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Jessica Harkins

*College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University*

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## Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale* and Boccaccio's *Decameron* X.10

JESSICA HARKINS

Many readers find that Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale* profoundly critiques Petrarch's methods of translation, but hesitate to claim that Chaucer knew the text Petrarch was translating; Boccaccio's version of the Griselda story from the *Decameron*.<sup>1</sup> This hesitation goes back to J. Burke Severs's assertion that Chaucer did not know Boccaccio's text.<sup>2</sup> David Wallace began to undermine this argument by drawing attention to shared textual traits of these two versions of the story, but only John Finlayson has advanced the case directly against Severs by arguing that Boccaccio must be a source.<sup>3</sup> What has perhaps

I wish to thank David Lawton and Irene Scariati Maffia for their valuable insights. I am also grateful for the helpful and generous comments of this journal's two editors and the anonymous readers.

1. Robert Edwards judges the *Decameron* "not as a direct influence for Chaucer," but contends that "the *Clerk's Tale* absorbs and reorders the claims of Boccaccian multiplicity and Petrarchan closure" (*Chaucer and Boccaccio: Antiquity and Modernity* [New York, 2002], 131,141). Carolyn Dinshaw draws attention to the fact that Petrarch compares his translation to the Hieronymian woman in his dedicatory letter, but she does not acknowledge that Boccaccio's text is the subject of the metaphor (*Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* [Madison, 1989], 141–48). Robin Kirkpatrick reiterates the belief that Chaucer "regarded Petrarch as his primary source" and claims that Chaucer's Clerk "echoes" Boccaccio's Dioneo "unconsciously" ("The Griselda Story in Boccaccio, Petrarch, and Chaucer," in Piero Boitani, ed., *Chaucer and the Italian Trecento*, [Cambridge, U.K., 1983], 231–48, at 231).

2. J. Burke Severs's definitive theory, in *The Literary Relationships of Chaucer's Clerkes Tale* (New Haven, 1942), was that Chaucer is translating from two or three versions of the Griselda story, of which Boccaccio's Italian text is not one: Petrarch's *Epistolae Seniles XVII.3*, Philippe de Mézières's *Miroir des Dames Mariées*, and an anonymous French version entitled *Le Livre Griseldis*. Contemporary criticism almost exclusively discusses Chaucer as a respondent to Petrarch and the French sources on the basis of Severs's argument.

3. David Wallace never presses the case that Chaucer's critiques of Petrarch are fundamentally Boccaccian, even though the five criticisms of Petrarch he outlines are instances in which Chaucer recuperates an aspect of Boccaccio's novella (*Chaucerian Polity: Absolutist Lineages and Associational Forms in England and Italy* [Stanford, 1997], 286–93). John Finlayson identifies four textual correspondences that occur only in Chaucer and Boccaccio, and he concludes that the

most prevented a shift in our reading of Chaucer's sources in the *Clerk's Tale* is the absence of what Finlayson calls "a smoking gun": a clear and definitive example of Chaucer's use of Boccaccio's language.<sup>4</sup>

This essay points to just such an example, one that has hitherto gone unnoticed. But other equally important instances of translation have been missed as well, in part because Severs's influential study focused only on instances of translation in the form of paraphrase: the kind of sentence-by-sentence translation that Chaucer elsewhere performs with the writings of Boccaccio and Boethius. Severs did not, however, examine the translation of individual terms of critical importance (an isolated lexical reprisal) or the patterning of such terms at key narrative moments. His study also ignored how translation occurs in the linguistic play within a shared lexical set or within shared narratorial commentary. This essay will identify these forms of translation as they surround four key terms in the *Clerk's Tale*—*fortune*, *dishonest*, *arraye*, and *yvele*—providing proof, even beyond the "smoking gun," that Chaucer must have known and used Boccaccio's *Decameron* X.10 in addition to his French and Latin sources.<sup>5</sup> The evidence clarifies the textual reciprocity between the *Clerk's Tale* and *Decameron* X.10, and adjusts our understanding of how Chaucer translates his Italian sources.<sup>6</sup> If we do not see how Chaucer uses Boccaccio in the *Clerk's Tale*, we cannot perceive fully how Chaucer negotiates and redirects the textual history of the Griselda story.<sup>7</sup>

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*Decameron* X.10 is a source text for Chaucer ("Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*," *Studies in Philology* 97 [2000]: 255–75). He points out as well that Chaucer "must have known that Boccaccio had written an earlier version in his *Decameron*" because Petrarch names him as the author in his preface—which was included in "all the fourteenth and fifteenth-century manuscripts of the tale" (258). Finlayson further argues that Chaucer's habit of seeking out sources of interest to him supports the probability that Chaucer would have sought out a copy of Boccaccio's text.

4. Finlayson, "Petrarch," 255.

5. In the most recent essay on the issue, Thomas J. Farrell argues that Chaucer "knows but does not use *Decameron* X, 10" ("Source or Hard Analogue? *Decameron* X, 10 and the *Clerk's Tale*," *Chaucer Review* 37 [2003]: 346–64, at 351). The question of how Chaucer might reveal knowledge of Boccaccio's text without using this knowledge remains largely unaddressed.

6. Extensive scholarship has tracked Chaucer's movements in Italy and identified the possible means by which he could have read or obtained the writings of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio. David Wallace notes that by 1373 the *Decameron* was already widely circulated and enjoying fame (*Giovanni Boccaccio, Decameron* [Cambridge, U.K., 1991], 109). Vittore Branca has also documented that the *Decameron* was "sought after and well-disseminated" in Europe by the early 1380s ("Boccaccio Europeo," *Il Veltro: Rivista della Civiltà Italiana* 35 [1991]: 13–24, at 14–15). Glending Olson reiterates that Chaucer "probably acquired" Dante and Boccaccio during his "two trips to Italy, in 1372–3 and 1378" ("Geoffrey Chaucer," in David Wallace, ed., *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature* [Cambridge, U.K., 1999], 579). Finally, Michael Hanly has very plausibly suggested that Chaucer had access to Italian manuscripts through being Controller of the Customs ("Courtiers and Poets: An International Network of Literary Exchange," *Viator* 28 [1997]: 305–32).

7. As Michael Calabrese has noted, "Over the past twenty years, in fact, the complex relations between Boccaccio and Chaucer have been receiving ever expanding and dynamic treatment, without critics compelling themselves to determine whether Chaucer actually read the *Decameron*

Fortune: *Sentence by Sentence, a Larger Pattern of Repetition, and a Shared Narratorial Commentary*

When Griselda learns of the papal bull giving Walter dispensation to annul their marriage, the Latin and the anonymous French sources register her response as stalwart but not particularly pained. Petrarch writes:

Que fama cum ad Griseldis noticiam pervenisset, tristis, ut puto.  
Sed ut que [semel] de se suisque de sortibus statuisset, inconcussa  
constitit, expectans quid de se ille decerneret cui se et sua cuncta  
subiecerat.

When this rumor came to Griselda, she was sad, I imagine. But always firm about herself and her lot, she remained unaffected, awaiting the decision of the man to whom she had given herself and everything that was hers.<sup>8</sup>

The anonymous French text follows Petrarch closely:

Laquelle chose quant elle vint a la connoissance Griseldis, elle ne  
s'en esbayst ne mua en aucune maniere ne ne changa soy, attendant  
que cil, [a] qui elle avoit soubmis tous ses fais, en ordonnast a sa  
voulenté.

