

The Canterbury Tales

The Clerk of Oxford and his Tale

The Clerk's Tale

Introduction

This tale of patient Griselda was quite popular in the Middle Ages, a fact that may be puzzling for modern taste, which often finds the story grotesque for different reasons, even if we also find it fascinating. It first appeared in literary form in Italian, as the last tale in Boccaccio's *Decameron* (c. 1355), and was then retold by his contemporary and fellow-countryman, the poet Petrarch (c. 1373).

One thing to bear in mind is that one of the pilgrims, Harry Bailly, the Host, refers to it as a "legend," wishing that his wife had heard it (1212, below). A legend in the Middle Ages was not just an old or incredible story, though the story of Griselda's patience is incredible enough. Legend meant literally "something to be read," something edifying, that is, like a saint's life in, say, the great medieval hagiographical collection known as *The Golden Legend*. The stories in that book are often of incredible feats of endurance accomplished by virgins and martyrs for the faith. These saints are "patient," that is literally, "suffering, enduring." Christians were to look on them, if not as patterns to be directly imitated, at least as models to be admired, examples of what a real hero or heroine could do for God's sake; and ordinary Christians should try to follow in their own less perfect way.

The Clerk's Tale is similar and disturbingly different: it shows a saintly woman with the virtue of patience on the heroic scale, but the tortures inflicted upon her (mental not physical) are not inflicted by wicked men who are obviously the enemies of God and the faith, but by her husband who, in some way, seems to represent God !

The Wife of Bath had admitted that clerics *could* sometimes speak well about women even if only about those who qualified for a place in *The Golden Legend*. She may be right about this clerk, although having heard this tale, she might also have said that the Clerk is not speaking well of women, since this is an exemplary tale which (in spite of his final disclaimer) encourages women to be obedient to their husbands' whims and to participate in their own subjection; it is a man's fantasy of a wife eternally docile and forbearing, but told by a clerk, an unmarried clerical "authority" without any experience.

The Golden Legend, a collection put together by another clerk, Jacobus de Voragine, was not taken at face value by all. Indeed, it was dubbed the Leaden Legend by some,

The scriptural story of Job does not work in this emotional way. And after all, his sufferings are inflicted by the devil whom God has allowed to afflict him. Is Walter God's diabolical instrument? If so, who is God in the allegory or exemplum? A reader of the above passage may be tempted to treat "O good God" not only as an exclamation but as a direct address to the Deity by the suffering "sponsa Christi".

It has been pointed out that in the pre-marital agreement scene Walter is peculiarly scrupulous to make clear to Griselda the one crucial term on which the marriage is to take place: her total obedience to his wishes. In one sense she has no grounds for complaint; she has made what might under other circumstances be called a Rash Promise, and she must take the consequences. But did she really have any choice?

Those who argue that the allegory of Griselda as the patient soul fits the tale nearly as poorly as Griselda's old clothes, insist that it is an exemplary story, not to be read either as pure allegory or as a realistic novel; one suspends one's disbelief and does not ask questions like these: Do God and Walter exactly correspond? Do noblemen go out and marry peasant girls just like that? Does such an uncultivated girl suddenly blossom into a member of the aristocracy with all the diplomatic and social graces normally acquired by long training? Why do the people who were so pressing about an heir not do something about his sudden disappearance? Would any woman accept Walter's apparent murder of her child with such placidity? Would Walter's sister and her husband collaborate in Walter's enormity? And so on.

There is more than a touch of the folk tale here, where cruelties like those in "Cinderella" or "Hansel and Gretel" seem almost expected, and the story builds on the reader's hopes that all will come out right in the end. There is the same absence of any religious feeling at the core, in spite of the allusions to the Annunciation, the Nativity and Planctus Mariae that critics have found in the story, in spite of the reference to the Pope (who is there for convenience), and in spite of the occasional phrase like "By him that for us died." Perhaps the most striking evidence of this lack of religious center is the absence of a church service when Walter and Griselda get married, or of any wedding service for that matter. In spite of the Clerk's geographical introduction, one has very little feeling that the story is set in Christian Italy — or Christian England either. Instead, it is much the same indeterminate territory as one sees, for example, in many ballads or folktales, a bit preternatural, not quite human, not at all like the village beside Bath where the Wife, Alison Masterman lives.

