

In Gabrielle Spiegel book, *The Past as Text: The Theory and Practices of Medieval Historiography*, she widens the cascade of historical purchases on literary text by theorizing a “social logic of the text.”<sup>1</sup> Spiegel explains that “texts represent situated uses of language” and that “language itself acquires meaning and authority only within specific social and historical settings”.<sup>2</sup> Spiegel analysis illuminates the culturally specific meaning of a text. The text “both mirror and generate social realities, are constituted by and constitute social and discursive formations”.<sup>3</sup> A piece of text is an embodied preservation of the social and cultural constructs of a given time. The “textuality absorbs the social into its own linguistically” and through this process the “language constitutes meaning”.<sup>4</sup> Spiegel analysis allows us to realize that texts, of any discourse, have advanced meanings that “are not self-evident, transparent, or transcendent” and that “texts are best approached as socially situated utterances”.<sup>5</sup> There is an inseparable relationship between literature and society. Literature and society are to “be construed as systems of signs whose relationship to one another takes the form of commensurability or homology”.<sup>6</sup> The surrounding situations and dominate ideologies of a time, gives meanings to words that are encased within literature.

In Jonathan Culler’s essay, *Literary History, Allegory and Semiology*, he elaborates on the relationship between literature and society ~~forms~~ and argues it forms the basis of cultural

<sup>1</sup> Gabrielle M. Spiegel, *The Past as Text: The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography* / (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997),15

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.,15

<sup>3</sup> Gabrielle M. Spiegel, *Romancing the Past: The Rise of Vernacular Prose Historiography in Thirteenth-Century France* (University of California Press, 1993),11

<sup>4</sup> Spiegel, *The Past as Text*,15

<sup>5</sup> THERESA TINKLE, “Contested Authority: Jerome and the Wife of Bath on 1 Timothy 2,” *The Chaucer Review* 44, no. 3 (2010): 268–93, doi:10.5325/chaucerrev.44.3.0268., 274

<sup>6</sup> Spiegel, *Romancing the Past*, 13

Comment [JWG1]: Needs a title.

Comment [JWG2]: These footnote numbers are super-small. Make sure they that they are legible for your reader

Comment [JWG3]: Is there a reason THERESA TINKLE is wholly capitalized? If there isn't, then make sure that your citations are standardized, both to a style guide and to each other.

Comment [JWG4]: Did you know that Culler works here at Cornell?

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history and literary history.<sup>7</sup> Culler writes (?) that “literature and the culture [or society] of which it forms a part as institutions composed of symbolic systems which enable actions or objects to have meaning”.<sup>8</sup> Literature and society gives life to the meaning and allows it to attach to certain objects or actions. These devices and uses of meaning, like that of literature and genres, are the production and organization meaning.<sup>9</sup> The semiological system that Spiegel and Culler are advocating for, enables readers to see the intertwined dynamic between literature and society. Through the reposition of text into social historical context, we are able to enhance literary analysis and, more importantly, read text as they were written.

During the Middle Ages, the apostolic authority over biblical exegesis was dominated by males. The biblical interpretations produced a contested authority between genders.<sup>10</sup> These interpretations generated social and cultural conflicts that are preserved, and created, within various pieces of literature. Through the use of Spiegel’s analysis of social logic of a text and Culler’s symbolic system and idea of the organization of meaning, we are able to see the effects of biblical exegesis on social life. Pieces of literature produced during the Middle Ages are textual embodiment of the dominate social ideology. In this paper, I will be analyzing the cultural constructs and constraints created by unruly exegesis within the domain of virginity, sexuality, and authority. Within Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* and Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Wife of Bath prologue* and *tale*, we able to see the interplayed dynamic between literature and society.<sup>11</sup> Chaucer’s and Bede’s respective text embody crucial aspects of

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<sup>7</sup> Jonathan D. Culler, *The Literary in Theory* (Stanford University Press, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> TINKLE, “Contested Authority.”,260

<sup>11</sup> Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People; The Greater Chronicle; Bede’s Letter to Egbert*, ed. Judith McClure and Roger Collins, 1 edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* (New Wave Publishers, 2001).

**Comment [JWG5]:** I like this term, but I’m not sure quite what you mean by it

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culture that were created through repressive biblical interpretations. These interpretations fabricated social ideologies that governed the mental and social life within the Middle Ages. Bede and Chaucer were subjected to these confinements and illuminate them in the literary reflection of their society.

In Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* the social dictum, created by unruly exegesis, regulate the content of Bede's history.<sup>13</sup> Bede undermines political female roles and even omits them from his history. Bede disregards significant contributions women had to the development of the church. In turn, he redirects his focus to celebrate and demonstrate the iconic role of mothers and in virgins. Through this diversion and omission, Bede reflects key biblical exegesis that oppressed female roles in the church and created these 'iconic roles.' In contrast, Chaucer uses the Wife of Bath as a tool to subvert the medieval antifeminism ideologies that were created by male dominated exegesis. Chaucer reflects well-known medieval literature to illuminate the consistent negative depiction of women. He uses the Wife of Bath's appropriating discourse of oppressive patriarchy to expose the restrictions between women and the limitations imposed upon them by society. He then proceeds by having the Wife of Bath subtly penetrate the patriarchal system. Chaucer exploits the aperture of feminine roles and character by having the Wife of Bath act as an exegetical supplement. In juxtaposition, Bede remains true to the social identities and restrictions created by the male authority and allows them to guide his history.

Although Chaucer's and Bede's texts function differently, they both reflect exegetical passages that have an immeasurable impact on feminine roles and identity within society. In order to analyze the perpetuating influence of social ideologies on Bede's and Chaucer's text, we

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<sup>13</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*.

**Comment [JWG6]:** This is a long way to ask your audience to read before telling them what the argument is, esp. in an essay this short. I would recommend moving this paragraph up towards the top. Give your readers the argument first, and then immediately provide the theoretical grounding that you are working with. That way your audience can better think through the implications of the theory as they go, and you can be more explicit about directing understood connections between the New Historical and semiotic approaches of Spiegel *et al* and the texts you are investigating.

**Comment [JWG7]:** Again...not quite sure what you mean by this

**Comment [JWG8]:** Query: isn't Chaucer doing this too? As the text's author isn't he still acting to set the agenda of identities and restrictions? He's attempting to lay out new boundaries...sure. But they are still boundaries. Can you separate the actions of his character from those of the author himself?

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must first look at the origins of these ideologies. First Timothy 2<sup>14</sup> and Saint Jerome's treatise *Against Jovinianus*<sup>15</sup>, are two texts that constructed the negative description of females and function as a justification for the oppression of feminine authority and sexuality. First Timothy 2, "seeks to regulate women's economic, social, familial, ecclesiastical, and reproductive roles."<sup>16</sup> First Timothy 2, aims to establish an expected social conduct for women. It is within this text that we find the origins for the 'unruly women.'<sup>17</sup> This text functions as an oppressive tool to silence female roles in church by establishing them as inferior and impure beings, whose rule is not in the domain of the church or politics. First Timothy 2 states:

I will therefore that men pray in every place, lifting up pure hands, without anger and contention.

In like manner women also in decent apparel: adorning themselves with modesty and sobriety, not with plaited hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly attire, But as it becometh women professing godliness, with good works. Let the woman learn in silence, with all subjection.

But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to use authority over the man: but to be in silence. <sup>18</sup>

First Timothy 2, establishes and is used to reinforce male authority over women. This text argues that women's role in society is not that of teaching or authority, but of modesty. It defies the role of female authority and creates a new role that can only be achieved through the "modesty and sobriety" that the text advocates for. Although there is other biblical text that validate female roles within the church, like that of the Gospel of Mark and John, this text aims

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<sup>14</sup> Zondervan, *Holy Bible: New International Version, Blueberry / Melon Green, Italian Duo-Tone Reference Bible* (Zondervan, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> Charles George Herbermann, *The Catholic Encyclopedia;: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church*; (Appleton, 1914).

<sup>16</sup> TINKLE, "Contested Authority.",271

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.,271

<sup>18</sup> Zondervan, *Holy Bible*.

to discredit such female authority.<sup>19</sup> First Timothy 2 wishes to silent women, because women are not silent. Theresa Tinkle argues that this “text exists because women are *not* silent: they are teaching and exercising authority over men, obviously causing uneasiness in some congregations.”<sup>20</sup> Due to feminine resistance and penetration of authority, this text is designed to justify the silence of women through divine authority. Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza illuminates the cultural tension within this passage, “which expresses both a desire to subjugate women and feminine resistance.”<sup>21</sup> Fiorenza describes it as “prescriptive rather than descriptive,” because it doesn’t not directly reflect the reality, “but imagines religion compensating for men’s declining social power.”<sup>22</sup> The text wishes to secure male authority over women, by redefining their role and control in society.