When this news came to Griselda's attention, she was not afflicted by it or altered in any manner or changed, waiting until he, to whom she had yielded in all her acts, would announce his will.<sup>9</sup>

Phillipe de Mézières's version is similar, although he allows the heroine a moment of pain:

Ces froides nouvelles de ceste bulle—que le marquis devoit prendre  
une autre femme—vindrent aus oreilles de Griseldis fille de Janicola;

or employed it as a source" ("Chaucer's Dorigen and Boccaccio's Female Voices," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 29 [2007]: 259–92, at 259).

8. Francis Petrarch, *Historia Griseldis: Petrarch's Epistolae Seniles XVII.3*, ed. and trans. Thomas J. Farrell, in Robert M. Corrales and Mary Hamel, eds., *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, U.K., 2002, 2005), 1:108–29, at 123, 125 (lines 289–92) (hereafter cited as "*Seniles XVII.3*"). All italics within the textual citations are my own.

9. *Le Livre Griseldis*, ed. and trans. Amy W. Goodwin, in Corrales and Hamel, eds., *Sources and Analogues*, 1:140–67, at 157 (lines 282–85).

et se elle fu tourblee en son cuer et raisonnement nulz n'en devoit doubter, mais celle qui une fois de lui meismes des siens et de son sort franchement avoit deliberé, prist cuer en soy et fu reconfortee, attendant tout ce que celui auquel elle toute s'estoit sousmise en vaudroit ordener.

Then the chilling news of this [papal] bull came to the ears of Griselda, daughter of Janicula; no one could reasonably doubt that she was troubled in her heart, but once she had clearly considered her family and her lot, she took heart and was comforted, and awaited all that he to whom she had submitted herself in all things would wish to command in this.<sup>10</sup>

Chaucer picks up Petrarch's "I imagine" with *I deeme*, but then translates a phrase from Boccaccio that provides a clear and definitive example of Chaucer's use of Boccaccio's language:

But whan thise tidynges came to Grisildis,  
I deeme that *hire herte was ful wo*.  
*But she, ylike sad for everemo,*  
*Disposed was, this humble creature,*  
*The adversitee of Fortune al t'endure,*

Abidyng evere his lust and his plesance,  
To whom that she was yeven herte and al,  
As to hire verray worldy suffisance.

(IV 752–59)<sup>11</sup>

Chaucer's representation of Griselda's pain, beginning with "hire herte was ful wo," adopts the wording and syntax of a sentence in Boccaccio not present in the other sources:

La donna, sentendo queste cose e parendole dovere sperare di ritornare a casa del padre e forse a guardar le pecore come altra volta aveva fatto e vedere a un'altra donna tener colui al quale ella voleva

10. Philippe de Mézières, *Le miroir des dames mariees*, in Joan Williamson, ed., *Le Livre de la Vertu du Sacrement du Mariage* (Washington, D.C., 1993), 359–77, at 370 (lines 23–28). All translations of de Mézières are my own.

11. All citations from Chaucer are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn. (Boston, 1987).

tutto il suo bene, *forte in se medesima si dolea; ma pur, come laltre ingiurie della fortuna avea sostenute, così con fermo viso si dispose a questa dover sostenere.*

The lady, hearing these things and realizing that she should expect to return to her father's house and perhaps keep watch over the sheep as she had done before, and to see another lady possess the man to whom she was completely devoted, grieved to herself most bitterly; *but yet, just as she had endured the other injuries of Fortune, she was disposed to bear this one, too, with a firm countenance.*<sup>12</sup>

Chaucer closely renders the sense of Boccaccio's phrase *forte in se medesima di dolea* (she grieved to herself most bitterly) with *hire herte was ful wo*, which has no referent in the Latin or *Le Livre Griseldis*, and which de Mézières modifies by writing that she was "comforted." Crucially for the question of Chaucer's engagement with Boccaccio, Chaucer reproduces the syntax and lexis of the Italian phrase: he translates the Italian conjunction *ma pur* (but even though) with *But . . . ylike*, and four words in particular—*disposed*, *adversitee*, *Fortune*, and *endure*—appear in Boccaccio's sentence with the same meanings. While Chaucer alters Boccaccio's "injuries" by writing *adversitee*, he contextually refers to the same blows of fortune that Boccaccio names. Furthermore, *sostenere* means "to sustain or to bear," and since the usage here means to sustain over a period of time, Chaucer translates Boccaccio's meaning exactly with *endure*. The additional lexical reprisals of *disposed* and *Fortune* align this construction with the Boccaccian text.

This sentence-by-sentence correspondence is unmistakable and cannot be accidental. But other kinds of lexical correspondences that are just as important have been missed due to an incomplete conception of what counts as translation. The *Clerk's Tale* and the *Decameron* critique Fortune in reference to the same narrative event on two occasions, the first being the annulment scene. The second occurs when the marquis commands Griselda to return to her father's house. The Latin and French texts read respectively:

"Esto igitur forti animo, dansque locum alteri, et dotem tuam referens, in antiquam domum equa mente revertere. Nulla hominum perpetua sors est."

12. Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Vittore Branca (Turin, 1980), 1242. All translations of the *Decameron* are my own.

“Therefore be strong in spirit: give place to your successor, take back your dowry, and return to your old home in peace. The lot of humans is never stable.”

“Aies doncques bon couraige e fort; fay lieu a l'autre, e pren le douaire que tu apportas avecques moy et t'en retourne en la maison de ton pere. Ainsi est des choses: nul n'est seur en son estat.”

“Therefore, take heart and be strong: make way for another, and take the dowry that you brought with you and return with it to your father's home. Such is the way things are: no one can be sure of his lot.”

“Soyes donques de fort corage, Griseldis, laisse ton lieu a l'autre, pren ton douaire et apaise ton corage, va en ta vielle maison; nul sort a l'homme et a la femme ne puet estre perpetuel.”

Therefore take courage, Griseldis, leave your place to another, take your dowry and reconcile your heart, and go to your old house; no lot for man or for woman can be unchanging.<sup>13</sup>

Chaucer's version, alternatively, reads:

“Be strong of herte, and voyde anon hir place;  
 And thilke dowere that ye broghten me,  
 Taak it agayn; I graunte it of my grace.  
 Retourneth to youre fadres hous,” quod he;  
 “No man may alwey han prosperitee.  
 With evene herte I rede yow t'endure  
 The strook of Fortune or of aventure.”

(IV 806–12)

Chaucer reproduces the marquis' sentence in the Latin and the French sources, but then adds a couplet in which, unlike his Latin or French sources, the marquis blames Fortune for the blow that Griselda receives. This explicit attribution of blame to Fortune has no correlation in either the Latin or the

13. Petrarch, *Seniles XVII.3*, 125 (lines 303–5); *Le Livre Grisildis*, 159 (lines 303–6); and de Mézières, *Le miroir*, ed. Williamson, 371 (lines 11–14).

two French versions.<sup>14</sup> But it does share syntax and lexis with the Italian. As Griselda returns to her father's house (in the next narrative scene), Boccaccio mentions that her father, always suspicious of the marriage, has saved her old clothes, and a voice—which blames Fortune instead of Gualtieri—describes her redressing and resuming of “menial” household chores:

per che recatigliele e ella rivestitigli, a' piccioli servigi della paterna casa si diede, sí come far soleva, *con forte animo sostenendo il fiero assalto della nemica fortuna.*

[her father] gave [her old clothes] back to her, and she put them on again and applied herself to the menial chores in her father's house as she had been accustomed to doing before, *suffering with strong spirit the fierce assault of hostile Fortune.*<sup>15</sup>