Inevitably one is brought to wonder why Chaucer found the story worth re-doing after it had been treated by two major authors of his own century, Boccaccio and

Petrarch. To be sure, he makes it fit neatly into the Marriage Debate as a response to the Wife of Bath's prologue and tale, to which it is a striking contrast in more ways than one: the Wife's domineering is never cruel or inhuman like Walter's; her desire for "husbands young, meek, and fresh a-bed" is readily, even amusingly comprehensible. Her short tale is about as unrealistic as the Clerk's, but the milieu of her long prologue is an English world of gossips and clerics, household squabbles and theological argument, flirting, coupling, playgoing, domestic rebellion and church marriage.

The Clerk's tale of Griselda is not at all like this. The coolness at its center is appropriate for a tale which may be, in fact, a questioning of the very Christian lesson it purports to inculcate. This version of the tale may be a cry as muffled as Job's is loud against the arbitrary cruelty of a world that is supposed to be ruled by a good and just God. *Is God like Walter* — cruel, arbitrary, whimsical, tyrannizing over the defenceless men and women whom He has raised from the dust of the earth only to humiliate and torture them? Do we have any more choice in accepting His terms than Griselda did Walter's? Remember the swift and terrible punishment inflicted for the breaking of an arbitrary prohibition in Eden. Remember the terrible demand made on Abraham to sacrifice his son, so graphically portrayed in some medieval miracle plays. Griselda was expected to sacrifice her children in the same way. A questioning critique comes directly from the narrator:

What needed it
Her for to tempt, and always more and more
Though some men praise it for a subtle wit?
But as for me, I say that evil it sits
To assay a wife when that it is no need *to test*
And putten her in anguish and in dread (457-62)

O needless was she tempted in assay (621)

But now of women would I asken fain *I want to ask*
If these assayès mightè not suffice? (696-7) *these tests*

Chaucer put some similar questions in the mouth of pagan Palamon in *The Knight's Tale*, direct questions to the gods themselves:

What is mankind more unto you hold
Than is the sheep that rouketh in the fold? *huddles*

*What governance is in this prescience
That guiltless tormenteth innocence?* (Kn.T. 1307-14)

The answer to this let I to divines (Kn.T. 1323) *theologians*

The "happy" ending in the Clerk's tale is as arbitrary as in the Knight's; and, to the difficult questions posed by his own tale, the Clerk, like the good divine he is, gives the standard (but questionable) answer : "This story is said ...," quoted above. Griselda finally makes it to the heaven of Walter's bosom as all humanity may hope to make it to Abraham's. What this version of the tale invites one to question is the price exacted for both rewards. Each reader must be his or her own divine and must provide his or her own answer.

At the end, the Clerk (or Chaucer) shrewdly turns from "earnestful matter" to humor, jokingly encouraging all women to embrace the philosophy of the Wife of Bath and take no bullying from the would-be Walters of this world. Perhaps the very humor intentionally explodes his explanation.

Some Linguistic Notes for the Clerk's Tale

Spelling of Names:

Griselda is the usual form here in accordance with the modern usage. The MSS spell it Grisild, Grisilde, Grisildis, varying between two syllables and three and usually with the emphasis on the second syllable. But Chaucer does not scruple to change the stress to the first syllable when his rhythmic system needs it as at lines 752 and 948 (*Gríseldis*) where it also rhymes with *this* and *is*. Similarly, the heroine's father is called Janicula or Janicle (404). The name of the town varies from Sáluces to Salúces to Salúce.

Word stress

Stress that differs from our normal usage is most common in words of French origin, many of them clearly taking the French stress rather than the modern English emphasis. This is commonest in words ending in *-ure* like *natúre*, *conjectúre*, *creätúre* (3 syllables); or *-age* like *couráge*, *messáge*, *viságe*, though it is clearly *visage* in 1085. Similarly *pleasánce*, *patiént* (3 syllables). *Pity* (142) with second-syllable stress rhymes with *me* because it was originally *pítee* and stressed French-fashion in Chaucer's poetic dialect. In 407/9 the rhyme is *she* / *bount-ý*, but in 415 *boúnty*. Line 692 demands stresses almost totally like those of a French line:

And of malíce or of cruél couráge
but
He of his cruél purpose (734)

The rhymes in the opening stanza of Pt II are almost totally French in stress.

