

The Material Text in Wycliffite Biblical Scholarship

Inscription and Sacred Text

David Lavinsky



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In memory of Professor Anne E. Imbrie

Contents

List of Illustrations	viii
Acknowledgements	ix
Abbreviations	xi
 Introduction	 I
1. “ <i>De Pellibus Bestiarum</i> ”: Scripture, Realism, and Material Form	23
2. “Stories of þe elde testament”: Adherence, Supersession, and the “Proces” of Reading	67
3. “We speke not of enke and parchemyn”: Voice, Form, and Textual Supplement	113
4. Rolle’s “blessyd boke”: Heresy, Interpolation, and the Material Text	162
5. The “sentence of olde holy doctouris”: Gospel Commentary and the Materialities of the Literal Sense	223
Conclusion	242
 Select Bibliography	 249
Index	273

Illustrations

Figure 1: Oxford, Lincoln College MS Lat. 119, fol. 122 ^r , showing extract from Wycliffite Bible Prologue used as prefatory material for 2 Paralipomenon	70
Figure 2: Cambridge University Library MS Kk. 1. 8, fol. 8 ^{va} , showing marginal notation corresponding to material on 4 Kings in Wycliffite Bible Prologue	71
Figure 3: Cambridge University Library MS Mm. 2. 15, fol. 195 ^v , showing running head, rubricated chapter number, marginal glosses, and cross-reference in left margin	89
Figure 4: Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Laud misc. 286, fol. 1 ^r , showing metrical prologue	165
Figure 5: Oxford MS Bodley 877, fol. 9 ^{va} , showing commentary on Psalm 9:2, with manicule in left margin	175
Figure 6: Cambridge, Trinity College MS B. 5. 25, fol. 153 ^{vb} , showing selective erasures	180
Figure 7: Cambridge, Trinity College MS B. 5. 25, fol. 173 ^r , showing selective erasures	181
Figure 8: Cambridge, Trinity College MS B. 5. 25, fol. 173 ^v , showing selective erasures	182
Figure 9: Cambridge, Trinity College MS B. 5. 25, fol. 174 ^r , showing selective erasures	183
Figure 10: Cambridge, Trinity College MS B. 5. 25, fol. 174 ^v , showing selective erasures	184
Figure 11: Oxford MS Bodley 288, fol. 133 ^r , showing textura script	189
Figure 12: Oxford, University College MS 64, fol. 22 ^{va} , detail showing nota mark	200
Figure 13: Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Laud misc. 524, fol. 11 ^r , showing decalogue commentary	205

- Figure 14:** Cambridge University Library MS Mm. 2. 15, fol. 242^v, showing extensive glossing at Daniel 11–14 210
- Figure 15:** Oxford MS Bodley 143, fols. 159^v–160^r, showing erased leaves 219
- Figure 16:** Oxford MS Bodley 143, fol. 127^r, showing *mise-en-page* 230
- Figure 17:** Oxford MS Bodley 143, fol. 155^r, showing hierarchy of scripts 239

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Abbreviations

<i>AA</i>	<i>After Arundel: Religious Writing in Fifteenth-Century England</i> , ed. V. Gillespie and K. Ghosh (Turnhout, 2011)
Add.	Additional (in manuscript references)
BL	London, British Library
<i>BPHR</i>	C. Ocker, <i>Biblical Poetics Before Humanism and Reformation</i> (Cambridge, 2002)
CCCM	<i>Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievalis</i>
CCSL	<i>Corpus Christianorum Series Latina</i>
<i>CHB</i>	<i>The Cambridge History of the Bible</i> , vol. 2: <i>The West from the Fathers to the Reformation</i> , ed. G. W. H. Lampe (Cambridge, 1969)
<i>CHLMP</i>	<i>The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy: From the Rediscovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism, 1100–1600</i> , ed. N. Kretzmann, A. Kenny, and J. Pinborg (Cambridge, 1982)
<i>CHMEL</i>	<i>The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature</i> , ed. D. Wallace (Cambridge, 1998)
<i>CHMP</i>	<i>The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy</i> , ed. R. Pasnau (Cambridge, 2009)
CSEL	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i>
CUL	Cambridge University Library
<i>DE</i>	A. Hudson, <i>Doctors in English: A Study of the Wycliffite Gospel Commentaries</i> (Liverpool, 2015)
Deanesly, <i>Lollard Bible</i>	M. Deanesly, <i>The Lollard Bible and other Medieval Biblical Versions</i> (Cambridge, 1920)
<i>DR</i>	<i>The Holy Bible: Douay Rheims Version</i> , rev. R. Challoner (Rockford, IL, 1989); all uncited English biblical translations are from this edition
<i>DU</i>	John Wyclif, <i>Tractatus de Universalibus</i> , ed. I. J. Mueller (Oxford, 1985)
<i>EAEB</i>	<i>The Earliest Advocates of the English Bible: The Texts of the Medieval Debate</i> , ed. M. Dove (Exeter, 2010)
EETS	<i>Early English Text Society</i> (1864–); volumes without prefix are Original Series; e.s.=Extra Series; s.s.=Supplementary Series
EV	Early Version of the Wycliffite Bible

EWS	<i>English Wycliffite Sermons</i> , ed. A. Hudson and P. Gradon, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1983–1996)
FEB	M. Dove, <i>The First English Bible: The Text and Context of the Wycliffite Versions</i> (Cambridge, 2007)
FLS	F. Somerset, <i>Feeling Like Saints: Lollard Writings after Wyclif</i> (Ithaca, NY, 2014)
FM	Forshall and Madden (editors of <i>WB</i>)
FOW	<i>From Ockham to Wyclif</i> , ed. A. Hudson and M. Wilks (Oxford, 1987)
FZ	<i>Fasciculi Zizaniorum Magistri Johannis Wyclif cum Tritico</i> , ed. W. W. Shirley (London, 1858)
HSQA	I. C. Levy, <i>Holy Scripture and the Quest for Authority at the End of the Middle Ages</i> (Notre Dame, IN, 2012)
HUO	<i>The History of the University of Oxford</i> , vol. 2: <i>Late Medieval Oxford</i> , ed. J. Catto and R. Evans (Oxford, 1992)
IMEP	<i>Index of Middle English Prose</i> (Cambridge, 1984–)
LV	Later Version of the Wycliffite Bible
MED	<i>Middle English Dictionary</i> , ed. H. Kurath, S. M. Kuhn et al. (Ann Arbor, MI, 1952–1999)
misc.	miscellaneous (in manuscript references)
n.s.	new series
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
PIP	M. Wilks, <i>Wyclif: Political Ideas and Practice, Papers by Michael Wilks</i> , ed. A. Hudson (Oxford, 2000)
PG	Patrologia Cursus Completus Series Graeca, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1857–1866)
PL	Patrologia Cursus Completus Series Latina, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1844–1864)
PMLA	<i>Proceedings of the Modern Language Academy</i>
PR	A. Hudson, <i>The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History</i> (Oxford, 1988)
RP	<i>Two Revised Versions of Rolle's English Psalter Commentary and the Related Canticles</i> , ed. A. Hudson, 3 vols., EETS 340, 341, and 343 (Oxford, 2012–2014)
RT	<i>The Middle English Translation of the "Rosarium Theologie,"</i> ed. C. von Nolcken (Heidelberg, 1979)
SEWW	<i>Selections from English Wycliffite Writings</i> , ed. A. Hudson (Cambridge, 1978)
TWT	<i>Two Wycliffite Texts: The Sermon of William Taylor, 1406, The Testimony of William Thorpe, 1407</i> , ed. A. Hudson, EETS 301 (Oxford, 1993)
Vulgate	<i>Biblia sacra iuxta Vulgatam versionem</i> , ed. R. Gryson et al., 5th edn. (Stuttgart, 2007)
WH	K. Ghosh, <i>The Wycliffite Heresy: Authority and the Interpretation of Texts</i> (Cambridge, 2001)