Chaucer also depicts her return to her father's house as a blow delivered by Fortune. When Walter instructs Grisildis to “endure/the strook of Fortune or of aventure,” Chaucer's *strook* may not be as emphatic as Boccaccio's *fiero assalto della nemica fortuna* (fierce assault of hostile Fortune), but the two phrases are syntactically parallel, and both frame her change in circumstances as a physical attack carried out by this external force. Secondly, when Walter admonishes her to “endure” the loss, Chaucer translates Boccaccio's verb *sostenere* (to sustain, to bear) with *endure*, as he had done in the previous attribution of blame to Fortune. The marquis' command to “endure” the blow with an “even herte” seems an unnecessary command after “Be strong of herte” (which Chaucer reproduces from the Latin or French sources). *Even herte* echoes what Boccaccio's narrator reveals—that she endured the

14. Petrarch does refer at one point to Fortune as a hostile force. The difference is that Petrarch employs *fortuna* not to comment on the narrative events, but to describe the imperfect understanding of the populace who lament Griseldis's fate when she returns home from Valterus's palace in her shift. Petrarch writes, “atque ita prosequentibus multis et flentibus fortunamque culpantibus” (Many followed her, lamenting and blaming Fortune) (*Seniles XVII.3*, 125 [line 329]). A similar version appears in *Le Livre Griseldis*: “Et en cest estat la suivent plusieurs, plourans et maudisans fortune” (And in this state several follow her, weeping and slandering fortune) (ed. Goodwin, 161 [lines 339–40]). In de Mézières's text, it is the nobility who follow Griseldis from the palace, “fortune maudissant” (slandering fortune) (*Le miroir*, ed. Williamson, 372 [lines 16–17]). Chaucer picks up these lines: “The folk hire folwe, wepyng in hire weye,/And Fortune ay they cursen as they goon” (IV 897–98). While I do not mean to suggest that the use of *fortuna/fortune* is simplistic in the Latin or French texts, in their divorce scenes those lamenting Fortune do not share equal authority with the single, omniscient narrator who finally guides readers' interpretation of the tale. Chaucer's usage, however, is anchored to his additional usages of the term, so that the populace in his scene voices a critique echoed elsewhere in the narrative.

15. Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Branca, 1244.



assault of Fortune with a *forte animo* (strong spirit). The precise lexical correspondence occurs at three points: *strook*, *Fortune*, and *endure*. In the marquis' speech, Chaucer reproduces the sentence of the Latin and French texts, and then adds a couplet that contains the important lexical information provided in a slightly later narrative moment in Boccaccio.

Chaucer's translation of these attributions of blame to Fortune gives additional insight into how he is translating Boccaccio because, by translating Boccaccio's lexis in these instances, Chaucer also translates Boccaccio's recurrent sense of Fortune as a hostile and potentially culpable force. The attribution of blame to Fortune by a narrative voice—independent of actors within the story—occurs on three occasions in the *Decameron*.<sup>16</sup> On each of these occasions, Dioneo's open critique of Gualtieri shifts to a third, alternative narrative voice that blames Fortune for Griselda's sufferings. The disjunction suggests a third narratorial voice and further puts the agent of Griselda's suffering into question. As Giulio Savelli has argued, both of these affects serve to generate the "già moderna" (already modern) ambiguity of Boccaccio's novella.<sup>17</sup> When Chaucer translates Boccaccio's lexis on these two occasions, he reproduces the pattern of repetition (the recurrent attributions of blame to Fortune) and the corresponding narrative affects of disjunction and ambiguity.

### Dishonest: *An Isolated Lexical Reprisal*

Another critically important reprisal of Boccaccio appears early in the divorce scene. Having first spread false rumors that he was seeking to have the pope annul his marriage to Griselda, Walter informs Griselda that he has received a (phony) papal bull and that she needs to return to her own house, taking her dowry with her, since he will now be taking a new, younger bride. Griselda's "patient" yet pained reply recalls that she has no dowry as Walter removed her clothes before marrying her. But, returning his wedding ring and his other belongings, she makes a famous appeal to keep a shift in order to cover her body as she walks home from the castle. All five texts identify Griselda's desire to cover her body and, by reminding Walter of his paternity, implicitly criticize his violation of the womb.

16. The third instance in Boccaccio occurs when Gualtieri asks her to prepare his house for his second wedding and new wife (*Decameron*, ed. Branca, 1244–45).

17. Giulio Savelli, "Struttura e Valori Nella Novella Di Griselda," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 14 (1983): 278–301, at 300.

Petrarch's *Griseldis* states that she feels it would be "indignum" (unworthy) for her womb to be uncovered:

"Nuda de domo patris egressa, nuda ibidem revertar, nisi quod *indignum* reor ut hic uterus in quo filii fuerent quos tu genuisti, populo nudus appareat."

"Naked I came from my father's house; naked I shall return there, except that I consider it *unworthy* that this womb, which contained the children that you begot, should appear naked to the people."

In *Le Livre Griseldis*, *Griseldis* agrees to walk home naked unless the marquis finds such exposure "vil e malgracieuse" (base and ungracious):

"Nue vins de chiez mon pere, et nue la retourneray, se tu ne repute et tien chose *vil e malgracieuse*, comme je croy que tu feroyes, que ce ventre cy, qui a porté les enfans que tu as engendrez, soit veu nus ne descouvert au peuple."

"I came naked from my father's house, and I will return there naked unless you consider and hold it to for a *base and ungracious* thing, as I believe you would, that this womb here that carried the children you engendered be seen naked or uncovered by the people."

In de Mézières's version, which is closer to the Latin, *Griseldis* finds it "chose indigne et non affreable" (an unworthy and inappropriate thing):

"Toute nue de la maison mon pere je yssis et toute nue je y retourneray sauve que ce me sambleroit *chose indigne et non affreable* que cestui ventre ou quel furent les enfans que tu as engendrés devant le peuple deust apparoir tout nuz."

"I left my father's house completely naked, and I will return completely naked, except that it seems to me an *unworthy and inappropriate* thing that this womb which held the children that you engendered should appear completely naked before the people."<sup>18</sup>

18. Petrarch, *Seniles XVII*.3, ed. Farrell, 125 (lines 320–21); *Le Livre Griseldis*, ed. Goodwin, 159, 161 (lines 328–331); and de Mézières, *Le miroir*, ed. Williamson, 371 (line 37), 372 (line 3).

Chaucer adopts the French version's expression of hopeful doubt that Walter would do such a thing, somewhat eschewing Petrarch's version, but he uses the adjective *dishonest*:

“Naked out of my fadres hous,” quod she,  
 “I cam, and naked moot I turne agayn.  
 Al your plesance wol I folwen fayn;  
 But yet I hope it be nat youre entente  
 That I smoklees out of youre paleys wente.

“Ye koude nat doon so *dishonest* a thyng,  
 That thilke wombe in which youre children leye  
 Sholde biforn the peple, in my walkyng,  
 Be seyn al bare.”

(IV 872–79)

Boccaccio also employs the term *onesto* (honest, honorable):

“Comandatemi che io quella dota me ne porti che io ci recai: alla qual cosa fare né a voi pagatore né a me borsa bisognerà né somiere, per ciò che di mente uscito non m'è che ignuda m'aveste; e se voi giudicate *onesto* che quel corpo nel quale io ho portati i figliuoli da voi generati sia da tutti veduto, io me n'andrò ignuda.”

“You command me to carry away with me the dowry which I brought here: to do this thing neither will you require a bursar nor I a purse or a pack animal, for I have not forgotten that you received me naked; and if you deem it *honorable* for the body in which I carried the children that you engendered to be seen by everyone, I will leave naked.”<sup>19</sup>

Chaucer's use of *dishonest* reproduces the precise inversion of Boccaccio's *onesto* (honest, honorable) in the same pivotal moment of Griselda's speech. As opposite sides of the same coin, *dishonest* and *onesto* focus on the same moral value. In Italian, *onesto* refers to “che è conforme, che si ispira alle leggi morale, ai principi della rettitudine, della giustizia, della lealtà” (that which is in keeping with, inspired by moral laws, the principles of rectitude, of justice, and of loyalty);

19. Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Branca, 1243.

