Jerome, Chrysostom, and Friends: Essays and Translations* (New York and Toronto, 1979), pp. 35-106, esp. 45-52, 71-76; F. A. Wright, trans., *Select Letters of St. Jerome* (London and New York, 1933), pp. 483-97 (Appendix I, 'On Jerome's Correspondence with Roman Women'); Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York, 1988), pp. 367-73; and Kelly, *Jerome*, pp. 91-103. For the text of Jerome's letters I use the edition of Isidorus Hilberg, *Sancti Evsepii Hieronymi Epistvlae* CSEL 54-56 (Vindobonae and Lipsiae, 1910-18); unless otherwise noted,

translations are my own, under comparison with those of W. H. Fremantle (with the assistance of G. Lewis and W. G. Martley), *The Principal Works of St. Jerome* (1892; rpt. Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1983 – A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, 2nd ser. 6); F. A. Wright, ed. and trans., *Select Letters of St. Jerome*; and *The Letters of St. Jerome*, trans. Charles Christopher Mierow, Vols. 1-3 (New York and Ramsey, NJ, 1963 [Ancient Christian Writers, 33-35]).

⁸ See, for example, Letter 130.19, where Jerome says that the language he used in Letter 22 gave offence to many, 'because everyone applied to himself that which I said and, rather than welcoming my cautions, spurned me for having accused him of deeds'. But, gloats Jerome, while they have all passed away, his book remains. Rufinus, *Apologia contra Hieronymus* 2.5 notes that the enemies of Christianity were gladdened by Jerome's reproaches of Christians' conduct in this letter; interestingly enough, Jerome does not answer this charge in his virtual point-by-point rebuttal, the *Epistula adversus Rufinum*, ed. P. Lardet, CCCL Series Latina 79 (Turnholt, 1982); see ch. 32, where he takes up merely Rufinus' indictment of him for continuing to read the pagan authors. Eustochium's older sister Blesilla had turned under Jerome's tutelage from a gay young widow to the most rigorous ascetic. When she died only a few months after her conversion (in 384), many claimed Jerome's teachings were responsible, and such public criticism contributed to his decision to leave Rome for the Holy Land, where Eustochium, then about fifteen years of age, and her mother Paula soon joined him; see Jerome, Letters 38 and 39, and Kelly, *Jerome*, pp. 110-11.

⁹ Bernard Lambert, O. S. B., *Bibliotheca Hieronymiana Manuscripta: La tradition manuscrite des oeuvres de Saint Jerome*, Tome Ib (The Hague, 1969), pp. 450-60.

¹⁰ See Siegfried Wenzel's Explanatory Notes to *ParvT* in *The Riverside Chaucer*, pp. 958-59, notes to 318-979, 322-49, 345-46; and Alfred L. Kellogg, 'St Augustine and the *Parson's Tale*', (1952), rpt. in Alfred L. Kellogg, *Chaucer, Langland, Arthur* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1972), p. 348 and p. 352, note 25. Bert Dillon, *A Chaucer Dictionary* (Boston, 1974), p. 124 traces *ProWB*, 71-72 to Letter 22.20, but Chaucer's source here is almost certainly Jerome, *Adv. Jov.* 1.12. Lynn King Morris, *Chaucer Source and Analogue Criticism: A Cross Referenced Guide* (New York and London, 1985), pp. 274-75 does not distinguish among the various letters of Jerome to Eustochium; if Chaucer had Jerome in mind for the *corones two* of virginity and martyrdom of *SNT*, 220ff., he was recalling Letter 108.32, written in 404 on the death of Paula, not Letter 22.

¹¹ Pratt, 'Chaucer and the Hand that Fed Him', p. 634.

¹² I quote from *Communiloquium siue summa collationum Johannis gallensis* (Strassburg, 1489; rpt. Wakefield, Yorkshire, 1964), IV.iii.7, which refers to the letter in the pre-modern numbering as *Epistula XLIII*. This accessible modern reprint is of the shorter recension of the text; there are no significant variants for the passages quoted in this essay in the MSS of the longer

recension which I have inspected, BL Royal 6.B.XI and BL Harley 632, though early printed editions of the longer recension, that of 1481 by Johann Zainer of Ulm (a reprint of the 1475 Augsburg edition by A. Sorg) and that of 1496 by Georgius Arrivabenus of Venice, interestingly omit the apostrophe 'o lamuel' from I.iii.3.

¹³ Jerome, Letter 22.7; cf. Jerome, *Vita Hilarionis* 7 (PL, 23:32A), where the girls are naked. Brown, *The Body and Society*, p. 375, note 43 notes that Evagrius describes exactly the same experience.

¹⁴ Jerome, Letter 22.8.