This variable stress seems to extend all too often to words with the distinctly English endings in *-ness* and *-ing*, where it has an unfortunate effect, at least in: *cunníngly* (1017) : *ring* / *amblíng* (386/8); *quakíng* / *willíng* / *likíng* (317-20). Line 320 seems to require a scansion impossible in a modern reading: "*Is as you will nor ágainst your likíng.*" The situation in the MS form does not improve matters much: *Is as ye wole, nor ayeynes youre likynge*. We have a different apparent stress in *tórmenting*, *nourishing*, *súpposing* (1038-41) most of which I

have not marked except for the first because I think readers can easily adapt to whatever accent they think necessary. See also 1080-83.

fairnéss rhymes with *richesse* (384-5) and shares its stress. Similarly *witnéss* / *mistréss* (821/823) seem to demand this stress though I have not marked them in the text.

At 1044 the rhyming word *patience* should strictly be metered *patience* and *malíce* so marked in 1045, but here and elsewhere the reader can adapt these lines to our normal stress on these words, and so the stress mark seems especially out of place, as no doubt it sometimes does elsewhere in the text. Readers should ignore these stress marks if they find them of no help.

The problem is at its most insistent in the Envoy, Chaucer's variation on a very French poetic form, the double *ballade*, where he uses only three rhymes throughout 36 lines, and where 4 out of every 6 rhymes are on French-derived words with distinctly French stress. It is almost impossible to be consistent in using the modern equivalents in these circumstances since both rhyme and rhythm will be thrown off that way: *marvel* will not go well with *nail* and *entrail*. In my first edition I allowed *camel*, *battle*, and *counsel* to stand, but though they might rhyme reasonably well, the rhythm clearly demands stress on the second syllable; hence I have here reverted to the Chaucerian spelling: *camail*, *batail*, *co(u)nsail*, which may, however, require glosses. See also the note to the opening stanza of Part II.

Scansion

1048: "*Continuing ever her innocence overall.*" There is an *-e* at the end of each of the first three words in the original, but even not counting these *-e*'s there are thirteen syllables in this line, which argues strongly for slurring or elision which must have been common in many other cases also.

The Portrait, Prologue and Tale of the Clerk

The portrait of the Clerk from the General Prologue

The Clerk is a deeply serious university man, more interested in study and books than in money, food, clothes or worldly position

	A CLERK there was of Oxenford also	<i>Oxford</i>
	That unto logic haddè long y-go. ¹	<i>gone</i>
	As leanè was his horse as is a rake,	
	And he was not right fat, I undertake,	<i>he=the Clerk</i>
	But lookèd hollow, and thereto soberly.	<i>gaunt & also</i>
290	Full threadbare was his overest courtepy,	<i>outer cloak</i>
	For he had gotten him yet no benefice	<i>parish</i>
	Nor was so worldly for to have office,	<i>secular job</i>
	For him was lever have at his bed's head	<i>For he would rather</i>
	Twenty bookès clad in black or red	<i>bound</i>
295	Of Aristotle and his philosophy	
	Than robès rich or fiddle or gay psalt'ry.	<i>stringed instrument</i>
	But albeit that he was a philosopher,	<i>although</i>
	Yet haddè he but little gold in coffer, ²	<i>chest</i>
	But all that he might of his friendès hent	<i>get</i>
300	On bookès and on learning he it spent,	
	And busily gan for the soulès pray	<i>regularly prayed for</i>
	Of them that gave him wherewith to scholay.	<i>study</i>
	Of study took he most care and most heed.	
	Not one word spoke he morè than was need,	

¹ 285-6: He had long since set out to study logic, part of the trivium or lower section of the university syllabus (the other two parts were rhetoric and grammar); hence his early college years had long since passed. "y-go" (gone) is the past participle of "go." Clerk = cleric / student / scholar. Our Clerk is all of these.

² 298: A joke. Although he was a student of philosophy, he had not discovered the "philosopher's stone," which was supposed to turn base metals into gold. The two senses of "philosopher" played on here are: a) student of the work of Aristotle b) student of science ("natural philosophy"), a meaning which shaded off into "alchemist, magician." "philosópher" was probably the stress here, French fashion, to rhyme with "coffer".

305 And that was spoke in form and reverence,
 And short and quick and full of high senténcé. *lofty thought*
 Sounding in moral virtue was his speech,
 And gladly would he learn and gladly teach.

Prologue to the Clerk's Tale

The Host asks the Clerk for a tale, and pokes a little fun at him. The Clerk takes it in a good spirit, and in scholarly and somewhat pedantic fashion he gives the source of the tale he is going to tell.