“degno di onore; commendabile, lodevole” (worthy of honor, commendable, praiseworthy); and “adatto, appropriato, conveniente” (fitting, appropriate, seemly).<sup>20</sup> *Honest* likewise carries the meanings of “worthy of honour, honourable, commendable; bringing honour, creditable” in addition to “free from disgrace or reproach; respectable, decent, seemly, befitting, becoming.”<sup>21</sup> While both *onesto* and *honest* contain the meaning of “appropriate” found in the other versions of the narrative, the cognate (unlike the terms used in other versions) independently contains, even foregrounds, the definition of “honor” and what may be considered “honest” or “honorable” within its field of meaning. Indeed Chaucer’s use of *dishonest* strengthens the reference to Walter’s honor, since *dishonest* is conversely defined as: “entailing dishonour or disgrace; dishonourable, discreditable, misbecoming, shameful, ignominious.”<sup>22</sup>

By using *dishonest*, Chaucer translates a term that is under scrutiny in Boccaccio’s narrative.<sup>23</sup> Boccaccio’s version utilizes variations of the verb *onorare* (to honor) ten additional times throughout the narrative to euphemistically and ironically describe Gualtieri’s “honorable” treatment of his wife—and to indicate how the marquis insists that his populace treat *whomever* he may marry. The term *onesto* forms the center of Griselda’s speech in *Decameron* X.10 by virtue of being the culmination of her request: it is her sole and sharp challenge to Gualtieri’s inequity, and it may be the only usage of *onorare* (to honor) that can be read without irony. The word further stands out in Boccaccio’s novella as a rare moment of speech in which Griselda’s tone and implications are unequivocal. Chaucer’s interest in this significant feature of the Italian text accords with the way that he not only cites but also deepens Walter’s duplicity in the *Clerk’s Tale*.

#### Arraye: Linguistic Play within a Shared Lexical Set; An Isolated Lexical Reprisal

Clothing, too, plays a vital role in the *Decameron* X.10 and in the *Clerk’s Tale*. Carolyn Dinshaw states that Chaucer “has heightened and pointed the

20. Salvatore Battaglia, ed., *Il grande dizionario della lingua italiana* (Turin, 1961–2008), s.v. *onesto*. Branca notes that Boccaccio uses the term *onesto* in the sense of “honorable” on multiple occasions. See *Decameron* I.5 (line 7), II.8 (lines 16, 49), III.9 (line 5), III.concl. (line 16), IV.5 (line 6), IX.1 (line 7; here *onesto* carries the meaning of “fair, just”), and X.8 (line 69).

21. *OED*, s.v. *honest*. All citations of the *OED* were accessed no later than May 2011. <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.csbsju.edu/>

22. *OED*, s.v. *dishonest*.

23. The narrative recurrently cues the meaning of *onesto* as Gualtieri asks his people multiple times to “honor” his wife—and will ask Griselda to “honor” his second wife. *Onore* is the central term—ironically as it may be employed—used to describe how Gualtieri conceives of his and others’ treatment of his wife.

clothing imagery of the Griselda tale in creating the Clerk's version," but this argument makes sense only when his text is compared to the Latin and French sources, rather than to Boccaccio's version.<sup>24</sup> The Latin and French versions refer to dress and/or list items of apparel on six occasions: the preparations for the marquis' wedding to Griselda, the stripping and redressing of Griselda, her public divorce, her return to her father's house, preparations for the marquis' second wedding, and the re-dressing of Griselda after the marquis reveals the truth. Boccaccio and Chaucer both refer to clothing in three additional narrative moments: the description of Griselda after her move to the palace; the arrival/return of the two children; and the post-tale commentary. Chaucer also refers to clothing twice when the marquis reveals the truth of her children's identities.

In his treatment of clothing in the *Clerk's Tale*, Chaucer translates Boccaccio closely in two ways. While the Latin and French texts refer to clothing in a literal manner, both Boccaccio and Chaucer develop—through repetition and semantic inversion—plural, figurative meanings that run the length of their narratives. Boccaccio, for instance, adopts *costume* (dress, costume, custom, habit, moral conduct), and Chaucer *array*: "outfit, attire, dress," and also "a condition of special preparation, or which has been attained by special preparation; the state of being specially fitted out, as for war, festivities, solemnities."<sup>25</sup> Chaucer also employs *estaaat*, and, as Dinshaw notes, *condicioun* and *degree*, to describe clothing in the narrative (and in the *General Prologue*)—each a polyvalent term. Boccaccio's *costume* and *abito* (habit, dress, custom, attitude, carriage) similarly describe not only clothing but also manners, attributes, and habits.<sup>26</sup>

In at least three instances, this linguistic play occurs in the same textual moment of the *Decameron* and the *Clerk's Tale*. After the marquis marries Griselda, all versions comment upon the widespread praise of his perceptiveness:

quodque eximiam virtutem tanta sub *inopia* latitantem tam perspicaciterprehendisset, vulgo prudentissimus habebatur.

24. Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, 134. I agree with Dinshaw's point that Chaucer's references to clothing call attention to themselves and to their polysemic qualities; I would simply add that Chaucer's "clothes-consciousness" and verbal play with sartorial terms provides evidence that he engages with Boccaccio's text.

25. Battaglia, *Il grande dizionario*, s.v. *costume*; OED, s.v. *array*. Dinshaw also notices Chaucer's repeated employment of this term (*Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, 144–46).

26. Battaglia, *Il grande dizionario*, s.v. *abito*.

Because he had recognized so clearly the extraordinary virtue concealed by her *poverty*, his prudence was widely praised.

lequel, comme si tres grant et excellent vertus, [en si grant *povreté* mucié, eust prins], chascun l'en tenoit a saige.

Since he had perceived such great and excellent virtues hidden in such great *poverty*, each held him to be wise.

en son palays vivoit en pais et en repos a la grace di Dieu et dehors a la grace des hommes en lui loant que si grant vertu, reposté et absconse en si grant *povreté*, il avoit sceu cognoistre et prendre sagement.

Inside his palace he lived in peace and repose in God's grace, and outside his palace in the [good] graces of men who praised him for having known to recognize and wisely take hold of such great virtue hidden and obscured under such great *poverty*.<sup>27</sup>

And for he saugh that under *low degree*  
Was ofte vertu hid, the peple hym heelde  
A prudent man, and that is seyn ful seelde.  
(IV 425–27)

per ciò che niuno altro che egli avrebbe mai potuta conoscere l'alta virtù di costei nascosa sotto *i poveri panni e sotto l'abito villesco*.”

since no one other than he could have ever recognized her noble virtue hidden as it was beneath *her poor clothes and her peasant garb*.<sup>28</sup>

But unlike the Latin and French texts, which indicate that the marquis could see beneath her *poverty*, Chaucer specifies that the marquis could see through her *low degree*. As Dinshaw has discussed, *degree* semantically connotes clothing although its primary definition is “a stage or position in the scale of dignity or rank; relative social or official rank, grade, order, estate, or station.”<sup>29</sup>

27. Petrarch, *Seniles XVII.3*, ed. Farrell, 119 (lines 183–84); *Le Livre Griseldis*, ed. Goodwin, 149 (lines 149–50); and de Mézières, *Le miroir*, ed. Williamson, 364 (lines 25–28).

28. Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Branca, 1238.

29. *OED*, s.v. *degree*.