- WB *The Holy Bible ... Made from the Latin Vulgate by John Wycliffe and his Followers*, ed. J. Forshall and F. Madden, 4 vols. (Oxford, 1850; reprinted New York, 1982)
- WBP Wycliffite Bible Prologue
- WC *Wycliffite Controversies*, ed. M. Bose and J. P. Hornbeck II (Turnhout, 2011)
- WLP *The Works of a Lollard Preacher: The Sermon "Omnis plantacio," the Tract "Fundamentum aliud nemo potest ponere," and the Tract "De oblatione iugis sacrificii,"* ed. A. Hudson, EETS 317 (Oxford, 2001)
- WOS J. A. Robson, *Wyclif and the Oxford Schools: The Relation of the 'Summa de Ente' to Scholastic Debates in the Later Fourteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1961)
- WS Wyclif Society Publications (London, 1883–1921); abbreviations used for individual works include DVSS=*De Veritate Sacrae Scripturae*, ed. R. Buddensieg, 3 vols. (London, 1905–1907)

Introduction

The Material Text in Wycliffite Biblical Scholarship examines the biblical scholarship of John Wyclif and his successors, treated here in material dating from approximately 1380 to 1420. Like so many other academic projects on late medieval writing and religious culture, this one is profoundly indebted to Anne Hudson's account of Wycliffism's history and textual *oeuvre*. Despite the growth of interest in Wycliffism following publication of *The Premature Reformation* in 1988, however, the archive there designated as "Lollard biblical scholarship" – a broad category encompassing works such as the Wycliffite Bible and Prologue, sermon collections, interpolated versions of the Psalms, glossed commentaries on the gospels, compendia of hermeneutic terms and concepts, and polemical religious writings from later stages of the movement – has gained prominence in medieval studies only recently.¹ There is the

¹ *PR*, 228–77. As recently as 2003, there was still a need to account for its emergence as a field, and prior to 2011 there had been no sustained attempt to compare the major examples of Wycliffite biblical scholarship or "to consider whether or how their first production fits together." With regard to the first date, see the seminal collection of essays entitled *Lollards and Their Influence in Late Medieval England*, ed. F. Somerset, D. Pitard, and J. Havens (Woodbridge, 2003); for the second, A. Hudson, "Five Problems in Wycliffite Texts and a Suggestion," *Medium Aevum* 80.2 (2011), 1. A brief comment on the nomenclature of lollard or Wycliffite studies seems necessary here as well. Although variations in the meaning of the term "lollard" suggest the need to differentiate it from "Wycliffite," this study retains the latter because it denotes the question of a teleological and deterministic progression from individual to movement. More generally, I invoke it in conjunction with Hudson's understanding of "vernacular Wycliffism" as the context "in which 'Wycliffite' concerns coincided with the intellectual interests of the time ... such concerns also extended into the areas of social, theological and ecclesiastical questions." *PR*, 393. "Wycliffism" so defined represents a broad cultural and epistemological field, not just texts harboring identifiably "lollard" conclusions. For further discussion, see A. Cole, *Literature and Heresy in the Age of Chaucer* (Cambridge, 2008), 25–74, as well as "William Langland's Lollardy," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 17 (2003), 25–54; K. Ghosh, "Wycliffism and Lollardy," *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 4: *Christianity in Western Europe, c.1100–c.1500*, ed. M. Rubin and W. Simons (Cambridge, 2009), 433–45; M. Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation*, 3rd edn. (Oxford, 2002), 250; W. Scase, *Piers Plowman and the New Anticlericalism* (Cambridge, 1989), 149–60; and H. B. Workman, *John Wyclif: A Study of the English Medieval Church*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1926), I.327. Such questions of terminology and identity are fruitfully reconsidered in *FLS*, 15–20. Other recent studies have put pressure on the meaning of "lollardy" by accounting for the various non-conformities that both predated

obvious fact that for many years key Wycliffite texts remained unedited or limited to incomplete collations.² Such work also has a marginal relation to Middle English *literature* as currently surveyed and anthologized, though this too is changing as scholars explore how writers reframed or otherwise adapted Wycliffite terms, concepts, and forms in the process of cultivating their own diverse literary vernaculars.³ But this evolving critical orientation must also contend with a strong impulse towards homogeneity and transhistorical coherence in the study of medieval religious movements. Variations in the development and transmission of reformist thought are sometimes difficult to discern in the case of Wycliffism given its attitudes towards scriptural authority and post-biblical revelation.⁴ Unlike contemporaries of his who sought to embed biblical scholarship in the history and tradition of the church, or to preserve the important truths which reason by itself may “fynde, leerne, and knowe,” in Reginald Pecock’s words, Wyclif afforded scripture the anteriority of a divine archetype or idea.⁵ The receptivity such a “text” demands of its readers was reflected in terminology emphasizing scripture’s overall unity and authority of meaning, most

and ran parallel to the movement itself, notably K. Kerby-Fulton, *Books under Suspicion: Censorship and Tolerance of Revelatory Writing in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame, IN, 2006), and J. P. Hornbeck II, *What Is a Lollard?: Dissent and Belief in Late Medieval England* (Oxford, 2010). For evidence suggesting a continental derivation of the term “lollard,” in usages associated with the heresy of the “Free Spirit,” see R. Lerner, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages* (Berkeley, CA, 1972), 5.

² Though here Hudson’s prodigious editorial labors in the years following publication of *PR* – most especially in *EWS*, *TWT*, *WLP*, *RP*, and *DE* – are to be noted.

³ For an example of cultural history situated at the interface of these concerns, see Cole, *Literature and Heresy*. Questions about Wycliffism’s status in relation to the canon and the broader field of Middle English literature are also forcefully raised in J. Simpson, *The Oxford English Literary History*, vol. 2, 1350–1547: *Reform and Cultural Revolution* (Oxford, 2002). For a relevant response to Simpson’s model, see B. Holsinger, “Lollard Ekphrasis: Situated Aesthetics and Literary History,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 35.1 (2005), 67–89. For prescient reflection on some of these issues, see H. R. Jauss, “The Alterity and Modernity of Medieval Literature,” *New Literary History* 10.2 (1979), 181–229.

⁴ Steven Justice and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton stress similar points in their responses to scholarship on Wyclif and Wycliffism. S. Justice, “Inquisition, Speech, and Writing: A Case from Late Medieval Norwich,” *Representations* 48 (1994), 18–21, and Kerby-Fulton, *Books under Suspicion*, 224. This problem also has a corollary on the level of style insofar as Wycliffite texts have often been accused of possessing a “certain sameness,” in F. D. Matthew’s influential early assessment. See the illuminating discussion in C. von Nolcken, “A ‘Certain Sameness’ and our Response to it in English Wycliffite Texts,” *Literature and Religion in the Later Middle Ages: Philological Studies in Honor of Siegfried Wenzel*, ed. R. Newhauser and J. Alford (Binghamton, NY, 1995), 191–208.