Through this process, it displays an “underlie anxiety about women’s leadership in the Church,” because it “links women’s control of material resources, intellectual leadership and seductive powers.”<sup>23</sup> The passages existence comes from the authority and cultural tension that women have induced: “it acknowledges a continuing struggle over the hierarchy it seeks to establish.”<sup>24</sup> This passage creates a double invitation because, it invites readers imagine the provocative and dominate female, as much as it invites you to agree with the silence of women.<sup>25</sup> Tinkle argues, that it is this double invitation that establishes First Timothy 2 as an “important *locus biblicus* for the medieval literary code of the ‘unruly woman’”.<sup>26</sup> First Timothy 2 creates a

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<sup>19</sup> TINKLE, “Contested Authority.”,271

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 271

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.,271

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.,271

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.273

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.,273

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.,275

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.,274

**Comment [JWG9]:** Or at least causing unease to Paul.

**Comment [JWG10]:** Should this be a citation from Fiorenza, or are you quoting her from Tinkle? If that’s the case, then its usually worth the effort to track down the original – this lets you make sure that Tinkle used her source correctly, and lets you cite the original.

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socially expected role for women to pursue in society, but also invites you to imagine the opposite. This complementary contrast puts these two imagined images of women in juxtaposition: the unruly and ruly women. This passage is significant in understanding how biblical authorities have created ideologies that will occupy society through its **existence**.

First Timothy 2 is at the heart of Chaucer's Wife of Bath. Chaucer creates the Wife as a supplement to penetrate **the gap** within the biblical exegesis.<sup>27</sup> The Wife of Bath enters the *Canterbury Tales* as a gargantuan tumultuous threat to the male authority. Chaucer presents her not in "modest" or in "decent apparel," but has her wearing hoes of scarlet red that was as bold as her face.<sup>28</sup> Chaucer does this not only to have the Wife of Bath be in contrast to the description of feminine modesty, in First Timothy 2, but to show her economic role in society. Chaucer establishes the Wife of Bath as a sole proprietor of a successful business: "at making cloth she had so great a bent... her kerchiefs were of finest weave and ground."<sup>29</sup> In doing so, Chaucer has the Wife of Bath be **financially independent from males**. Chaucer not only illuminates the gap with First Timothy 2, but also draws attention to the limitations women faced.

Women were not only viewed in a negative light in a patriarchal society, **they were also confined by limitations imposed upon them**. During the Medieval Ages, women were viewed and identified **based upon their roles in society**. This varied from their maternal to marriage statuses. As a result, the medieval conception of women was dependent upon men. We can see these social conceptualizations within the Wife of Bath's discourse. The *Wife of Bath's prologue* "derives not so much from her perception of herself as a speaking subject, as

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

**Comment [JWG11]:** So to this point you provided a fairly good examination of Timothy 1:2 – enough for me to be open to this reading – but you haven't shown that the passage itself had any impact on medieval social thought. Is there a history of explicit exegesis dealing with this passage?

**Comment [JWG12]:** What is that gap? I suspect that you are talking about the two opposing versions of feminine action in Timothy, but I'm not sure quite what you mean by gap. This could use explanation.

**Comment [JWG13]:** Sort of. I take your point, but she's only independent to a degree...she's still reliant of a male-driven economic structure to provide the capital that allows for the purchase of her goods. Which is to say that she sells things to men, or to women primarily supported by men.

**Comment [JWG14]:** Can you not make this statement about men, as well?

**Comment [JWG15]:** Again...this isn't a gender issue (at least not as you are wording it). Class and social roles defined (and still define) both men and women.

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from her awareness of the tension between her centrality as a speaker, and her experiential understanding as a female” (Losonti 133). The Wife of Bath’s discourse and actions are constructed by the male dominant society that she lives within. The patriarchal authority becomes “the fundamental basis for her self-definition” (Losonti 133). She speaks directly of female experience in relation to men. The Wife of Bath is imprisoned by the phallogocentric society of the medieval ages.