Boccaccio's phrase, *abito villesco* (peasant garb), also indicates both clothing and social status: *abito* indicates "veste" (clothes); a "particolare tipo di abbigliamento" (a particular kind of clothing); "portamento e atteggiamento della persona" (carriage and attitude of a person); and "abitudine" (habit).<sup>30</sup> Put together, the phrase *abito villesco* refers specifically to the clothes of a peasant, differentiating itself from *poveri panni* (poor clothes) by stressing the social significance of the clothing. Chaucer's *low degree* likewise utilizes a sartorial lexis to specify her lower social status.

A second example of a shared sartorial reference occurs when the marquis requests the divorced Griselda, dressed in the rags of her native poverty, to help with his second wedding. In the Latin, French, and English texts, the marquis requests that she welcome and administer to his guests according to their status, explaining that he lacks sufficient, knowledgeable help (and would like her to provide this service). But in the Latin and French versions, the marquis refers explicitly only to the work of greeting and installing his guests:

"Cupio, ait, ut puella cras huc ad prandium ventura magnifice accipiatur, virique et matrone qui secum sunt, simulque et nostri qui convivio intererunt, ita ut locorum verborumque honor singulis pro dignitate servetur. *Domi tamen feminas ad hoc opus ydoneas non habeo.*"

"I desire that this girl be received magnificently at a banquet here tomorrow. Let each guest be welcomed to the feast—she and her entourage, and my own people in the same way—and let their welcome and placement honor the worthiness of each guest appropriately. *I do not have in my house enough women for this work.*"

"Griseldis, je desire moult que celle pucelle, qui doit demain estre cy pour estre ma femme, et ceulx qui vendront avec elle, et aussy tous ceulx qui seront au disner, soient receus bien et grandement, et que chascun soit festoyé et ordonné selon sa personne et estat. *Toutesfoiz, ceans [n'ay] a present qui proprement sceut ce faire.*"

30. Battaglia, *Il grande dizionario*, s.v. *abito*.

“Griselda, I greatly desire that this maiden, who should be here tomorrow to be my wife, those who will come with her, and also all those who will be at dinner be received properly and perfectly and that each be regaled according to his worth and rank. *Yet I have no one here who knows how to do this properly.*”

“Griseldis, la pucelle que je doy espouser sera demain cy au disner; et pour ce je desire que elle, le conte mon frere, les seigneurs et dames qui viennent en sa compaignye soyent noblement receus par telle maniere que a chascun soit fait honneur et de paroles et de fait selonc sa dignité. *Et pour ce que je n'ay pas a mon hostel dame ne matrone qui bien le seust faire a ma volenté . . .*”

“Griseldis, the young woman whom I am marry will be here tomorrow to dine; and therefore I desire that she, the count my brother, and the lords and the ladies that come in their company, be nobly received in such a manner that each is honored with words and actions according to his status. *And since I do not have at my house woman or matron who knows well how to do this according to my wishes . . .*”<sup>31</sup>

Chaucer's marquis states that she should *arrange the rooms* of his palace:

“Grisilde,” quod he, “my wyl is outrely  
This mayden, that shal wedded been to me,  
Received be to-morwe as roially  
As it possible is in myn hous to be,  
And eek that every wight in his degree  
Have his estaat, in sitting and servyse  
And heigh plesaunce, as I kan best devyse.

“I have no wommen suffisaunt, certayn,  
*The chambres for t'arraye* in ordinaunce  
After my lust.”

(IV 953–62)

31. Petrarch, *Seniles XVII.3*, ed. Farrell, 127 (lines 344–47); *Le Livre Grisildis*, ed. Goodwin, 161 (lines 356–60); and de Mézières, *Le miroir*, ed. Williamson, 374 (lines 1–6).



This request also occurs in Boccaccio:

“Io meno questa donna la quale io ho nuovamente tolta e intendo in questa sua prima venuta d'onorarla; e tu sai che io non ho in casa donne che mi sappiano *acconciar le camere* né fare molte cose che a così fatta festa si richeggiono.”

“I will bring this lady home, whom I have newly chosen (as my wife), and I want her to be honored when she arrives; and you know that I do not have women in my home who know how to *lay out the bedrooms* for me, or to do the many things that such a grand celebration requires.”<sup>32</sup>

The linguistic correspondence runs through the length of the scene, since both Chaucer and Boccaccio repeat their sartorial verbs (*array* and *acconciare*, respectively) in their closing sentences. In the concluding sentence of the housecleaning in the *Clerk's Tale*, Chaucer's narrator comments:

And she, the mooste servysable of alle,  
Hath every chambre *arrayed* and his halle.  
(IV 979–80)

Boccaccio also repeats the verb *acconciare* in the concluding sentence of the housecleaning in the *Decameron*:

e a ogni cosa, come se una piccolo fanticella della casa fosse, porre le mani, né mai ristette che ella ebbe tutto *acconcio* e ordinato quanto si conveniva.

And, as if she were a little maid in the house, she put her own hands to everything and did not pause to rest until she had everything *laid out* and in order.<sup>33</sup>

Boccaccio's verb *acconciare* jointly refers to preparation and to dress. *Acconciare* may mean: “disporre; preparare; adornare, disporre con abilità, con arte; abbigliare, in particolare pettinare” (to arrange; to prepare; to adorn, to

32. Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Branca, 1244.

33. Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Branca, 1245.

arrange with ability, with art; to clothe, to dress up, in particular to do one's hair).<sup>34</sup> Chaucer's verb *array* shares this double meaning: "to put in order for a purpose; to make (a thing) ready, prepare; to furnish the person with raiment . . . to attire, dress; now, to dress up with display."<sup>35</sup> Both terms immediately summon the meanings of "to prepare" and "to dress," particularly in the sense of fancy or intricate dress. In all five texts, Griselda prepares the castle for the arrival of the guests—and each narrator comments on her poor clothes and servitude—but only Chaucer and Boccaccio have the marquis explicitly ask her to prepare the rooms, and they both phrase that request with an open-ended word that resonates with sartorial language elsewhere in the narrative.

In *Envoy de Chaucer* at the close of the *Clerk's Tale*, the narrator makes a parting reference to clothing in his advice to "fair" women to "Shewe thou thy visage and thyn apparaille" (IV 1207–8). Boccaccio's subversive narrator, Dioneo, refers to articles of clothing—each with multiple meanings—three times within his final sentence: "camiscia" (blouse, shift, or [contextually] hymen), "pelliccione" (fur coat, a fur-trimmed gown, or [contextually] pubic hair), and "roba" (stuff, things, belongings, or [contextually] dress).<sup>36</sup> Dioneo jokes that Gualtieri's outrageous tests make him deserving of, perhaps, "the kind of woman who, when he chased her out of her house in nothing but a shift, would have arranged for another to shake her furry little trim, so as to get herself a nice dress out of the affair."<sup>37</sup> Slightly before the *Envoy*, the Clerk makes the point, analogous to Dioneo's, that contemporary women would break "a-two" rather than withstand such pressure as Walter imposed.

For if that they were put to swiche assayes,  
 The gold of hem hath now so badde alayes  
 With bras, that thogh the coyne be fair at ye,  
 It wolde rather breste a-two than plye.  
 (IV 1166–69)

34. Battaglia, *Il grande dizionario*, s.v. *acconciare*.

35. *OED*, s.v. *array*.

36. Translations are my own. Emma Campbell has noticed that the Clerk's emphasis on Griselda's physical virginity during her public divorce not only departs from Petrarch's sole reference to it—when she asks for a shift in which to leave the castle—but that Chaucer's "three time repetition of 'maydenhede' re-introduces some of the spirit of the Boccaccian original" ("Sexual Poetics and the Politics of Translation in the Tale of Griselda," *Comparative Literature* 55 [2003]: 191–216, at 211n32). The similarity is stronger than she supposes; Dioneo *does* emphasize Griselda's physical virginity, naming it repeatedly in the divorce scene through the double entendre of *camiscia* (blouse, shift, hymen)—a wordplay he reiterates in the closing sentence of the novella.

37. Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Branca, 1248.

The context suggests that contemporary women are less pure than Griselda—their “gold . . . so bad alayes / With bras”—and that they would be untrue in the face of such treatment (IV 1164–67). Like Dioneo, the Clerk with his language of debased “coyne” depicts the duplicity with which a woman out of fabliau would respond to “swiche assayes.” The Clerk’s mercenary language echoes the materialistic impulses of Dioneo’s hypothetical adulteress who would betray Gualtieri in order to “get herself a nice dress.”<sup>38</sup>

The parting commentary of the *Clerk’s Tale* illustrates a larger point about Chaucer’s translation of Boccaccio: not only do Chaucer and Boccaccio each rely on particular narrative voices (which the other sources do not use), but the Clerk’s narrative voice often recaptures Dioneo’s. While lexical reprisals make clear the relationship between the Clerk’s narrative voice and Dioneo’s, the Clerk’s reflections of Dioneo’s style and wordplay involve the precise slippage between clothing and Griselda that allows for the shift from high to low speech in the double entendre of the parting joke. In this playfully ironical ending—with its allusions to sex and trade, and the narrator’s advice about the artful use of clothing within marital battles—Chaucer uses the linguistic play to open the story’s meaning up to debate among the common populace—a semantic and narratorial event that occurs only once in the *Clerk’s Tale* and *Decameron* X.10.<sup>39</sup>

### *Yvele: A Larger Pattern of Repetition, and a Shared Narratorial Commentary*

It is commonly observed that Chaucer shows less sympathy for the marquis than his Latin or French predecessors: he reduces the marquis’ grief during the tests of his wife, and he includes longer, more fully developed extra-narrative commentary on the marquis’ behavior. However, criticism has not yet considered that the adjectives used by Chaucer’s narrator to describe the marquis are synonymous with those used by Boccaccio’s. Before the marquis’

38. Finlayson has already argued that Chaucer’s ending is Boccaccian, though he reads the Clerk somewhat differently, contending that “The Clerk cannot . . . be used to go as far, and be as crude as Dioneo, but the reference to the Wife of Bath is *precisely* to the pilgrim who has ‘shaken her skin-coat,’ more than once, to earn ‘a fine new dress’ and more” (“Petrarch,” 272). While I find the Clerk to be more like Dioneo than Finlayson does, my reading concurs with his assessment—in particular with his claim that “The introduction of the Wife of Bath . . . parallels Boccaccio’s introduction of a radically different way for women to respond to matrimonial abuse” (272).

39. Farrell also claims that “the sudden invitation to think about Griselda in the previously unimagined terms of her sexuality is surely the most suggestive parallel in the structure of the two works” (“Source or Hard Analogue,” 358–59).

first test of his wife, when he has their newborn daughter taken from her, Petrarch's narrator observes that the marquis was seized by a desire:

Cepit, ud fit, interim Walterum, cum iam ablactata esset infantula, *mirabilis* quedam quam [laudabilis] doctiores iudicent cupiditas, satis expertam care fidem coniugis experiendi altius et iterum retemptandi.

As can happen, however, Walter was seized by a desire—wiser heads will call it more *amazing* than worthy. When the child had stopped nursing, he decided to test further the already proven faithfulness of his dear wife, and to repeat the test again.

*Le Livre Griseldis* phrases a slightly stronger critique of the marquis:

Et veez cy que je ne sçay quelle ymaginacion *merveilleuse* print ledit marquis, laquelle aucuns saiges veulent louer, c'est assavoir de experimenter et essaier sa femme plus avant, laquelle il avoit desja assez essayee et approuvee, et de la tenter encores par diverses manieres.

Now look, I do not know where the marquis got this *strange* notion, which some men wish to praise, to assay his wife and to test her more than before, whom he had already tried and tested enough, and to tempt her again in diverse ways.

Philippe de Mézières comments:

Lors le marquis, qui tant amoit s'espouse pour la tres grant vertu qu'il veoit tous les jours croistre en lui, pensa de l'esprouver et de le fort tempter.

Then the marquis, who so loved his wife for the tremendous virtue which he saw increase in her every day, thought to test and to tempt her strongly.<sup>40</sup>

40. Petrarch, *Seniles XVII.3*, ed. Farrell, 119 (lines 192–94); *Le Livre Griseldis*, ed. Goodwin, 149, 151 (lines 162–65); and de Mézières, *Le miroir*, ed. Williamson, 365 (lines 5–7). Similar language appears in de Mézières's version before the second test, where he describes the marquis' *curiosité* (curiosity) as *merveilleuse, perilleuse, et estrange* (astonishing, perilous, and strange) (*Le miroir*, ed. Williamson, 367 [lines 23–25]).

Chaucer's extended critique of the marquis, however, runs over two stanzas in length.

Ther fil, as it bifalleth tymes mo,  
 When that this child had souked but a throwe,  
 The markys in his herte longeth so  
 To tempte his wyf, hir *sadnesse* for to knowe,  
 That he ne myghte out of his herte throwe  
 This merveillous desir his wyf t'assaye;  
 Nedelees, God woot, he thoghte hire for t' *affraye*.

He hadde assayed hire ynogh bifore,  
 And foond hire evere good; what neded it  
 Hire for to tempte, and alwey moore and moore,  
 Though som men preise it for a subtil wit?  
 But as for me, I seye that *yvele* it sit  
 To assaye a wyf when that it is no nede,  
 And putten hire in *angwyssh* and in *drede*.

(IV 449–62)

Boccaccio's text places the narrator's first response to the marquis' tests slightly earlier, at the outset of the test during which Gualtieri decides first to test Griselda's humility by informing her of the populace's unhappiness with her low status.

Ma poco appresso, entratogli un nuovo pensier nell'animo, cioè di volere con lunga esperienza e con *cose intollerabili* provare la *pazienza* di lei, e' primieramente la punse con parole . . .

But shortly afterward, a new thought entered his mind, the desire to test her *patience* with a lengthy trial and with *intolerable things*; first, he stung her with words . . .<sup>41</sup>

The Latin and French texts describe, respectively, Walter's desire as "more amazing than worthy," "strange," and unnecessary, but the Clerk's commentary, like Dioneo's, calls for an ethical assessment of the marquis' actions. Chaucer's verb *affraye* and his nouns *angwyssh* and *drede* name the two central

41. Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Branca, 1239.

“cose intollerabili” (intolerable things) that Griselda is made to suffer. Like Dioneo, the Clerk not only remarks upon the bizarre nature of the marquis’ impulses, but also highlights their painful effects upon Griselda.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, Chaucer’s term *sadnesse* (gravity of mind or demeanor; seriousness, soberness, staidness) emulates Boccaccio’s *pazienza* (patience) more closely than Petrarch’s *fidem* (faithfulness).<sup>43</sup> Both *sadnesse* and *pazienza* (which here refers to Griselda’s ability to tolerate offenses) indicate that the marquis wishes to test Griselda’s steadiness under pain, that is, her ability to endure it.