⁵ Central to this first proposition is the work of William Woodford; see, for instance, E. Doyle, O.F.M., “William Woodford, O.F.M. (c. 1330–c. 1400): His Life and Works together with a Study and Edition of his ‘Responsiones contra Wiclevum et Lollardos,’” *Franciscan Studies* 43 (1983), 17–187, as well as *WH*, 67–85. Reginald Pecock, *Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy*, 2 vols., ed. C. Babington (London, 1860), I.10. On moral questions such as usury, for instance, “Holi Writt zeueth litil or noon liȝt therto at al,” yet reason judges “that y be waar forto not do it” (16). For more on Pecock’s arguments in such contexts, see S. Lahey, “Reginald Pecock on the Authority of Reason, Scripture and Tradition,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 56.2 (2005). It is worth noting that from Wyclif’s perspective the conclusions of the Fathers were grounded in reason as much as in sacred texts themselves (e.g., *DVSS*, I.x.228/19–22).

especially in what Wyclif referred to as the *liber vitae*, with everything this figure implied about retrieving the sacred sense from the material flux of written artifacts.⁶

Artifacts usually have their own origin stories and quasi-mythical genealogies, and this is no less true of the Wycliffite Bible itself, as the very name by which it has become known reminds us. “In this house are several English Bibles, including the first – John Wiclif’s,” the unnamed narrator in Jorge Luis Borges’ short story “The Book of Sand” tells a stranger who has appeared at his Buenos Aires flat peddling holy books. In exchange for the mysterious “book of sand,” the narrator agrees to swap his pension check and the “black-letter” Wycliffite Bible “inherited” from his ancestors.⁷ Less cryptically but with a similar element of genealogical continuity, an inscription at the beginning of Oxford, St. John’s College, MS 7, an early fifteenth-century translation of the Old Testament, describes the volume as having been translated into English “by Master Iohn Wicklife in the time of King Edward the third [written wth his owne hand].”⁸ The remark, though dating from a later period, captures a familiar perspective, echoed in many other manuscript inscriptions that impute to Wyclif the qualities of an entire reading community and its texts.⁹ Yet the bracketed words were also subsequently erased, suggesting some uncertainty about the textual boundaries of this community as well as its relationship to a definitive point of origin in Wyclif’s “owne” hands. Perhaps the reader responsible for the erasure had noticed what modern scholars now openly acknowledge: while the Wycliffite Bible survives in no fewer than 250 partial and complete copies, none cites or even incidentally mentions its namesake, either in the lengthy and wide-ranging Prologue affixed to some versions of the translation or in marginal glosses

⁶ Thus did Wyclif imagine scripture as “one perfect word proceeding from the mouth of God whose individual parts fit together to create the entire authority and efficacy of Christ’s law” (Confirmatur ex hoc, quod tota lex Cristi est unum perfectum verbum, procedens de ore dei, cuius singule partes concausant totam autoritatem vel efficaciam legis Cristi [DVSS, I.xii.268/12–15]) (171). All citations of DVSS are keyed to the volume, chapter, page, and line number of the Buddensieg edition and given in the notes following the Latin. Translations from I. C. Levy’s abridged English version, *On the Truth of Holy Scripture* (Kalamazoo, MI, 2001), are given parenthetically in the text; all unattributed translations of DVSS and other texts are my own. Note as well Wyclif’s comments regarding heretics whose arbitrary interpretation of scripture prevents them from granting its overall correctness and authority (*non concedendo eam ex integro capiunt eis placitum*). DVSS, I.vi.136/19–23.

⁷ J. L. Borges, *The Book of Sand*, trans. N. T. Di Giovanni (New York, 1977), 118, 120.

⁸ As noted in E. Solopova, *Manuscripts of the Wycliffite Bible in the Bodleian and Oxford College Libraries* (Liverpool, 2016), 250.

⁹ For instance, an early modern inscription on the fly leaf of Oxford, University College, MS 96, a fifteenth-century copy of the Wycliffite Bible Prologue and lections for Easter and Palm Sunday, notes that “This book seemeth to have been made by John Wickliffe” (fol. iii^r). A description of the manuscript’s contents can be found in H. Coxe, *Catalogus Codicum Mss. qui in Collegiis Aulisque Oxoniensibus hodie adservantur*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1852) I.28 (Collegii Universitatis). Forshall and Madden, who included the manuscript (there listed as University College Oxford G.3) in their collation, date it to 1430–1440, though an earlier dating range seems possible based on dialect information adduced in Solopova, *Manuscripts of the Wycliffite Bible*, 278–79.

accompanying the translated scripture itself.¹⁰ “All the elaborate superstructure about the place of Wyclif in the preparation of the English bible,” writes Michael Wilks, “is deduced from manuscripts which make no reference to Wyclif whatsoever and which contain within themselves not a shred of real evidence that he was in any way connected to them.”¹¹

Though easily overemphasized, this fact reminds us that the same methodological tendencies described above also inform the view of medieval religious movements as genealogies with their origin in a single individual or as the reception of one person’s thought in the work of his followers – a linear development akin to what Nietzsche in the *Genealogy of Morals* criticized as the search for *Ursprung*, an original basis or stable foundation.¹² From the standpoint of recent humanities scholarship, Nietzsche’s term might well designate any mode of historical method or meaning resistant to the discussion of singularities, individual cases, or particular textual economies. But *Ursprung* in this sense has a special topicality within scholarship on religious heresy and dissent. Writing on Catharism, for instance, Mark Pegg has lamented the “intellectual determinism” he believes has long shaped the study of medieval heresy. Stemming from Herbert Grundmann’s classic work, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*, this approach “presupposes that heresies, like religions, have an intellectual purity and theological coherence in which it is possible to neatly

¹⁰ The conclusions in this paragraph are based on my review of Forshall and Madden’s record of marginal glosses, supplemented and revised in *FEB*, Appendix 2, 210–21. Many of the glosses instead make use of Lyra’s postils, as detailed in H. Hargreaves, “The Marginal Glosses to the Wycliffite New Testament,” *Studia Neophilologica* 33 (1961), 292. Hargreaves comments elsewhere that while there were a great many anonymous texts in the late fourteenth century, “it might reasonably have been expected that the author of a widely copied translation would be well enough known to be mentioned by name in some manuscripts at least, particularly if he was as prominent a scholar as Wyclif,” later adding that there is “no convincing evidence for Wyclif’s active participation in the work at all, and the failure of the manuscripts to provide any indication of his part that would support the clear statements of his friends and foes is the most puzzling feature of the Wycliffite bible.” H. Hargreaves, “The Wycliffite Versions,” *CHB*, 390, 404. According to Anne Hudson, “Wyclif’s name does not appear in early manuscripts of the Bible translation, nor does he ever claim responsibility for such a work in his own writings.” *SEWW*, 162. Outside the Bible translation itself, Christina von Nolcken concludes that while Wyclif was a source of *auctoritas*, “the texts that drew on the repertories [such as the *Floretum* and its Latin and English derivatives, all of which included passages from Wyclif] are less likely to advertise Wyclif’s presence in them than were the repertories themselves.” She adds that “only once do they transparently ascribe an opinion to him,” citing the “Doctour Euangelicus” mentioned in the *Twelve Conclusions*. C. von Nolcken, “Lollard Citations of John Wyclif’s Writings,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 39 (1988), 417–18. For evidence that the number of passages quoted from Wyclif’s own writings decreased significantly in the process of adapting the Middle English *Rosarium Theologie* from the *Floretum*, perhaps with the goal of “making its content more easily accessible,” see *RT*, 28–29.

¹¹ M. Wilks, “Misleading Manuscripts: Wyclif and the Non-Wycliffite Bible,” reprinted in *PIP*, 85–99 (at 91–92). The larger implications of Wilks’ argument are explored in H. A. Kelly, *The Middle English Bible: A Reassessment* (Philadelphia, 2016).

¹² M. Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. D. F. Bouchard (Ithaca, NY, 1977), 140–41. See also Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse of Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York, 1972), 3–17 (esp. 13).

sift out other less coherent ideas and, most crucially, it is a technique that effectively ignores historical specificity.”¹³ Though Grundmann’s study and others like it have enriched my own at many points, I share Pegg’s skepticism regarding large-scale claims of continuity and coherence, and have tried to register those moments in which seemingly “analogous attitudes” and “homologous ideas” are called into question by specific forms and practices.¹⁴ Indeed, not least among all the ways Wycliffism might represent an unusual moment in the history of the reading and reception of the Bible is the striking range of discursive transformations to which it subjects the scriptural text.¹⁵ So too did this work’s uncertain but highly suggestive and always self-aware relation to a theoretical *liber vitae* raise vital questions about late medieval realism and biblical materiality (chapter one); translation and typological exegesis (chapter two); gospel preaching and textual form (chapter three); heresy and manuscript interpolation (chapter four); and codicological contexts for the literal sense (chapter five).