"Sir Clerk of Oxenford," our Hosté said,
 You ride as coy and still as does a maid
 Were new espouséd sitting at the board. *newly married / table*
 This day ne heard I of your tongue a word.
 5 I trow you study about some sophime. *I guess / logic problem*
 But Solomon says: `Everything hath time.'
 For God's sake as be of better cheer;
 It is no timè for to study here.
 Tell us some merry thingé, by your fay, *by your faith*
 10 For what man that is entered in a play *game*
 He needs must unto the play assent. *agree to the rules*
 But preacheth not, as Friars do in Lent
 To make us for our oldè sinnés weep.
 Nor that thy talè make us not to sleep!
 15 Tell us some merry thing of áventures.
 Your termès, your coloués, and your figúres ¹ — *fancy rhetoric*
 Keep them in store till so be you endite *until you write*
 High style, as when that men to kingès write.
 Speaketh so plain at this time we you pray
 20 That we may understanden what you say."
 This worthy Clerk benignèly answerèd: *good humoredly*
 "Host," quod he, "I am under your yard. *your rod i.e. authority*
 You have of us as now the governance,
 And therefore will I do you obeisance *obey you*
 25 As far as reason asketh hardily. *certainly*
 I will you tell a talè which that I

¹ 16: Terms and tropes (of rhetoric), figures of speech.

	Learned at Padua of a worthy clerk As provéd by his words and by his work. He is now dead and nailèd in his chest.	<i>coffin</i>
30	I pray to God to give his soulè rest. Francis Petrarch, the laureate poet ¹ Hightè this clerk, whose rhetoricè sweet Illumined all Itaille of poetry As Linian did of Philosophy, Or law or other art particular.	<i>this writer was called Italy di Lignano other study</i>
35	But death, that will not suffer us dwellen here But as it were a twinkling of an eye, Them both has slain. And allè shall we die.	<i>not allow Only we shall all</i>
40	But forth to tellen of this worthy man That taughtè me this tale, as I began, I say first that with high style he enditeth, (Ere he the body of his talè writeth) A prohemie in which describeth he Piedmont, and of Saluces the country,	<i>A preface</i>
45	And speaks of Apennines, the hillès high That be the boundès of West Lombardy, And of mount Vesulus in special Where as the Po, out of a wellè small, Taket h his firstè springing and his source	<i>Mt Viso</i>
50	That eastward aye increaseth in his course To Emeliaward, to Ferrara and Venice, The which a longè thing were to devise. And truly, as to my judgèment Methinketh it a thing impertinent	<i>to tell irrelevant</i>
55	Save that he will conveyen his matter. ² But this his talè, which that you shall hear.	

¹ 31: Chaucer gets his story from the Latin version of Petrarch, the great Italian poet who was crowned (with laurel) poet laureate in 1341.

² 54-55: "It is out of place unless it contributes to the story." So why was it not omitted here? Perhaps this is Chaucer's gentle poke at the pedantry of some scholars.

The Clerk's Tale
Part One

The subjects of an Italian ruler want him to marry to ensure the succession. He agrees on condition that they accept and respect his choice of wife. A date is set.

- | | | |
|----|--|---|
| 60 | There is, at the west side of Itaille,
Down at the root of Vesulus the cold,
A lusty plain, abundant of vitaille,
Where many a tower and town thou mayst behold,
That founded were in time of fathers old,
And many another délitable sight,
And Sáluces this noble country hight. | <i>Italy</i>
<i>Mt Viso</i>
<i>fertile w. crops</i>

<i>was called</i> |
| 65 | A marquis whilom lord was of that land,
As were his worthy elders him before;
And obeisant, aye ready to his hand,
Were all his lieges, both less and more.
Thus in delight he lives, and has done yore,
Beloved and dread, through favor of Fortúne,
Both of his lordès and of his commune. | <i>was once</i>

<i>obedient, always</i>
<i>subjects, b. high & low</i>
<i>for long time</i>
<i>Loved & feared</i>
<i>by his l. & common people</i> |
| 75 | Therewith he was, to speak as of lineage,
The gentilest y-born of Lombardy,
A fair person, and strong, and young of age,
And full of honor and of courtesy;
Discreet enough his country for to gye,
Save in some thingès that he was to blame;
And Walter was this youngè lordè's name. | <i>ancestry</i>
<i>most nobly</i>