Further, the Clerk’s statement, “But as for me I seye that *yvele* it sit,” recalls Dioneo’s condemnation of the marquis as an example of *una matta bestialità* (a senseless cruelty). When Dioneo introduces the Day 10 novella, he informs the *brigata* that he will not speak of a “magnificent” thing but of *una matta bestialità* (a senseless cruelty). As an independent term, *bestiale* refers to actions and persons who are “proprio delle bestie; contrario alle forme dell’umanità e della civiltà; violente, brutale, crudele, disumano” (brutish; contrary to the forms of humanity or of civility; violent; brutal, cruel, callous or inhumane).<sup>44</sup> But Dioneo’s phrase also famously cites Canto IX of Dante’s *Inferno*, when Virgil outlines the Aristotelian categories of sin—of which “*matta bestialità*” is the lowest.<sup>45</sup> Vittore Branca notes that, in Dioneo’s usage, the Dantean language takes on the more general meaning of a “*sciocca crudeltà*” (shocking cruelty) or “*stoltezza crudele*” (a cruel senselessness).<sup>46</sup> Chaucer’s adjective *yvele* means “in an evil manner; ill; wrongly, wrongfully, wickedly,” though it may also mean “badly, poorly, indifferently, insufficiently; not well.”<sup>47</sup> The Clerk likely means something akin to “badly” when he says, “But as for me, I seye that *yvele* it sit/To assaye a wyf when that it is no nede,” but the adverb retains the meaning of “wickedly” within its field of meaning. Both phrases assert the senselessness or needlessness of the marquis’ actions

42. An extended description of the heroine’s pain occurs in de Mézières’s version following each occasion that the marquis informs her of the populace’s dissatisfaction with her children (*Le miroir*, ed. Williamson, 365 [lines 22–23], 368 [lines 7–10]). Chaucer certainly could have utilized de Mézières’s depiction of Griselda’s anguish; my point is that he connects Griselda’s suffering to a damning portrait of the marquis that earlier occurs in Boccaccio’s version.

43. *OED*, s.v. *sadness*.

44. Battaglia, *Il grande dizionario*, s.v. *bestiale*.

45. This passage appears in *Inf.*, XI.79–82 (Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, trans. Alan Mandelbaum [New York, 1982], 94–95). In Aristotle’s *Ethics*, crimes of incontinence, malice, and senseless (or insane) cruelty are so ordered because they reflect different degrees of one’s loss of reason: sins of incontinence (such as gluttony or lust) or sins of malice (such as wrath) are committed out of potentially understandable passions; sins of insane cruelty serve no purpose and, being senselessly destructive, are the furthest from God.

46. Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Branca, 1233n4.

47. *OED*, s.v. *evilly*.

while simultaneously containing a reference to sin. Further, Chaucer places stress on the meaning of *yvele* as “in an evil manner” by using, as well, the term *wikked* two times within the narrative—“a term of wide application, but always of strong reprobation, implying a high degree of evil quality.”<sup>48</sup> It is important to notice that these critiques make moral evaluations of the marquis’ actions that associate them—if not the marquis himself—with the infernal. While the terms *yvele* and *una matta bestialità* lack lexical similarity, they share connotative meaning: *yvele* by definition, and *bestiale* by allusion, refer to a cruelty that is worthy of hell. No such commentary takes place in the other versions.

The second appearance of *yvele* in the *Clerk’s Tale* creates an important parallel with Boccaccio during the second marriage. After Griselda responds graciously to Walter’s final goad—his public solicitation of her opinion of his new bride—the marquis decides she has been tested to his satisfaction. He acknowledges the rumors that have been spread about him, and he explains the truth of his actions. Petrarch first describes the marquis’ reflection on the treatment of his wife, and then has the marquis describe his own behavior to the populace:

Talia dicentis alacritatem intuens, atque constanciam tociens  
tamque acriter offense mulieris examinans . . . “Sciant qui con-  
trarium crediderunt me curiosum atque experientem esse, *non*  
[*impium*]; probasse coniugem, non dampnasse; occultasse filios,  
non mactasse.”

He looked at her cheerfulness, and considered the constancy of the  
woman, so often and so roughly offended . . . [And to the populace,  
he says:] “Let those who believed the opposite know me painstaking  
and testing, *not impious*. I have proved my wife rather than con-  
demning her and hidden my children rather than killing them.”

The French versions follow relatively closely. *Le Livre Griseldis* states:

Et quant le marquis regarda la bonne et entiere voullenté de celle  
femme, la constance et grant pacience, que tant de fois et tant  
durement courroucié avoit . . . “Saichent tous qui le contraire ont

48. *OED*, s.v. *wicked*. See *CIT*, IV 723 (“wickedly”), 785 (“wikke usage”).

cudié, moy avoir fait ce que j'ay fait pour toy approuver et essaier tant seulement, e non pas avoir voulu faire tuer mes enfans.”

And when the marquis saw the complete good will of this wife, her constancy and great patience, this wife whom so many times and so cruelly he had afflicted . . . [And to the populace, he says:] “All who believed the contrary should know that I did what I did only to test and try you, never planning to have my children killed.”

Similarly in the version by de Mézières, the marquis reflects on his wife's good cheer and constancy during his tests of her:

l'avoit offendu cruellement et verissimelment couroucyé sans sa desserte in aucune maniere . . . “Sachent donques tous qui le contraire pensoyent, que j'ay voulu ma loyale espouse curieusement et rigoreusement esprouver e non pas condampner, et mes enfans ay fait nourir secretement par ma suer a Boulongne et non pas occyre ne tuer.”

he had cruelly offended and truly afflicted her, without her meriting it in any way . . . [And to the populace, he says:] “Therefore all who thought the contrary should know that I wanted to test my loyal wife in an unusual and rigorous manner rather than to condemn her, and that I had my children secretly raised by my sister in Bologna and did not have them murdered or killed.”<sup>49</sup>

Chaucer's verse follows a structure close to each of the anterior versions:

“This is ynogh, Grisilde myn,” quod he;  
 “Be now namoore agast ne *yvele* apayed.  
 I have thy feith and thy benyngnytee,  
 As wel as evere womman was, assayed,  
 In greet estaat and povreliche arrayed.  
 Now knowe I, dere wyf, thy stedfastnesse”  
 .....

49. Petrarch, *Seniles XVII.3*, ed. Farrell, 127, 129 (lines 374–75, 382–84); *Le Livre Griseldis*, ed. Goodwin, 165 (lines 397–98, 407–9); and de Mézières, *Le miroir*, ed. Williamson, 375 (lines 21–22), 376 (lines 23–26).



“And folk that ootherweys han seyde of me,  
 I warne hem wel that I have doon this deede  
 For no *malice* ne for no *crueltee*,  
 But for t’assaye in thee thy wommanheede,  
 And nat to sleen my children—God forbeede!—  
 But for to kepe hem pryvely and stille,  
 Til I thy purpos knewe and al thy wille.”

(IV 1051–56, 1072–78)

Walter’s use of the term *yvele* critically parallels Gualtieri’s repetition of the term *bestiale*:

Gualtieri, veggendo che ella fermamente credeva costei dovere esser sua moglie, né per ciò in alcuna cosa men che ben parlava, la si fece sedere allato a disse: “Griselda, tempo è omai che tu senta frutto della tua lunga pazienza, e che coloro li quali me hanno reputato *crudel* e *iniquo* e *bestiale* conoscano che ciò che io faceva a anti-veduto fine operava.”