That these different configurations are brought together in the study of a single movement may make it seem as though Wycliffism were “omnipresent” in late medieval England.¹⁶ To be sure, Wyclif was not unique in resisting the spiritual mediation of the church or in critiquing ecclesiastical authority according to biblical precept and the life of Christ as recorded in the gospels.¹⁷ In these respects we might note the movement’s proximity to other reformist agendas in the period, such as Joachimite and Olivian traditions of revelatory theology, or even the “self-reforming” tendencies of the English church under Archbishop Henry Chichele recently described by

¹³ M. Pegg, “Catharism’ and the Study of Medieval Heresy,” *New Medieval Literatures* 6 (2003), 252; H. Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*, trans. S. Rowan (Notre Dame, IN, 1995). For a similarly skeptical reading of traditional forms of intellectual and religious history, which have tended to emphasize “discursive unity” and “continuous historical narratives,” see Rita Copeland’s discussion of Michel de Certeau’s *The Writing of History in Criticism and Dissent in the Middle Ages*, ed. R. Copeland (Cambridge, 1996), 3.

¹⁴ Pegg, “Catharism,” 257.

¹⁵ Recent interest in this topic includes conferences such as that organized by Elizabeth Solopova, May 29–31, 2014, at St Anne’s College, Oxford, entitled “Transforming Scripture: Biblical Translations and Adaptations in Old and Middle English.” See *The Wycliffite Bible: Origin, History and Interpretation*, ed. E. Solopova (Leiden, 2017).

¹⁶ Kerby-Fulton, *Books under Suspicion*, 3.

¹⁷ “The turning away from the church’s mediation,” Gordon Leff concludes, “thus made for the almost universal tendency in all the main heresies towards simplicity of belief and personal piety: it was actuated by the desire to strip away the accretions with which the church had overlaid Christ’s life and teaching.” G. Leff, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages: The Relation of Heterodoxy to Dissent, c.1250–c.1450*, 2 vols. (Manchester, 1967), I.8. Leff later points to Marsilius of Padua, who is mentioned in Pope Gregory XI’s 1377 bull condemning Wyclif’s views on ecclesiastical authority and dominion, as an important precursor in this respect (II.411–22). While not, to my knowledge, directly referenced in Wyclif’s writings, Marsilius was nevertheless a significant part of the doctrinal background Leff reconstructs in his study. See as well A. Patschovsky, “Heresy and Society: On the Political Function of Heresy in the Medieval World,” *Texts and the Repression of Medieval Heresy*, ed. P. Biller and C. Bruschi (York, 2003), 25.

Vincent Gillespie.¹⁸ Moving backwards from the first half of the fifteenth century to the 1350s, ideas later closely identified with Wyclif and his successors were already present at Oxford with the introduction of Fitzralph's *De Pauperie Salvatoris*, which galvanized contemporary discussions about property and dominion, shaping debates to come.¹⁹ Such a timeframe could be extended in both directions according to any number of intellectual, political, or theological criteria.

To exclude these broader patterns from consideration is to risk reifying a preconceived idea of Wycliffism's centrality.²⁰ Moreover, studies by John Bossy, Eamon Duffy, and J. J. Scarisbrick press scholars who focus on Wycliffism to defend the assumption that heresy had wide practical and theoretical implications.²¹ While the current study has more modest objectives, the concession of a historian whose well-known skepticism concerning Wycliffism as a "movement" is worth repeating here: "the historical importance of Lollardy," writes Richard Rex, "consists in the fact that it was the first time that the English ecclesiastical authorities had to grapple with the problem of heresy as anything other than the inconsequential aberration of an eccentric academic or the coarse skepticism of a thoughtful layman."²² And that is putting it mildly in the case of the movement's biblical scholarship, much of which, as Anne Hudson established some time ago, attests to a centralized and well-funded effort for the production and dissemination of manuscripts.²³ For instance,

¹⁸ On the Spiritual Franciscans in these contexts, see Kerby-Fulton, *Books under Suspicion*. On the "new cadre of bishops and intellectuals" surrounding Chichele, see V. Gillespie, "Chichele's Church: Vernacular Theology in England after Thomas Arundel," *AA*, 3–42 (at 14, 41–42).

¹⁹ J. Dawson, "Richard Fitzralph and the Fourteenth-Century Poverty Controversies," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 34 (1983), 315–44. On Fitzralph's life and work, see K. Walsh, *A Fourteenth-Century Scholar and Primate: Richard FitzRalph in Oxford, Avignon and Armagh* (Oxford, 1981).

²⁰ For insightful discussion of this problem, see J. A. F. Thomson, "Orthodox Religion and the Origins of Lollardy," *History* 74 (1989), 39–55.

²¹ J. Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400–1700* (Oxford, 1985); E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c.1400–c.1580* (New Haven and London, 1992; 2nd edn., 2005); J. J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People* (Oxford, 1984). This "now-familiar triumvirate" is discussed in I. Forrest, "Lollardy and Late Medieval History," *WC*, 122–23 (at 122).

²² R. Rex, *The Lollards* (New York, 2002), 11. Fiona Somerset sharply critiques Rex's conclusions in "Afterword," *WC*, 319–20. Subtly recasting such debates, Patrick Collinson observes that Wycliffites "had little interest in conjuring into existence a visible, true Church, at total odds with the visibly false Roman Church." P. Collinson, "Night Schools, Conventicles and Churches: Continuities and Discontinuities in Early Protestant Ecclesiology," *The Beginnings of English Protestantism*, ed. P. Marshall and A. Ryrie (Cambridge, 2002), 209–35 (at 225). For a pointed response to Duffy's work, see D. Aers, "Altars of Power: Reflections on Eamon Duffy's *Stripping of the Altars*," *Literature and History* 3 (1994), 90–105. Wycliffism's broad and differentiated relevance is forcefully reasserted in Ghosh, "Wycliffism and Lollardy."

²³ See Hudson's conclusions, for instance, concerning the production of the Wycliffite sermon cycle, in *EWS*, I.189–207. Catto also remarks on "the scale and the deliberate character of the Lollard programme of lay religious education," in "Wyclif and Wycliffism at Oxford," *HUO*, 224. More recently, Matti Peikola has drawn attention to copies of the Wycliffite Bible (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MSS Bodley 183 and Fairfax 11) whose production circumstances suggest derivation from "common sets of exemplars." M. Peikola, "Aspects of *Mise-en-Page* in Manuscripts of the Wycliffite Bible," *Medieval Texts in Context*, ed. G. D.

the “overwhelming majority” of books owned or used among Wycliffites in late fifteenth-century Coventry, we know from research by Shannon McSheffrey and Norman Tanner, were translations of scripture.²⁴ Earlier notions about the limits of Wycliffism’s reach and relevance having been thoroughly revised, much recent scholarship now recognizes the movement’s necessity to a large number of areas and subjects, including, as Andrew Cole has persuasively argued, the English literary canon.²⁵

The complexity of the vernacular as a cultural formation is also reflected in the different *loci* of Wycliffite biblical scholarship itself.²⁶ Both a reaction against certain strains of Latinate intellectual culture centered in the schools and a deliberate appropriation of their textual methods, Wycliffism spanned contexts, inviting consideration from disciplinary standpoints concerned with a wide range of historical questions and critical practices. Over the last three decades or so, as the contours of lay literacy have emerged in more detail, scholarship in the Wycliffite field has concentrated on the movement’s relationship to Chaucer and Langland, as well as to other dissenting positions and identities in late medieval England, especially revelatory theology and English Joachimism;²⁷ the mechanics of censorship

Caie and D. Renevey (London and New York, 2008), 32. The same patterns help explain Wycliffism’s transformation into a broad-based reform movement. According to Elizabeth Solopova, the translation “started as a highly learned and specialized scholarly enterprise, but left the confines of academia to reach the widest possible audience.” E. Solopova, “Manuscript Evidence for the Patronage, Ownership and Use of the Wycliffite Bible,” *Form and Function in the Late Medieval Bible*, ed. E. Poleg and L. Light (Leiden, 2013), 349. Perceptive comments about the “exportation” of Wycliffite texts and ideas can also be found in R. Copeland, *Pedagogy, Intellectuals, and Dissent in the Later Middle Ages: Lollardy and Ideas of Learning* (Cambridge, 2001), 40–42. John Purvey seems to have been especially influential in this regard, though little is known about his life. See M. Jurkowski, “New Light on John Purvey,” *English Historical Review* 110 (1995), 1180–91. For the biographical details of Wyclif’s early Oxford associates, see A. B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A.D. 1500*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1957–1959), I.67 (for John Aston), II.913 (for Nicholas Hereford), III.1565–67 (for Philip Repyngdon), and III.1772 (for Laurence Bedeman, listed as Laurence Stephen).