<i>guide (rule)</i> |
| 80 | I blame him thus, that he considered naught
In timè coming what might him betide,
But on his lust presént was all his thought,
As for to hawk and hunt on every side.
Well nigh all other curès let he slide,
And eke he n'ould — and that was worst of all —
Wed no wife, for naught that may befall. | <i>not at all</i>
<i>happen to him</i>
<i>desires of the moment</i>

<i>duties</i>
<i>would not</i> |
| 85 | Only that point his people bore so sore | <i>resented so much</i> |

	That flockmeal on a day they to him went,	<i>in a group</i>
	And one of them that wisest was of lore,	<i>of learning</i>
	Or elsè that the lord best would assent	<i>either because</i>
	That he should tell him what his people meant	
90	Or elsè could he show well such mattér, ¹	<i>knew best how to</i>
	He to the marquis said as you shall hear:	
	"O noble marquis, your humanity	
	Assureth us and gives us hardiness,	<i>courage</i>
	As oft as time is of necessity,	
95	That we to you may tell our heaviness.	<i>problem</i>
	Accepteth, lord, now of your gentleness	<i>Accepteth: polite plur.</i>
	What we with piteous heart unto you 'plain,	<i>complain</i>
	And let your earès not my voice disdain.	
	"All have I naught to do in this matter	<i>Although / nothing</i>
100	More than another man has in this place,	
	Yet for as much as you, my lord so dear,	
	Have always showéd me favour and grace	<i>a moment</i>
	I dare the better ask of you a space	
	Of audience, to shoven our request,	<i>to present</i>
105	And you, my lord, to do right as you lest.	<i>as pleases you</i>
	"For certès, lord, so well us liketh you	<i>you please us</i>
	And all your work, and ever have done, that we	
	Ne could we not ourselves devisen how	
	We mighten live in more felicity,	
110	Save one thing, lordè, if it your will be,	
	That for to be a wedded man you lest;	<i>agree to marry</i>
	Then were your people in sovereign heartès' rest.	<i>completely at ease</i>
	"Boweth your neck under that blissfull yoke	<i>pleasant harness collar</i>
	Of sovereignty, not of service,	
115	Which that men clepe espousal or wedlock;	<i>men call</i>
	And thinketh, lord, among your thoughtès wise	
	How that our dayès pass in sundry wise;	

¹ 88-90: Either because the lord would agree to listen to *him* say what his people wanted; or because he was the best at presenting such cases.

- For though we sleep, or wake, or run, or ride,
Aye flees the time; it n'll no man abide. *Always / wait for*
- 120 "And though your greenè youthè flower as yet,
In creepeth age always, as still as stone,
And death menaces every age, and smites *strikes*
In each estate, for there escapeth none; *In every rank*
And all so certain as we know each one
- 125 That we shall die, as uncertain we all
Be of that day when death shall on us fall.
- "Accepteth then of us the true intent,
That never yet refuseden thy hest, *your orders*
And we will, lord, if that you will assent
- 130 Choose you a wife, in short time at the least,
Born of the gentilest and of the most *noblest & highest*
Of all this land, so that it ought to seem
Honour to God and you, as we can deem. *in our judgement*
- "Deliver us out of all this busy dread, *serious worry*
135 And take a wife, for highè Godè's sake!
For if it so befell, as God forbid,
That through your death your lineage should slake, *die out*
And that a strangè súccessor should take
Your heritage, O, woe were us alive! *God help us*
- 140 Wherefore we pray you hastily to wive." *to marry*
- Their meek prayer and their piteous cheer *their sad looks*
Madè the marquis's heart to have pity.
" You will," quod he, "my ownè people dear,
To that I never erst thought strainè me. ¹
- 145 I me rejoicèd of my liberty,
That seldom time is found in marriage; *rarely*
Where I was free, I must be in servage. *servitude*
- "But nathelees I see your true intent,
And trust upon your wit, and have done aye; *judgement / always*

¹ 143-4: "You will ... pressure me to do what I had never thought of doing."