However, Chaucer uses these imposed limitations of a patriarchal society to have the Wife of Bath penetrate them. The Wife of Bath uses renowned authorities that her predominantly male audience will recognize and accept in order to establish herself as an authority. By doing this, Chaucer allows the Wife of Bath to subvert antifeminism. Instead of having the Wife of Bath be submissive to a patriarchal society, she “uses antifeminist satire as a blunt instrument to beat her [audience] into submission”.<sup>30</sup> During the *Wife of Bath’s Prologue* she recites various interpretations of Jovinianus treatises, and the Bible as a source of authority to defend herself and all women. In order for her to justify her multiple marriages, she reconstructs Jovinianus and Christ who argue against it. She does this by reciting the numerous examples of biblical men with multiple wives. In order to defend her position, she refers to King Solomon who had many wives: “Lo, here the wise kyng, duan Salomon/He had wives more than one”.<sup>31</sup> In order to reinforce this she uses a reference to Jovinianus treatise: “He seith that to be wedded is no synne; Bet is to be wedded than to brynne”.<sup>32</sup> In Jovinianus treatise on *Marriage* and *Virginitie*, he

<sup>30</sup> Lee Patterson, “‘For the Wyves Love of Bathe’: Feminine Rhetoric and Poetic Resolution in the Roman de La Rose and the Canterbury Tales,” *Speculum* 58, no. 3 (1983): 656–95, doi:10.2307/2848963., 137

<sup>31</sup> Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*.33-34

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*,50

**Comment [JWG16]:** It would be useful if you gave your own primary textual analysis here

**Comment [JWG17]:** footnote

**Comment [JWG18]:** w/c...phallogocentric isn't a synonym for male-dominated, which is what you really mean here. You could probably make an argument for legitimately phallogocentric behavior focused around cults of swords and such, but you've not done that (and don't really need to).

**Comment [JWG19]:** Your continued use of the word “penetrate” is a bit clumsy and unfocused. You've not laid any real groundwork for a discussion of penetration as a trope, literary device, or analytical lens, so it winds up feeling like a buzzword without any real meaning.

**Comment [JWG20]:** While you spent time on Timothy, you haven't laid the groundwork for either Jovinian or Jerome's work (you mention it up near the top of the essay, but don't explain it like you do for the Timothy passage). It needs explication before you can come back to it here.

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proclaims that it is “better to marry than to burn”.<sup>33</sup> She continues to defend herself by arguing that God did not want women to be virgins. In her discussion of virginity she says that God commanded us to multiply and be fruitful: “God bad us for to wexe and multiplie”.<sup>34</sup> She also uses Jovinianus treatises to back this statement up. In Jovinianus’ s treatise he argues, “if everybody were a virgin, what would become of the human race”?<sup>35</sup> This is similarly said by the Wife of Bath, “And certes, if ther were no seed ysowe, Virginitee, thane wherof sholde it growe”?<sup>36</sup> She uses these texts as a source of authority, to defend her argument.

The Wife of Bath not only asserts her dominance and authority to interpret biblical passages, but she goes so far to deny the preexisting exegesis. It is here that the Wife of Bath becomes the ‘noble preacher,’ that First Timothy 2 wishes to discredit and prevent. The Wife of Bath is in complete contrast to the ‘ideal’ women that First Timothy 2 aims to achieve. She uses and manipulates biblical text to adhere to her social agenda that the **preexisting exegesis criticizes and forbids**. The Wife of Bath uses biblical exegesis in the same way the dominate authority of interpretation does: to justify their stand and create ideologies that will govern mental and social life.

Furthermore, another key text of exegesis is Saint Jerome’s treatise *Against Jovinianus*. Saint Jerome composes these treatises to discredit Jovinianus interpretations for virginity and marriages. Jovinianus published treatises were viewed as extremely controversy. One of these views was based upon the passage from 1 Corinthians 7:8. Jovinianus interpreted this passages to

<sup>33</sup> Herbermann, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*;

<sup>34</sup> Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*.,28

<sup>35</sup> Herbermann, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*;

<sup>36</sup> Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*.,32

**Comment [JWG21]:** It feels like you are calling Timothy an exegetical text, but that can't be correct. You could, in theory, make the argument that Paul's letters form an exegetical corpus of their own, but that's a tough argument (and not one that you are making, anyway). You need to better distinguish between the biblical text itself and the work of later exegetes. This is where my point above, about wanting you to demonstrate the impact of Timothy, would pay out.

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argue that virginity was not something that God valued or thought was more righteous than marriage and sexuality. In turn, St Jerome was outraged by this and created treatises *Against Jovinianus* to abolish this view from entering societies mindset. Jerome argues that virginity is superior to that of sexuality of marriage. We should be “in the faith and love of Christ, and in sanction cation and chastity,” juxtapose to being fruitful and multiplying. He explains that those who marry will be bond and “reduced to the condition of Eve.”<sup>37</sup> His inclusion of Eve shows his stands on virginity and detest of sexuality. He draws this connection so his readers are able to relate the negative connotation of Eve and her impurity to that of sexuality. In addition, by including Eve brings to light the possible supplement—Mary. This would draw a comparison in his reader minds, allowing them to compare these two figures together alongside with sexuality and marriage.