²⁴ *Lollards of Coventry, 1486–1522*, ed. and trans. S. McSheffrey and N. Tanner (Cambridge, 2003), 15.

²⁵ Cole, *Literature and Heresy*, xiv.

²⁶ As Fiona Somerset has shown, for example, vernacular Wycliffite texts were able to assume a great deal about the interpretive resources of lay readers, deploying “the terms, modes of argument, and topics” of academic material in “undiluted” form. F. Somerset, *Clerical Discourse and Lay Audience in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1998), 12. See, too, the essays reprinted, with some revisions, in A. J. Minnis, *Translations of Authority in Medieval English Literature: Valuing the Vernacular* (Cambridge, 2009). Vincent Gillespie provides an insightful overview of the topic in “Vernacular Theology,” *Middle English: Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature*, ed. P. Strohm (Oxford, 2007), 401–20.

²⁷ Treatments of these topics include D. Aers, *Faith, Ethics, and Church: Writing in England, 1360–1409* (Cambridge, 2000), as well as *Sanctifying Signs: Making Christian Tradition in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame, IN, 2004); M. Borroff, *Traditions and Renewals: Chaucer, the Gawain-Poet, and Beyond* (New Haven, 2003); Cole, *Literature and Heresy*; A. J. Fletcher, “Chaucer the Heretic,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 25 (2003), 53–121; Kerby-Fulton, *Books under Suspicion*, as well as the roundtable devoted to Kerby-Fulton’s study in *The Journal of British Studies* 46 (2007), 746–73; F. McCormack, *Chaucer and the Culture of Dissent* (Dublin,

and inquisitorial process in the investigation of heresy;²⁸ the cultural and political impact of Wycliffite efforts to democratize the word of God and make scripture available to non-clerical audiences;²⁹ Wycliffism's status as a dissenting theology and the problems of definition, method, and affiliation arising therein;³⁰ its place within the discourses of learning and instruction that dominated late medieval university culture and academic study of the Bible;³¹ the question of gender roles and the possibilities for women's scriptural learning in Wycliffite circles;³² the movement's investment in the ethics, aesthetics, and what we might now refer to as the spiritual

2007); A. J. Minnis, *Fallible Authors: Chaucer's Pardoner and the Wife of Bath* (Philadelphia, 2007); Scase, *Piers Plowman and the New Anticlericalism*; F. Somerset, "Expanding the Langlandian Canon: Radical Latin and the Stylistics of Reform," *The Yearbook of Langland Studies* 17 (2003), 73–92. See, too, the collection of essays in the special section on "Langland and Lollardy," *The Yearbook of Langland Studies* 17 (2003).

²⁸ J. Arnold, "Lollard Trials and Inquisitorial Discourse," *Fourteenth Century England II*, ed. C. Given-Wilson (Woodbridge, 2002), 81–94; I. Forrest, *The Detection of Heresy in Late Medieval England* (Oxford, 2005); N. Watson, "Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, The Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's *Constitutions* of 1409," *Speculum* 70.4 (1995), 822–64; and various items included in *AA*.

²⁹ M. Aston, "Wyclif and the Vernacular," *FOW*, 281–330; R. Hanna, "The Difficulty of Ricardian Prose Translation: The Case of the Lollards," *Modern Language Quarterly* 51 (1990), 319–40; F. Somerset, *Clerical Discourse and Lay Audience: Text and Controversy from Wyclif to Bale: Essays in Honour of Anne Hudson*, ed. H. Barr and A. Hutchison (Turnhout, 2005). Worth mentioning in this category as well is Mary Dove's exhaustive study of the manuscript tradition in *FEB*, especially 37–67.

³⁰ J. Havens, "Shading the Grey Area: Determining Heresy in Middle English Texts," *Text and Controversy from Wyclif to Bale*, 337–52; J. P. Hornbeck II, *What Is a Lollard?*; items included in *WC* (especially K. Ghosh, "Wycliffite 'Affiliations': Some Intellectual-Historical Perspectives," 13–32; A. Hudson, "'Who Is My Neighbour?' Some Problems of Definition on the Borders of Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy," 79–96; M. Jurkowski, "Lollard Networks," 261–78; and P. Marshall, "Lollards and Protestants Revisited," 295–318); S. McSheffrey, "Heresy, Orthodoxy, and English Vernacular Religion, 1480–1525," *Past & Present* 186 (2005), 47–80; R. Lutton, *Lollardy and Orthodox Religion in Pre-Reformation England: Reconstructing Piety* (Woodbridge, 2006); M. Aston, "Were the Lollards a Sect?" *The Medieval Church: Universities, Heresy, and the Religious Life, Essays in Honor of Gordon Leff*, ed. P. Biller and R. B. Dobson (Woodbridge, 1999), 163–92; and, in the same collection, J. Catto, "Fellows and Helpers: The Religious Identity of the Followers of Wyclif," 141–62.

³¹ Catto, "Wyclif and Wycliffism at Oxford," *HUO*, 175–261; R. Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge, 1991), as well as *Pedagogy, Intellectuals, and Dissent; Wyclif in His Times*, ed. A. Kenny (Oxford, 1986); I. C. Levy, *John Wyclif: Scriptural Logic, Real Presence, and the Parameters of Orthodoxy* (Milwaukee, WI, 2003), as well as *HSQA: A Companion to John Wyclif*, ed. I. C. Levy (Leiden, 2006) (see especially M. Bose, "The Opponents of John Wyclif," 407–55); *WH*; and items included in *FOW*.

³² A. Blamires, "Women Preaching in Medieval Orthodoxy, Heresy, and Saints' Lives," *Viator* 26 (1995), 135–52; M. Erler, *Women, Reading, and Piety in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge, 2002); D. Lavinsky, "'Knowynge Cristes Speche': Gender and Interpretive Authority in the Wycliffite Sermon Cycle," *The Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 38.1 (2012), 60–83; *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. L. Olson and K. Kerby-Fulton (Notre Dame, IN, 2005); S. McSheffrey, *Gender and Heresy: Women and Men in Lollard Communities, 1420–1530* (Philadelphia, 1995); *Women and Religion in Medieval England*, ed. D. Wood (Oxford, 2003).

valences of reform;³³ and, along with these more recent developments, on the material histories, networks, forms, and modes of production specific to Wycliffite biblical and theological texts.³⁴