¹⁵ Jerome, Letter 22.8, trans. Wright, *Jerome: Select Letters*, p. 73. Peter Taitt, 'In Defence of Lot', *Notes and Queries*, ns 18 (1971), 284-85, argues that Chaucer and Langland both used as their immediate source for the passage Peter Comestor's *Historia Scholastica*, which contains (ch. 54) a discussion of Lot's incest that unlike the Vulgate does not exonerate the drunken Lot, as well as an account of John the Baptist's beheading (ch. 73). But Comestor's account does not, like the *Pardoner's Tale*, make drunkenness a motive; and it should be noted that Comestor's comment on Lot is a paraphrase of Jerome's comments, which he cites along with the *Glossa Ordinaria* (which also relies on Jerome's exegesis): 'Lot is unpardonable . . . because he was drunk; and sin was the cause of sin'. Pratt, 'Chaucer and *Les Cronicles* of Nicholas Trevet', in *Studies in Language, Literature, and Culture of the Middle Ages and Later*, ed. E. Bagby Atwood and Archibald A. Hill (Austin, 1969), p. 304, brings forward Trevet's account of John's murder, which draws on Comestor but, again without mentioning Herod's drunkenness, at least offers a parallel for *PardT*, 491 'at his feeste' ('ala fest herodes'). Pratt also sees a parallel of the description of Lot, 'so dronke he was' in Trevet's addition to the biblical narrative: 'Et cil loth taunt fu enyver, qil ne savoit qu'aunt celles filles la procherount ne qu'aunt eles ceo departirent'. From a reference in the extremely valuable study of Lawrence Besserman, *Chaucer and the Bible: A Critical Review of Research, Indexes, and Bibliography* (New York and London, 1988), p. 127. I note that Dudley Rapelje Johnson, 'Chaucer and the Bible', Unpublished dissertation, University of Yale (1941) p. 166, cites an allusion in John Bromyard, *Summa Praedicatorum* I, 229 to Gratian's *Decretum*, 'so close to Chaucer's text that it was probably quoted in his direct source': 'Inebriaverunt Loth filiae ejus, et se nescienti miscuerunt. Quapropter culpandus est quidem, non tamen quantum ille incestus, sed quantum illa ebrietas meretur'. I have been unable to trace the reference, which seems to depend on Jerome, in either John de Bromyard, *Summa Praedicatorum* [Basel, not after 1484] or the *Decretum* (PL 187). In *Decretum*, Pars I, Dist. XXXV, Cap. VIII. 4, Gratian writes: 'Legimus etiam quod patrem Loth inebriaverint filiae in monte, ad quem timentes incendium Sodomitarium confugerant, et habitabant in spelunca'.

Edmund Reiss, 'Biblical Parody: Chaucer's "Distortions" of Scripture', in David L. Jeffrey, ed., *Chaucer and the Scriptural Tradition* (Ottawa, 1984), p. 59, suggests that the Pardoner's term

'unkyndely', given the daughters' motives for incest, is an additional misuse of the biblical account.

¹⁶ See Robert E. Nichols, Jr, 'The Pardoner's Ale and Cake', *PMLA*, 82 (1967), 498-504.

¹⁷ Jerome, Letter 22.9; In this passage, Jerome conflates Dan. 10.3 and 10.19. 'Desideriorum vir' is usually taken as 'man greatly beloved'; the Hebrew translates literally as 'a man of loveliness'.

¹⁸ Jerome, Letter 22.10. Johnson, 'Chaucer and the Bible', pp. 167-68, compares Gratian, *Decretum*, Pars I, Dist. XXXVI [error for XXXV], Cap. VIII.1 (PL 187.197): 'In paradiso abstinentia, post paradisum edendi lascivia inceptit . . . Itaque gula de paradiso regnantem expulit, abstinentia ad paradisum revocavit errantem'.

¹⁹ Lotario dei Segni (Pope Innocent III), *De Miseria Condicionis Humane*, ed. Robert E. Lewis. The Chaucer Library. (Athens, Georgia, 1978), pp. 8-11.

²⁰ *De Miseria*, ed. and trans. Lewis, II.17.1-5, 14 (p. 9): 'Nunc autem gulosus non sufficiunt fructus arborum, non genera leguminum, non radices herbarum, non pisces maris, non bestie terre, non aves celi . . . Ceterum tam brevis est gule voluptas'.

²¹ Siegfried Wenzel, 'The Source of Chaucer's Seven Deadly Sins', *Traditio*, 30 (1974), 351-78; see esp. pp. 370-71. As Wenzel remarks, the section on *Gula* offers the strongest proof that Chaucer's source was *Quoniam*, not Peraldus.

²² Jerome, Letter 22.12.