Moreover, Jerome argues that the only way for a married or un pure women to be saved is through childbirth: “the woman will then be saved, if she bear children who will remain virgins: if what she has herself lost, she attains in her children, and makes up for the loss and decay of the root by the excellence of the flower and fruit.”<sup>38</sup> Jerome description of marriage and sexuality as a “loss and decay of the root” reinforces his stands on **sexuality**. Jerome is arguing that the only salvation that a married woman will receive is not through Son or Father, but on her ability to “bring up the children themselves in the faith and love of Christ.”<sup>39</sup> In this passage, Jerome reduces female role to sexuality: their ability to resist or to procreate. Their salvation and connection with God is not that of worship or praise but is dependent on their sexuality. Jerome is disregarding female roles in the church or even in religion **itself**, but repositions them in

<sup>37</sup> Herbermann, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*; Book 1

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* Book 1

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* Book 1

**Comment [JWG22]:** This idea also comes from 1 Timothy 2, at the end of the section (1 Timothy 2:15).

**Comment [JWG23]:** To be fair, this was Jerome's view on sexuality broadly, for men and women. He advocated for chastity for all everyone as the best way to holiness, and he practiced it himself (or so he tells us).

**Comment [JWG24]:** I'm not sure of that. Jerome had strong relationships with a number of women who played important roles in the early church. He knew St. Marcella well – and had good things to say about her on her death – and she was one of the earliest monastic organizers. And he worked with St. Paula and her daughter, who helped him to translate large parts of the Vulgate from the Hebrew.

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context to sexuality. Feminine value and worth, in God's and societies eyes, is not dependent upon their spiritual devotion to, but the devotion to **abstinence**.

**Comment [JWG25]:** Maybe...but I think this is an oversimplification. Rather, chastity was the key to higher spiritual devotion (but for men, as well).

Female roles were reduced to two primary roles: mothers and virgins. Within Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, we are able to see the hierarchy of these roles and how they are used to redirect feminine roles to that of sexuality. Bede undermines and even omits political roles women had in the development of the Church. In turn, he focuses his attention to the female roles that remain true to the value of sexuality Jerome has created. Through this process, Bede "demonstrates appropriate gendered behaviors for abbess [and women] who are rarely shown interacting in political areas".<sup>40</sup> The two primary female acts in Bede's *History* is **Hild and Aethelthryth**. The roles and descriptions Bede gives to these females in his *History*, display the effects Jerome's treatises had upon society. Bede describes Hild as the 'mother' and Aethelthryth as the 'mother of virgins.' Although Bede mentions Hild's role in the monastery and her wisdom, he undermines her significant political role in Caedmon's hymn and the deeds she performed.<sup>41</sup>

**Comment [JWG26]:** I think you want the citation to read /Æthelthryth

**Comment [JWG27]:** Who are they? Always remember to introduce your actors

In Virginia Blanton's book *Signs of Devotion: The Cult of St. Aethelthryth in Medieval England*, she explains that Bede "does not even hint at the difficulties the abbess may have encountered when, at the Synod of Whitby, she supported the Irish contingent against her kinsman who chose to adopt the Roman rite".<sup>42</sup> Bede chooses to dismiss aspects of Hild's life that may portray her as a strong female who has supported the congregation. Bede's "representation focuses instead on the great men who emerged from her monastic house and the important role

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<sup>40</sup> Virginia Blanton, *Signs of Devotion: The Cult of St. Aethelthryth in Medieval England, 695-1615* (Penn State Press, 2010), 27

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 28

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 30

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they played in cultural politics”.<sup>43</sup> Bede undermines Hild’s role in political role in society and instead refocuses on the people that bloomed from her monastic. In addition to this, Bede silences Hild’s role in mentoring Caedmon by placing the miracle after her death.<sup>44</sup> Bede “represents Hild as a passive participant within the patriarchal reproduction of literacy, for it is Hild who receives and cultivates Caedmon’s talent”.<sup>45</sup> In effect, Bede has successfully “undermined her participation within the production of literary culture”.<sup>46</sup> And redirects her purpose and value as the ‘mother’. In contrast, Bede produces a piece of literary culture through his hymn on virginity. Bede dedicates the virginity hymn to Aethelthryth—the mother of virgins. Bede uses Aethelthryth commitment to virginity, after two marriages, to serve as an example for society. Aethelthryth significance, for Bede’s purposes, lies on her virginity. Bede’s use and description of Aethelthryth and Hild show how the ideologies attached to women’s roles in society are deeply embedded in the minds of society.