No overarching statement of intention and method can adequately account for the suggestive complexities of these studies, which have put reformist discourses, and Wycliffism in particular, on the map in all kinds of compelling ways. Most of all, though, they attest to the fact that we are still uncovering the heterogeneity of English “heresy,” not only by attending to a broad spectrum of religious belief and practice, but also, to borrow Michael Sargent’s trenchant formulation, by reading Wycliffite texts “in terms of the many different kinds of work that they do in the cultural economy in which they are situated.”³⁵ The implications of this approach for my study are framed by Nietzsche’s other term for origins, *Herkunft*, which he counterposes to *Ursprung* according to the following criteria, memorably distilled in Foucault’s own meditation on historical method and meaning. The pursuit of *Ursprung*, Foucault writes,

is an attempt to capture the exact essence of things, their purest possibilities, and their carefully protected identities, because this search assumes the existence of immobile forms that precede the external world of accident and succession. This search is directed to “that which was already there,” the image of a primordial truth adequate to its nature, and it necessitates the removal of every mask to ultimately disclose an original identity. However, if the genealogist refuses to extend his faith in metaphysics, if he listens to history, he finds that there is “something altogether different” behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms.³⁶

Genealogy properly so-called “is not the erecting of foundations,” Foucault continues; on the contrary, as Nietzsche’s distinctive use of the term *Herkunft* implies, “it disturbs what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with

³³ E. Craun, *Ethics and Power in Medieval English Reformist Writing* (Cambridge, 2010); S. Gayk, *Image, Text, and Religious Reform in Fifteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 2010); D. Lavinsky, “Turned to Fables: Efficacy, Form, and Literary Making in the *Pardoner’s Tale*,” *The Chaucer Review* 50.3–4 (2015), 442–64; E. Schirmer, “William Thorpe’s Narrative Theology,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 31 (2009), 267–99; and *FLS*.

³⁴ M. Van Dussen, *From England to Bohemia: Heresy and Communication in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2012); *Religious Controversy in Europe, 1378–1536: Textual Transmission and Networks of Readership*, ed. M. Van Dussen and P. Soukup (Turnhout, 2013); K. E. Kennedy, *The Courtly and Commercial Art of the Wycliffite Bible* (Turnhout, 2014); D. Lavinsky, “An Early Sixteenth-Century Lutheran Dialogue and its Wycliffite Excerpt,” *Journal of the Early Book Society* 17 (2014), 195–220; Peikola, “Aspects of *Mise-en-Page* in Manuscripts of the Wycliffite Bible,” 28–67; Peikola, “Lollard (?) Production Under the Looking Glass: The Case of Columbia University, Plimpton Add. MS 3,” *Journal of the Early Book Society* 9 (2006), 1–23; E. Poleg, *Approaching the Bible in Medieval England* (Manchester, 2013); Solopova, “Manuscript Evidence.”

³⁵ M. G. Sargent, “Censorship or Cultural Change? Reformation and Renaissance in the Spirituality of Late Medieval England,” *AA*, 55–72 (at 67).

³⁶ Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 142.

itself.”³⁷ Though both Nietzsche and Foucault are attempting to decenter normative definitions of morality, their shared understanding of *Herkunft* looks out onto a medieval scene in which Wyclif formulated his ideas about scriptural authority in similar metaphysical terms, invoking the Bible as an immaculate *liber vitae* preceding all textual and historical contingency – “the external world of accident and succession,” as it were. Of course, as Paul de Man stressed, the postulate of “a single originary, pre-figural and absolute text” is specific to the very idea of hermeneutics.³⁸ Yet Wyclif was unusually forceful and reflective about the conditions such an idea imposed on biblical exposition, moving debate beyond the more conventional and familiar medieval dichotomy of word and Word by invoking a monolithic concept of *auctoritas*, one that protected scripture, if need be, not only from the distorting effects of glossing, but also from textuality itself.³⁹

In my view, the most compelling discussion of a “supernal” or “supralinguistic” Bible in this sense is to be found in Kantik Ghosh’s book, *The Wycliffite Heresy: Authority and the Interpretation of Texts*. “An important conceptual polarity in Wycliffite writing,” Ghosh argues, explaining a “governing paradigm” of his study, “opposes a dialogic, interested and, by implication, corrupt ‘glossatorial’ hermeneutics institutionalized in Church and University, to a (in theory) monologic apprehension of the divine mind through a transparent ‘open’ text.”⁴⁰ Ghosh frames this polarity in terms of “sciential” and “sapiential” approaches to scriptural interpretation, or between, in the first case, a self-consciously philological and historical understanding of biblical language, and, in the second, an inspired appreciation of the Bible’s transcendent and uniform meaning.⁴¹ If the first possibility stresses textual criticism and a sophisticated approach to scripture within the domain of human apprehension and reasoning, the second privileges receptivity, personal sanctity, and an affective commitment to scripture as the unchanging and immutable law of God. Wyclif, he stresses, has ideological investments in both; his fideistic emphasis on “biblical certitude” operates in tension but also sometimes in unison with a “rationalistic intellectuality” crucial to the hermeneutic contestation of ecclesiastical authority and tradition.⁴² Ghosh shows how these different tendencies generated the discursive processes by which the movement “brought out of the Schools, and into the domain of the non-clerical and the vernacular, intellectual discourses of considerable

³⁷ Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 147. On these and related terms, see Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, ed. and trans. W. Kaufmann (New York, 1989), 15–23, 76–96.

³⁸ P. de Man, *The Resistance to Theory*, *Theory and History of Literature*, vol. 33 (Minneapolis, 1986), 17. For discussion of this idea and its countertheorizations, see G. Bruns, *Hermeneutics: Ancient and Modern* (New Haven, 1992), 195–212.

³⁹ Within the medieval curriculum, according to Suzanne Reynolds, a more contingent notion of *auctoritas* took shape in relation to *literary* texts, particularly those used in the arts of grammar and the acquisition of Latin. S. Reynolds, “Inventing Authority: Glossing, Literacy and the Classical Text,” *Prestige, Authority, and Power in Late Medieval Manuscripts and Texts*, ed. F. Riddy (York, 2000), 16.

⁴⁰ *WH*, 7.

⁴¹ *WH*, 8.

⁴² *WH*, 41, 50.

complexity, sophistication and latitude, and thereby changed the always problematic ideological positioning of such discourses within contemporary culture.”⁴³

The notion of a “supernal Bible” therefore entails significant appropriations and disavowals; because it “is independent of the temporal and yet incorporates all that is spiritually relevant to the temporal,” such a text, Ghosh continues, “necessitates a troubled and recurrent Lollard engagement with the authority of ‘Tradition.’”⁴⁴ Still, one might suggest that the temporal is not quite the same thing as the *material*, and that any such concept of a “supernal” or “supralinguistic” scripture also implicates Wyclif’s relation to the book as object and hermeneutic event. Here, too, it is necessary to begin with a set of juxtapositions intimated by Wyclif’s commitment to scriptural sufficiency as he understood that principle *vis-à-vis* patristic thought and his obligations as a doctor of theology.⁴⁵ According to Heiko Oberman, Wyclif’s biblicism was a reaction against the growing dominance in the fourteenth century of canon law and canon lawyers, who insisted on “equal reverence for scriptural and for extrascriptural oral traditions.”⁴⁶ Like Bradwardine and other doctors of theology in the period, Wyclif turned to scripture as “the authoritative source” of tradition – “the final test,” Oberman writes, “of the interpretation of later interpreters.”⁴⁷ This latter principle functions as a “mode of reception of the *fides* or *veritas* contained in Holy Scripture.”⁴⁸

If in these respects Wyclif’s ideas were the starting point for a “coherent programme” of reform extending to virtually every major area of theological, ecclesiastical, and political life in the period, they also leave open the issue of the Bible’s concrete specificity as a book and its relation to the peculiarly concentrated and efficacious “truth” that lodges “in” scripture as other sources of authority and

⁴³ *WH*, 210–11.

⁴⁴ *WH*, 10.

⁴⁵ *WH*, 15.

⁴⁶ H. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Cambridge, MA, 1963), 369. On the balance between the faculties of theology and law through the end of the fifteenth century, see A. B. Cobban, “Theology and Law in the Medieval Colleges of Oxford and Cambridge,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 65 (1982–1983), 57–77.