²³ Joseph E. Grennen, "'Sampsoun" in the *Canterbury Tales*: Chaucer Adapting a Source', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 67 (1966), 117-22, suggests that Chaucer was working from *Le Livre de la chevalier de La Tour Landry, pour l'enseignement de ses filles*, ch. 89, which, mainly concerned with the story of Samson (described as someone who maintained his strength through temperance), also contains a description of a winebiber that parallels Chaucer's order of details in describing the loss of control of the countenance, then the limbs, and finally the mind. John Halverson, 'Chaucer's Pardoner and the Progress of Criticism', *Chaucer Review*, 4 (1970), 184-85 declares the question of the Pardoner's inebriation 'moribund'; but Middle English literature occasionally shows a rather lively interest in the representation of the speech of the less than sober: Sister Mary Clemente Davlin, *A Game of Heuene: Word Play and the Meaning of Piers Plowman B* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 84 provocatively suggests that *Piers Plowman* B.11.433-34, 'And shame shrapeþ hise cloþes and his shynnes wassheþ,/ Thanne woot þe dronken [wye] wherfore he is to blame', with 'shynes' (i.e. shins) a metaphor for 'sins', may be wittily imitating the way a drunken speaker might slur 'sins'; she likewise calls attention to the meaningless 'drunken' repetitions in a lyric in MS Rawlinson D.913 printed by R. H. Robbins, *Secular Lyrics of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1952), p. 106, no. 117.

Perhaps merely coincidentally, the *Speculum humane salvationis* includes illustrations of the Philistines mocking the blinded Samson and drunken Noah mocked by Ham as Old Testament

types of Jesus' being blindfolded, spat upon, and beaten. See Adrian Wilson and Joyce Lancaster Wilson, *A Medieval Mirror: Speculum humanae salvationis 1324-1500* (Berkeley, Calif., 1984), pp. 178-79.

²⁴ Pratt, 'Chaucer and the Hand that Fed Him', p. 634.

²⁵ *De Miseria*, ed. and trans. Lewis, II.19.1-4 (pp. 167-69).

²⁶ *De Miseria*, ed. and trans. Lewis, II.19.14-16.

²⁷ Proverbs, 31.3-4.

²⁸ John of Wales, *Communiloquium* (1489), I.iii.3.

²⁹ Jerome, Letter 22.28.

³⁰ Jerome, *Adv. Jov.*, 2.37.

³¹ C. David Benson, 'Chaucer's Pardoner: His Sexuality and Modern Critics', *Mediaevalia*, 8 (1985 [for 1982]), 337-49.

³² Benson, 'Chaucer's Pardoner', p. 346.

³³ Richard Firth Green, 'The Sexual Normality of Chaucer's Pardoner', *Mediaevalia*, 8 (1985 [for 1982]), 351-58.

³⁴ Green, 'Sexual Normality', p. 354.

³⁵ Benson, 'Chaucer's Pardoner', p. 345; see also Green, 'Sexual Normality', p. 353.

³⁶ Beryl Rowland, *Blind Beasts: Chaucer's Animal World* (Kent, Ohio, 1971), p. 100, quotes Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus*, 6.99: 'et equam ideo vocamus feminam luxuriam appetem'.

³⁷ The classic study of the Pardoner as 'spiritual eunuch' is, of course, that of Robert P. Miller, 'Chaucer's Pardoner, the Spiritual Eunuch, and the *Pardoner's Tale*', *Speculum*, 30 (1955), 465-81, which discounts in its understanding of the Pardoner's description and behaviour the 'natural eunuch' (the first of those described in Matt. 19.12) in favour of the two contrasting definitions of 'spiritual eunuchry', i.e. those who either lead, or wilfully turn away from, the life of chastity, charity, and good works. In Letter 22.19, Jerome actively invokes the traditional exegesis of Matt. 19 in drawing a distinction between those made eunuchs by necessity (presumably *ex nativitate* or by castration) and the good cleric, who is a eunuch by choice. I am suggesting, however, that while Jerome partakes of the tradition (established by Martial, *Epigrams*, V.61; Juvenal, *Satires*, 6.368ff.) that satirized involvement with testicular eunuchs (who, unlike those fully castrated, could indulge in intercourse), he also develops the familiar spiritual sense of eunuch as one unproductive of good works, in the figure of effeminized heterosexual dissolute, as foil to the chaste but fecund cleric. Perhaps in this Jerome is influenced by Rabanus Maurus (*Expositio in Matt.*, PL 107.1019) who defines the man-made eunuchs as those who through idolatrous worship are softened into women (*emolliuntur in feminas*).

³⁸ Jerome, Letter 130.13, trans. Fremantle, p. 267.

³⁹ Fleming, 'Anticlerical Satire', p. 8.

⁴⁰ Jerome, Letter 22.24, trans. Wright, p. 105.