- 150 Wherefore of my free will I will assent
 To weddè me, as soon as ever I may. *To marry*
 But there as you have proffered me to-day
 To choosè me a wife, I you release
 That choice, and pray you of that proffer cease. *offer*
- 155 "For God it wot, that children often been *God knows*
 Unlike their worthy elders them before;
 Bounty comes all of God, not of the strain *goodness / stock*
 Of which they been engendered and y-bore.¹ *begotten & born*
 I trust in Godè's bounty, and therefore
- 160 My marriage and my estate and rest
 I Him betake; He may do as Him lest. *commend to Him / wishes*
- "Let me alone in choosing of my wife;
 That charge upon my back I will endure. *burden*
 But I you pray, and charge upon your life, *demand*
- 165 That what wife that I take, you me assure
 To worship her while that her life may dure, *honor / last*
 In word and work, both here and everywhere,
 As she an emperourè's daughter were. *As if*
- "And furthermore, this shall you swear, that ye
 170 Against my choice shall neither grouch nor strive;
 For since I shall forgo my liberty
 At your request, as ever may I thrive, *as I hope to prosper*
 There as my heart is set, there will I wive; *Wherever / marry*
 And but you will assent in such mannér, *And unless*
- 175 I pray you, speak no more of this mattér."
- With hearty will they swear and they assent
 To all this thing; there said no wightè nay, *nobody said No*
 Beseeching him of grace, ere that they went,
 That he would granten them a certain day
- 180 Of his espousal, as soon as ever he may; *wedding*

¹ 155-58: These lines might have been spoken as part of the lecture on true nobility given by the hag in the *Wife of Bath's Tale*. And this tale of the Clerk proves her point. But with the preceding few lines they seem to be meant to hint at his unusual choice for a bride.

- For yet always the people somewhat dread, *dreaded*
 Lest that the marquis no wife wouldè wed.
- He granted them a day, such as him lest, *he appointed / he pleased*
 On which he would be wedded sikerly, *certainly*
 185 And said he did all this at their request.
 And they, with humble intentè, buxomly, *obediently*
 Kneeling upon their knees full reverently,
 Him thankèd all; and thus they have an end
 Of their intent, and home again they wend. *they go*
- 190 And hereupon he to his officers
 Commandeth for the feastè to purvey, *prepare*
 And to his privy knightès and his squires *personal*
 Such chargè gave as him list on them lay; *orders as he wished*
 And they to his commandèment obey,
 195 And each of them does all his diligence *his best*
 To do unto the feastè reverence.

Part Two.

Wedding preparation are made but, without telling his people or the prospective bride, the Marquis has decided to marry Griselda, a peasant girl who lives in poverty with her father.

- Not far from thilkè palace honorable, ¹
 Where as this marquis shoop his marriage, *planned*
 There stood a thorp, of sitè delitable, *village / beautiful*
 200 In which that poorè folk of that village

¹ All the riming words in this stanza are of French derivation and probably in Chaucer's day bore French stress: honoráble, villáge, ábundáncè, etc. Such heavy concentration of French words at line end makes it impossible to get full rime in normal modern English pronunciation. This is also notably true of the "Envoy" at the end of the poem. See Introduction to this tale.

- Hadden their beastès and their herbergage, *homes*
 And of their labour took their sustenance,
 After that th'earthè gave them abundance. *according as*
- Amongst these poorè folk there dwelt a man
 205 Which that was holden poorest of them all; *regarded as*
 But highè Godè sometimes senden can
 His grace into a little ox's stall;
 Janicula men of that thorp him call. *village*
 A daughter had he, fair enough to sight,
 210 And Gríselda this youngè maiden hight. ¹ *was called*
- But for to speak of virtuous beauty,
 Then was she one the fairest under sun;
 For poorly y-fostered up was she, *reared in poverty*
 No likerous lust was through her heart y-run. *lecherous*
 215 Well oftener of the well than of the tun *(wine) cask*
 She drank, and for she wouldè virtue please, *and because / practise*
 She knew well labour, but no idle ease.
- But though this maiden tender was of age, *was young*
 Yet in the breast of her virginity
 220 There was enclosed ripe and sad couráge; *mature & serious spirit*
 And in great reverence and charity
 Her oldè poorè father fostered she. *cared for*
 A few sheep, spinning, in field she kept;²
 She wouldè not be idle till she slept.
- 225 And when she homeward came, she wouldè bring
 Worts or other herbès timès oft, *Cabbages*
 The which she shred and seethed for their living, *& boiled / meal*
 And made her bed full hard and nothing soft;
 And aye she kept her father's life on-loft *always / going*
 230 With every obeisance and diligence *respect*

¹ 208-210: The names of the father and daughter occur both here and in the manuscripts of the poem in different spellings. See the introduction.

² 223: She spun thread while she watched her sheep. The spinning was presumably not done with a wheel but with a distaff, a portable stick for making wool thread by hand.

That child may do to father's reverence.