⁴⁷ Oberman, *Harvest of Medieval Theology*, 369. Oberman asserts that what he calls Tradition I, within which he situates Wyclif, “should be seen as a protest against the growing acceptance of the Basilean two-sources theory,” which confers validity on extrascriptural ecclesiastical custom (371). Insistence on the authority of scripture, however, does not require an unambiguous embrace of *sola scriptura*, as Oberman is careful to suggest, and as Wyclif himself often implies (377). In order to prevent interpretations that neglect the evidence of holy scripture, God ordained a common biblical text perceptible to the senses (*ordinavit deus comunem scripturam sensibilem*), yet its meaning unfolds in conformity to the understanding of the holy doctors, as derived from the wisdom of the early church (*sensu sanctorum doctorum secundum etatem ecclesie a fonte sapientie derivata*). *DVSS*, I.xv.380/19–27. For a critique of Oberman’s reading of Basil, see *HSQA*, 26–27.

⁴⁸ Oberman, *Harvest of Medieval Theology*, 372. If these circumstances were as determinative as Oberman suggests, however, Wyclif might have been expected to advocate word-for-word translation of the Bible.

tradition are called into question.⁴⁹ Here we can lend critical extension to his “biblicism” in the sense G.A. Benrath anticipated when he used the term to describe the nexus of ecclesiological politics and theological realism.⁵⁰ And yet Wyclif’s self-conscious return to the “theological” has implications beyond his work as postillator or exegete (Benrath’s focus).⁵¹ In keeping with his sometimes pronounced realism (overlooking, for a moment, the many assumptions behind such a label), “theology” also occasions an urgent need to account for the material element of scripture, which, he concedes, the Christian venerates “just as he venerates images for the sake of the protection they offer, and not for the sake of the wood or manuscript themselves” (140).⁵² Hence Wyclif’s tendency to regard the written book equivocally, as a kind of aggregate (*aggregatio*) or “two-fold” abstraction, the source for a sacred sense or meaning which at the same time lies beyond the constitutive mediation of language and material form.⁵³ The sacred page, according to Ian Levy, discussing *De Veritate Sacrae Scripturae*, possesses “a divine nature that renders it supremely authentic and thereby greater than all created and sensible signs.”⁵⁴

From the vantage point of Wyclif’s scriptural idealism, then, materiality is a dilemma evinced by the corrigible and defective human artifact, and one more reason to insist on hermeneutic alternatives to the book itself. As we shall see, however, the material text is never completely displaced, and eventually assumes an irreducible presence in Wyclif’s own academic thought. But the story here is as much about his successors, for whom, I go on to argue, materiality spurs interpretive and even literary self-consciousness across a surprisingly wide range of hermeneutic venues. The sermons, commentaries, scriptural redactions, polemical tracts, autobiographical testimonies, and devotional works of many kinds attributed to the movement, in addition to telling us much about the rise of popular heresy in England, therefore also raise

⁴⁹ “The evidence, particularly in the realm of ideology, is surely overwhelming that Wycliffism aimed at, and provided a coherent programme for, reformation,” Hudson concludes. *PR*, 508.

⁵⁰ G. A. Benrath, *Wyclif’s Bibelkommentar* (Berlin, 1966), 41 ff., 217 ff., 226, 314–20. Benrath’s is the most comprehensive study of Wyclif as postillator and exegete. Central here as well are Beryl Smalley’s articles on the *Postilla* and the *Principium*, respectively, “John Wyclif’s *Postilla super totam Bibliam*,” *Bodleian Library Record* 5 (1953), 186–205, and “Wyclif’s *Postilla* on the Old Testament and his *Principium*,” *Oxford Studies Presented to Daniel Callus*, ed. R. Southern (Oxford, 1964), 253–96.

⁵¹ Ocker notes Wyclif’s desire to “retrench theology in sources free of the destructive questions that, according to some, philosophy supplied.” *BPHR*, 118–19.

⁵² “Unde illam veneratur cristianus sicut ymagines ratione muniminis et non ratione trunci vel codices.” *DVSS*, I.ix.190/1–3.

⁵³ “Nam sacra scriptura est aggregatum ex codice et sensu vel sententia sacra, quam catholicus habet de illa materiali ut signo.” *DVSS*, I.ix.189/9–11. Quoted and briefly discussed in A. Kenny, *Wyclif* (Oxford, 1985), 61. “Two-fold” is Levy’s translation of “duplicem scripturam.” *DVSS*, I.ix.191/5 (141).

⁵⁴ Levy, *HSQA*, citing *DVSS*, I.vi.109/18–110/20, though to make the slightly different point that scripture is sacred with respect to Christ’s divinity, and thus “the result of a hypostatic union” (66).

significant questions in the history of late medieval writing and religious culture. In particular, they speak to the vicissitudes of taking the Bible as “the inscription of sacred truth,” as Wyclif had memorably described it, compressing into a single ambiguous theorization both a figure for the material circumstances of writing and a meaning that exceeds particularization in language.⁵⁵

The biblical scholarship treated in the following pages articulates itself within the scope of this idea and the key pairings it sets before us: not only Latinate intellectuality and vernacular hermeneutics, but also, and more pointedly, the Bible’s transcendent *fides* or *veritas* and the contingent material forms through which Wycliffism sought to consolidate a new *textual* foundation for reformed belief and practice. Scripture in this context is the occasion for contemplating the ramifying proximities of trace and type, human and divine inscription, the concrete material reality of the written (vernacular) word and the equally compelling reality of its exemplar in the mind of God.⁵⁶ But what I most want to emphasize in this formulation, especially given Ian Forrest’s recent note of caution about the rise of a “more restrictively textual perspective” reflecting the concerns of literary scholars in the interdisciplinary study of heresy, is the singularity of a corpus where every act of inscription also raises questions about the material and discursive complexities in which Wycliffite theology was embedded.⁵⁷ All told, then, this is not a book about

⁵⁵ “I have been in the habit of describing Holy Scripture as the inscription of sacred truth, whether in its revealing of other truths, or insofar as it is the very revelation of truth itself” (Unde solebam describere scripturam sacram, quod sit sacra veritas inscripta, sive subiectet alias, sive sit veritas subiectata [DVSS, I.vi.107/15–108/2]) (97). I return to this dense theoretical statement later in the book, though it is worth noting here that Wyclif’s use of *subjectare* is often philosophical, in the manner of “to be a subject for (an accident), underlie,” or “to be grounded (in a subject), inhere.” See *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* (Oxford, 1975–2013), s.v. “subjectare,” and examples from Wyclif’s writings therein. The ensuing discussion of this passage is outlined in a marginal gloss from Oxford MS Bodley 924. Summarizing the different implications of Wyclif’s statement, the gloss notes that “sometimes holy scripture is properly taken for the truths which are written in the book of life” (*nota quod scriptura sacra aliquando sumitur et proprie pro veritatibus scriptis in libro vite*), while at times it also stands for the truths of “manuscripts, voices, and other contrived things, which are figures recalling the prior truth” (*codicibus, vocibus aut aliis artificialibus, que sunt figura memorandi veritatem priorem*).

⁵⁶ Levy points to some of these pairings in the more delimited context of Wyclif’s “pan-propositionalism.” *HSQA*, 64. Incidentally, the framework I describe here does not set out to make any evaluative assertions regarding the *consistency* or otherwise of Wycliffite exegesis and commentary, or to assess the extent to which its hermeneutics are typical of more “mainstream tradition.” For these considerations, see *Wycliffite Spirituality*, ed. and trans. J. P. Hornbeck II, S. Lahey, and F. Somerset (Mahwah, NJ, 2013), 42–43, 196–241. Nor do the discursive pairings relevant to my reading of Wycliffite hermeneutics necessarily attest to a contradiction between theory and practice; I would suggest instead that theory and practice change and evolve through the pressure of their constant interaction. For recent methodological reflection on this issue, see *FLS*, 209–10.