Throughout the Wife of Bath’s *Prologue* and *Tale* and Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* it is evident that medieval beliefs, which reflect negatively on women, are incorporated within the text. However even “aggressively antifeminist texts often contain an unacknowledged but insistent feminist subtext”.<sup>47</sup> Chaucer uses the pre-conceived misogynistic notions of his era as a tool to subvert antifeminism. This is due to that subversion that arises from the ambivalent view of women within medieval culture. Through the Wife of Bath’s discourse, Chaucer doesn’t turn his back on these stereotypes, but uses them to present a central fact that needs to be confronted by society, and perhaps still does. In contrast, Bede remains true to the

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.,30

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.,24

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.,24

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.,24

<sup>47</sup> Patterson, “For the Wyves Love of Bathe.”

**Comment [JWG28]:** Most of what you are quoting here from Blanton is her discussing arguments made by Lees and Overing. In cases like this you want to go back and cite the original, to make sure that you are getting it right (that Blanton hasn't misrepresented the original argument).

**Comment [JWG29]:** This is a good point, and could use a lot more examination

**Comment [JWG30]:** The idea that virginity is a re-achievable state is an interesting one...that the sin of sex is translated to the child at birth, and leaves the mother. That's a curious bit of spiritual economy.

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restrictions biblical exegesis has had upon feminine roles in society and politics. In turn, he allows them to filter, omit, and redirect the content of his history. Through deep reflection of past authorities, we are able to see their influence on past societies and perhaps even our current society.

There is quite a lot to like in this essay. You've got some interesting ideas, and I appreciate the argument that you are trying to make – that where Bede employs a male-centric discourse that reads the bible as restrictive of women, Chaucer will later develop a counter-narrative in the same vein, speaking to the same passages and ideas. As I understand it, you want your reader to understand each authors as creating a particular biblical exegesis, with Chaucer's being the unruly one. That's not a bad thesis, but there are some problems in your execution that hinder your argument from having the punch that you want.

Quickly, here are the major problems: 1) the essay is too unfocused and unorganized; 2) the theoretical/historiographic section at the beginning is ultimately not necessary; 3) you provide very little primary evidence from either Bede or Chaucer; 4) Bede's role here could be important, but (in part because of organizational issues) he really feels like an ad-on to an essay which is primarily about Chaucer. It is difficult to tell why you chosen these two texts/authors to stand next to each other. In more detail:

Focus:

You jump back and forth from one text to another, and one topic to another, without a clear rationale. In thinking about the line of argument you seem to want to follow, I think that you would be better off with a structure that looked something like this:

Intro/thesis

Discussion of 1 Tim. 2 and Jerome's take on the women with a focus on later reception

Section on Bede in his role as The Man and his take on women

Section on Chaucer's tale as feminist counter-exegesis

Section comparing Bede and Chaucer on this point, and synthesizing those changes

This will, among other things, tell your reader why you've setting Bede and Chaucer next to each other. It will also give you room for a better discussion of biblical exegesis on the matter at hand.

Thesis:

Your thesis comes several pages into the essay and even then does not really say what the paper is about; what appears to be your thesis statement aims at the more theory-based questions from the first several pages, but that's not what the essay is actually about. This essay would be better off without the first several pages...they don't really bear on the argument at hand in any way that validates their position in the paper. The thesis can then come earlier and provide a guide to the argument to come...something that it does not currently do.

Evidence:

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One of the benefits to cutting the first bit is that it would free up space for you to provide evidence from your primary source material. You've got a lot of secondary support, but you've given almost none of your own analysis of the texts in question – a conspicuous absence. Especially with regard to Bede...you need to show your reader the bones of your evidence.

One final point: you make a fairly good argument for Chaucer's text as a counter-exegesis (although you miss the connections that Chaucer makes between the Wife and St. Paula), but I'm less sold on the sections from Bede's book as being exegetical. You have to address the fact that Bede wrote actual Biblical commentary on large parts of the Bible...in claiming the *EH* as an exegesis you need to deal with his more explicit forays into that genre and explain why the *EH* should count. Also worth noting...Bede's *Homilies on the Gospels* includes mention of all of Paul's letters (including 1 Tim.) and would be worth considering.

I've enjoyed having you in class this semester. Best of luck in all your future work! Please don't hesitate to let me know if I can be of any further help to you.

### Work Cited

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