Gualtieri, seeing that [Griselda] firmly believed the girl was to be his wife, and did not, despite this, speak anything but good of her, made her sit beside him and said: “Griselda, it is time now for you to reap the fruit of your long patience, and for those who have held me to be *cruel*, *unjust*, and *senseless* to realize that what I have done was directed toward a pre-established goal.”<sup>50</sup>

The common rhetoric of these narratives frames the marquis’ speech as a defense: he has “not” killed his children, and so on. The French, including the version by Philippe de Mézières, takes a slightly stronger tone by calling Griselda *durement courroucié* (cruelly afflicted), although this does not stray far from Petrarch’s *acriter offense* (roughly treated). But none of the Latin or the French texts implicates the marquis in a spiritual trespass. Chaucer’s repetition of *yvele*, however, reprises Boccaccio’s repetition of *bestiale*—both terms first appear early in the narrative in the mouth of the narrator, and then a second time in the marquis’ speech at this narrative moment. Chaucer’s use of *yvele appayed* may be read as “displeased” (which is likely how Walter intends it); so too, within Gualtieri’s speech, *bestiale* may mean “senseless, callous,

50. Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Branca, 1246–47.

or inhumane” (since Gualtieri does not himself refer to Dante). However, *yvele*, like *bestiale*, repeats lexis outside of the marquis’ speech and within the narratorial commentaries. As a result, in Boccaccio and in Chaucer, the marquis unconsciously reproduces a more severe moral critique of his actions than he intends.<sup>51</sup> The twice-repeated term performs the same function in the *Clerk’s Tale* as it does in the *Decameron*: a narrative perspective runs through the whole of the narrative which presents a damning portrait of Walter outside of the internal discourses that praise his actions. The effect of having Walter use this language is jarring. By putting these critical words into his mouth, Boccaccio and Chaucer cause the marquis to betray himself, to use language that does not belong to him but to this other, damning narrative view.

Further, Chaucer’s selection of descriptors in this scene strengthens the Boccaccian critique. Petrarch, Chaucer, and Boccaccio each use a total of three terms to describe the marquis’ actions: Petrarch calls the marquis *curiosum atque experientem esse, non [impium]* (painstaking and testing, not impious); Boccaccio, *crudel e iniquo e bestiale* (cruel, unjust, and unfeeling); and Chaucer uses the terms *yvele*, *malice*, and *crueltee* (Chaucer’s marquis explains that he has acted “For no malice ne for no crueltee”). While Chaucer picks up the marquis’ denial of negative attributes, he does not assign any positive or neutral attributes to the marquis, as Petrarch does. The term *crueltee* reproduces Boccaccio’s *crudel* (cruel) within the marquis’ sentence, though it also concurs with the French texts’ employment of *durement* and *cruelmente* (cruelly) earlier in the scene. Yet his two terms *yvele* and *malice* share meaning with *bestiale* and *iniquo*. The term *iniquo*, like the English cognate *iniquitous*, refers to rule that is “unjust,” “immoral,” or otherwise “wrongful.” But in a religious sense, *iniquo* connotes “ungodly” and even “aimed towards evil, towards sin” (“diretto al male, al peccato”).<sup>52</sup> Chaucer’s term *malice* similarly stresses “the intention or desire to do evil or cause injury to another person; active ill will or hatred.”<sup>53</sup> (Chaucer’s *malice* may additionally carry an echo of *Inferno*, Canto IX, where *malice* constitutes the second category of sin.)

51. Arguably, this shared pattern of repetition holds true for each of the versions since the marquis finally voices the criticisms raised against him. However, while the marquis reflects upon his cruel treatment of Griselda in both French versions, he does not implicate himself in a spiritual trespass nor do the terms for cruelty possess meanings outside of how the marquis employs them in his observations. Petrarch’s Walter does state that he has *not* been “impium” (impious). This potentially critical term differs from the critiques in Boccaccio and Chaucer in that *impium* appears only once in the narrative; by allowing its sole usage to be in the marquis’ speech, Petrarch returns control of its meaning to the marquis, whereas the terms *bestiale* and *iniquo* (unjust or ungodly) hold subversive power in Boccaccio.

52. Battaglia, *Il grande dizionario*, s.v. *iniquo*.

53. *OED*, s.v. *malice*.

Petrarch appears to rebuff Boccaccio's use of *iniquo* (unjust or ungodly) when his Valterus explains that he has "not" been *impious*, but Chaucer's use of *malice* underscores both godlessness and the intent to do harm that inheres to Boccaccio's *iniquo*.

Chaucer clearly reproduces phrasal structures and lexis of the Latin and French versions in this scene, yet he also incorporates lexis consonant with Dioneo's critique of the marquis. A crucial aspect of Chaucer's translation appears as a result. Like the novella, each of the subsequent versions of the narrative comments negatively on the marquis' behavior during each of the testing scenes; only Chaucer utilizes lexis that gives voice to the moral and spiritual judgment articulated by Boccaccio. In so doing, Chaucer not only translates the nature of Dioneo's complaint; he restores Boccaccio's exemplum inside of the narrative changes introduced by Petrarch. By translating both the Boccaccian exemplum of *una matta bestialità* and the Petrarchan exemplum of "Extraordinary Wifely Obedience and Trust" into the *Clerk's Tale*, Chaucer records the history of the story's translation, giving new voice to the discord between its polarized exempla.

In his dedicatory letter to Boccaccio that explains how and why he has chosen to translate Boccaccio's tale, Petrarch states that he has produced a "mutate veste" (change of vestment), alluding to St. Jerome's famous reading of a text as the captive foreign woman in Deuteronomy.<sup>54</sup> For Jerome, a text may be divested of its undesirable qualities as a woman might be shaved and stripped naked. Thus stripped, the text may be re-dressed to suit the translator's purposes—just as a captive foreign woman might be re-dressed, after a period of purification, and married by a member of the tribe. Despite reservations about the "style . . . idiom . . . and levity" of much of the *Decameron*, Petrarch deems the Griselda story pleasing in its "pious and serious" nature.<sup>55</sup> In translating this story, Petrarch re-purposes the tale as a Christian allegory: Walter becomes a form of adversity sent by God, and Griselda an example of the appropriate and patient response of the soul to God's testing. In so doing, Petrarch shaves and re-dresses Boccaccio's text to make it into an image that pleases him.

54. Petrarch, *Seniles XVII.3*, ed. Farrell, 111 (line 41). St. Jerome's famous allegoresis compares the translation of a text to the stripping and shaving of the captive foreign woman in Deuteronomy—articulating how a text can be stripped of its undesirable qualities while its truth (her body) is brought into the new language (the tribe). Critics commonly associate Griselda (who is stripped and redressed in her two marriage scenes) with Jerome's allegorical woman-as-text. See St. Jerome, *Letters and Select Works*, in W. H. Fremantle, trans., *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 14 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1983), 6:114, 138, 484.

55. Petrarch, *Seniles XVII.3*, ed. Farrell, 109 (lines 14–15, 17).

Chaucer's translation of the Griselda story does something different. Like Petrarch (and the French translators), Chaucer chooses elements of his source texts that are of interest to him, including phrases, narrative structures, and individual terms. Unlike Petrarch, who excises parts that do not work in order to create one homogeneous figure, Chaucer represents the different figures that compose the Griselda story's textual history. Chaucer restores Boccaccian lexis to the narrative, not because he privileges Boccaccio's version as definitive, but because he sees how subsequent versions have stripped away vital aspects of the story's complexity. (For instance, Chaucer juxtaposes Boccaccio with the author, Petrarch, who tried to silence him.) Far from diminishing Chaucer's accomplishments within the *Clerk's Tale*, our recognition that Chaucer used Boccaccio's text allows us to see that it was one of the multiple texts at his disposal when writing his version of the Griselda story. He translates Boccaccio not to replace what the other versions have taken out, but to create something richer and stronger by not allowing one author's desire to cancel out another's. Where Petrarch shaves away multiplicity of meaning in order to unify the story around a Christian exemplum, Chaucer draws attention to the phrases and terms that have made the text's meaning so contested. In so doing, he allows for a fuller understanding of what translation might be: neither a slavish representation of a source text, nor an enslaving, appropriative stripping of that text to create a unitary truth.

*Saint John's University*  
*Collegeville, Minnesota*  
*(jharkins@csbsju.edu)*