⁵⁷ Forrest, “Lollardy and Late Medieval History,” *WC*, 121–34 (at 134). Here a comparison presents itself to the persistent claim that for the American academy in particular textuality has become “the somewhat mystical and disinfected subject matter of literary theory,” in Edward Said’s memorable phrase. E. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, MA, 1983), 3. Since the “trans-Atlantic canonization and domestication” of Derrida and

the *debate* on Bible translation, either in the way it has been understood within (and consequently delimited by) the history of medieval heresy or in the obverse sense of “orthodox” responses to vernacular hermeneutics, though of course both topics continue to reward critical attention.⁵⁸ Nor does it presume to offer anything like a comprehensive intellectual or literary history of its topic. Without necessarily abandoning disciplinary paradigms such as these, its charge instead amounts to something like a revitalized, theoretically-oriented concept of materiality, whereby individual translations and commentaries suggest interpretive vistas beyond those most concerned with Wycliffism’s normative theological commitments.

The sense that vernacular translation or commentary might gesture towards the discursive in this way, that Wycliffism’s reflexivity about the contexts and conditions of its own hermeneutic labors might go beyond the need to address specific *theological* controversies, has not always informed critical discussions of its writings. Equally, scholarship frequently recognizes the extent to which the orthodox “response” to heresy invoked theoretical questions of its own. In *determinations* put forward during the 1401 Oxford debate on biblical translation, Thomas Palmer, William Butler, and Richard Ullerston – a Dominican friar, a Franciscan friar, and a secular cleric, respectively – dwell with considerable subtlety on questions concerning “the nature of language” or “the very possibility of translation,” to quote a modern account of this episode.⁵⁹ They do so, moreover, in academic forms, such

Foucault, Said argues, literary theory “has for the most part isolated textuality from the circumstances, the events, the physical senses that made it possible and render it intelligible as the result of human work” (3–4). Nevertheless, according to Aamir Mufti, “secular criticism,” which Said counterposes to narrow treatments of textuality, “has received nothing like the attention that, for instance, has been lavished upon the concept of Orientalism or the strategy of what he calls contrapuntal reading.” A. R. Mufti, “Auerbach in Istanbul: Edward Said, Secular Criticism, and the Question of Minority Culture,” *Critical Inquiry* 25.1 (1998), 95–125 (at 95). Mufti goes on to observe that “there may even appear to be something odd about the persistence of this concern in Said’s work, at least within the context of the Anglo-American academy. Could all this conceptual and rhetorical energy and all this ethical seriousness really be directed at literary readings of the Bible or at works concerning traditions of Judeo-Christian hermeneutics, as a few stray comments towards the end of *The World, the Text, and the Critic* might lead one to believe?” (96). At about the same moment, however, medievalists were posing this very question of Augustine scholarship with no sense that “secular criticism” or its more recent theoretical iterations had to be qualified or rationalized in relation to the biblical. For instance, Mark Vessey, reviewing Brian Stock’s study of Augustine, argued that texts such as *De Doctrina Christiana* and the *Confessions* invite an account of their “worldliness.” M. Vessey, review of Brian Stock, *Augustine the Reader: Meditation, Self-Knowledge and the Ethics of Interpretation* (Cambridge, MA, 1996), *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 96.9.1 (online text).

⁵⁸ For perceptive analysis of the pitfalls of working with “opposed terms,” see Michel de Certeau, who (citing Derrida to the same effect) writes that any such “contradiction” of “opposed terms” is easily “transcended by a third” and thus leads to “referential unity.” M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. S. Rendall (Berkeley, 1984), 133. Also relevant here are Michael Sargent’s reflections on “the essentialist privileging of orthodoxy” in studies of heresy and dissent. Sargent, “Censorship or Cultural Change?” *AA*, 60.

⁵⁹ *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol. 2: *The Middle Ages*, ed. A. J. Minnis and I. Johnson (Cambridge, 2005), 396. These observations occur in chapter 14, “Latin Commentary Tradition and Vernacular Literature,” collaboratively authored by R. Hanna, T. Hunt, R. G. Keightley, A. J. Minnis, and N. F. Palmer. For a different understanding of hermeneutic or

as the *quodlibet*, resistant to facile or reductive conclusions.⁶⁰ But while a great deal indeed had its genesis or was formally voiced in response to the translation project, the interplay of different interpretive and theoretical paradigms within it did at least as much to raise far-reaching questions.

This interplay was at its most dynamic as the material forms and textual practices of Wycliffite writing reframed ideological definitions of scriptural authority and the Bible as a book. In making the exploration of such a problem the central task of this study, I seek to avoid severing academic theology from popular religious movement; as I have suggested, Wycliffism was both these things, and perhaps nowhere is their interrelation more urgently denoted than in the importance both variously accord to biblical texts and their proper interpretation.⁶¹ My focus thus claims some of the same territory that the English Bible does in studies of late medieval intellectual or religious history while also drawing attention to the profound ambivalence Wyclif himself felt about the materiality of books and writing. In doing so, it leverages the critical terms, concepts, and methods scholars have developed in recent decades to study the history of reading and the book, especially as these pertain to cultural production before the age of print. Much work of this kind currently finds itself at home in studies whose materialist orientation centers either on specific books and manuscript traditions or on broader patterns of production, use, and circulation. Early studies in what Stephen G. Nichols and Siegfried Wenzel called “materialist philology” now often compete with those where the empirical or the material medium of the book itself constitutes the dominant plane of culture

exegetical self-consciousness, see *BPHR*, xii. The determinations of Palmer and Butler against vernacular biblical translation are reprinted in Deanesly, *Lollard Bible*, 399–437; Ullerston’s tract remains unedited but served as the basis for an abridged Middle English commentary mistakenly attributed by Deanesly (*Lollard Bible*, 437–45) to John Purvey, as demonstrated in A. Hudson, “The Debate on Bible Translation, Oxford 1401,” *English Historical Review* 90 (1975), 1–18. The English adaptation of Ullerston’s determination was subsequently edited as “A Lollard Tract: On Translating the Bible into English,” ed. C. Bühler, *Medium Aevum* 7 (1938), 167–83, and more recently as *First seip Bois*, in *EAEB*, 143–49. For contextualization of this important episode, see Gillespie, “Vernacular Theology,” 411–16; F. Somerset, “Professionalizing Translation at the Turn of the Fifteenth Century: Ullerston’s *Determinacio*, Arundel’s *Constitutiones*,” *The Vulgar Tongue: Medieval and Postmedieval Vernacularity*, ed. F. Somerset and N. Watson (University Park, PA, 2003), 145–57; *FEB*, 6–14; and, most fully, *WH*, 86–111.

⁶⁰ P. Glorieux, “Aux origines du quodlibet,” *Divus Thomas* 38 (1935), 502–22, as well as *La littérature quodlibétique*, I (Paris, 1925) and II (Paris, 1935). Ideological flexibility on the subject of biblical translation at this moment may owe something to the scholastic forms of argumentation in which the debate was conducted. The *disputatio de quolibet*, writes Ulrich Köpf, “is not restrained to a previously fixed or a conventional range of themes but can deal with any conceivable problem.” U. Köpf, “The Institutional Framework of Christian Exegesis in the Middle Ages,” *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of its Interpretation*, vol. 1: *From the Beginnings to the Middle Ages (until 1300)*, ed. M. Sæbø (Göttingen, 2000), 148–79 (at 171).

⁶¹ I therefore depart from uses of the term “popular” that suggest Wyclif’s theological concerns were eventually displaced by the more practical interests of “semi-literates and pious laymen.” K. B. McFarlane, *John Wycliffe and the Beginnings of English Nonconformity* (London, 1952), 115. Michael Wilks offers a thoughtful reassessment of McFarlane’s thesis in his essay, “Royal Priesthood: The Origins of Lollardy,” reprinted in *PIP*, 101–16 (esp. 103–104).