Upon Griselda, this poor creature,
 Full often sithe this marquis set his eye *often times*
 As he on hunting rode peraventure; *by chance*
 235 And when it fell that he might her espy, *when it happened*
 He not with wanton looking of folly ¹
 His eyen cast on her, but in sad wise *eyes / serious*
 Upon her cheer he would him oft advise, *face / look*

Commending in his heart her womanhood,
 240 And eke her virtue, passing any wight *surpassing / person*
 Of so young age, as well in cheer as deed. *in looks*
 For though the people have no great insight
 In virtue, he considered full right
 Her bounty, and disposed that he would *her goodness & decided*
 245 Wed her only, if ever he wed should.

The day of wedding came, but no wight can *no one*
 Tellè what woman that it shouldè be;
 For whichè marvel wondered many a man,
 And saidè when they were in privity: *in private*
 250 "Will not our lord yet leave his vanity? *his foolishness*
 Will he not wed? Alas! Alas, the while!
 Why will he thus himself and us beguile?" *deceive*

But nathelees this marquis hath done make *caused to be made*
 Of gemmès set in gold and in azure, *gems / blue enamel*
 255 Brooches and ringès for Griselda's sake,
 And of her clothing took he the measúre
 Of a maiden like to her statúre, *similar size*
 And eke of other ornamentès all
 That unto such a wedding should befall. *be appropriate*

260 The time of undern of the samè day *about 10 a.m.*
 Approacheth that this wedding shouldè be;
 And all the palace put was in array,

¹ 236-7: "And not with foolish, lustful glances did he look at her."

Both hall and chambers, each in its degree;
 Houses of office stuffèd with plenty
 265 There mayst thou see, of dainteous vitaille
 That may be found as far as last Itaille.

*storehouses
 delicious foods
 furthest part of Italy*

This royal marquis richely arrayed,
 Lordès and ladies in his company,
 The which that to the feastè were y-prayed,
 270 And of his retinue the bachelry,
 With many a sound of sundry melody,
 Unto the village of the which I told,
 In this array the rightè way have hold.

*dressed
 invited
 young knights
 In this fashion*

Griseld of this, God wot, full innocent,
 275 That for her shapen was all this array,
 To fetchè water at a well is went,
 And cometh home as soon as ever she may;
 For well had she heard said that thilkè day
 The marquis shouldè wed, and if she might,
 280 She wouldè fain have seen some of that sight.

*unaware
 was destined
 has gone
 that day
 would like to see*

She thought, "I will with other maidens stand,
 That be my fellows, in our door and see
 The marquissess, and therefore will I fond
 To do at home, as soon as it may be,
 285 The labour which that longeth unto me;
 And then I may at leisure her behold,
 If she this way unto the castle hold."

*my friends
 try
 I have to do
 comes*

The marquis and his retinue arrive at Griselda's cottage; he asks for her hand in marriage, and she promises to love, honor and obey, with special emphasis on
obey

And as she would over her threshold go,
 The marquis came, and gan her for to call;
 290 And she set down her water pot anon,
 Beside the threshold, in an ox's stall,
 And down upon her knees she gan to fall,
 And with sad countenancè kneeleth still

serious

Till she had heard what was the lordè's will.

- 295 This thoughtful marquis spoke unto this maid
 Full soberly, and said in this mannér: *Very seriously*
 "Where is your father, O Griseld?" he said.
 And she with reverence, in humble cheer, *manner*
 Answered: "Lord, he is already here."
 300 And in she goes withouten longer let, *delay*
 And to the marquis she her father fet. *fetches*

- He by the hand then took this oldè man,
 And saidè thus, when he him had aside:
 "Janicula, I neither may nor can
 305 Longer the pleasance of my heartè hide. *the desire*
 If that thou vouchèsafe, what so betide, *agree / happens*
 Thy daughter will I take, ere that I wend,
 As for my wife, unto my lifè's end. *before I go*

- "Thou lovest me, I wot it well certáin, *I know*
 310 And art my faithfull liegè man y-bore; *loyal subject born*
 And all that liketh me, I dare well sayn *pleases me*
 It liketh thee, and specially therefore
 Tell me that point that I have said before,
 If that thou wilt unto that purpose draw *agree to this*
 315 To takè me as for thy son-in-law."

- The sudden case this man astonished so
 That red he waxed; abashèd and all quaking *flustered*
 He stood; unnethès said he wordès mo' *scarcely*
 But only thus: "Lord," quod he, "my willing
 320 Is as you will, nor against your liking
 I will nothing. You be my lord so dear;
 Right as you listè, governeth this mattér." *as you wish, decide*

- "Yet will I," quod this marquis softèly, *I wish*
 "That in thy chamber I and thou and she
 325 Have a collation, and wost thou why? *conference & know you why?*
 For I will ask if it her willè be
 To be my wife, and rule her after me. *be ruled by me*

- And all this shall be done in thy preséncé;
I will not speak out of thine audience." *hearing*
- 330 And in the chamber, while they were about
Their treaty, which as you shall after hear, *agreement*
The people came unto the house without,
And wondered them in how honést mannér
And tentively she kept her father dear. *attentively*
- 335 But utterly Griselda wonder might,
For never erst ne saw she such a sight. *before*
- No wonder is though that she were astoned *astonished*
To see so great a guest come in that place;
She never was unto such guestès woned, *accustomed*
- 340 For which she lookéd with full palé face.
But shortly forth this matter for to chase, *to continue*
These are the wordès that the marquis said
To this benignè, very faithful maid.
- "Griseld," he said, "you shall well understand
345 It liketh to your father and to me *it pleases*
That I you wed, and eke it may so stand *and also*
As I suppose, you will that it so be.
But these demandès ask I first," quod he,
"That, since it shall be done in hasty wise,
350 Will you assent, or else will you advise? ¹ *take counsel*
- "I say this, be you ready with good heart
To all my lust; and that I freely may *my wishes*
As me best thinketh, do you laugh or smart, ²
And never you to grudge it, night nor day? *complain*
- 355 And eke when I say `Yea,' ne say not `Nay,' *And also*
Neither by word nor frowning countenance?

¹ 350: Skeat and Riverside point out that the phrase "The king will take counsel" (*Le roy s'avisera*) was a formula for polite refusal. So the line means roughly: "Do you agree or not?"

² 351-3: "Are you ready with good will (to fulfill) all my wishes?" The rest is either "And (grant) that I may freely (do) as I think best, whether that causes you to laugh or to feel pain" or "And (grant) that I may freely cause you joy or pain, as I think best." There is a difference.

Swear this, and here I swear our álliance."

Wondering upon this word, quaking for dread,
 She saidè, "Lord, undigne and unworthy
 360 Am I to thilk honoúr that you me bid, *undeserving*
 But as you will yourself, right so will I. *that honor / offer*
 And here I swear that never willingly,
 In work nor thought, I n'll you disobey,
 For to be dead, though me were loath to die."

365 "This is enough, Griselda mine," quod he.
 And forth he goes, with a full sober cheer, *serious look*
 Out at the door, and after that came she,
 And to the people he said in this mannér:
 "This is my wife," quod he, "that standeth here.
 370 Honour her and loveth her, I pray,
 Whoso me loves. There is no more to say." *Whoever*

*With her change into princely clothing Griselda is transformed in every way.
 In time a child is born.*

And for that nothing of her oldè gear *clothes*
 She shouldè bring into his house, he bade
 That women should despoilen her right there; *strip*
 375 Of which these ladies werè not right glad
 To handle her clothes wherein that she was clad.
 But natheless, this maiden bright of hue
 From foot to head they clothèd have all new.

Her hairès have they combed that lay untressed *unbraided*
 380 Full rudèly, and with their fingers small *loosely*
 A coronet on her head they have y-dressed, *tiara or garland / put*
 And set her full of nowches great and small. *brooches*
 Of her array what should I make a tale? *clothes / long story*
 Unnethe the people her knew for her fairness, *Scarcely / beauty*
 385 When she transformèd was in such richesse.

This marquis hath her spousèd with a ring *married*
 Brought for the samè cause, and then her set *Brought for that purpose*

- Upon a horse, snow-white and well ambling, *slow paced*
 And to his palace, ere he longer let, *without delay*
 390 With joyful people that her led and met,
 Conveyèd her, and thus the day they spend
 In revel, till the sun 'gan to descend. *In celebration*
- And shortly forth this talè for to chase, *to tell the story*
 I say that to this newè marquiss
 395 God hath such favour sent her of his grace,
 That it ne seemèd not by likeliness *didn't seem possible*
 That she was born and fed in rudèness, *raised in poverty*
 As in a cote or in an ox's stall, *cottage*
 But nourished in an emperourè's hall. *reared*
- 400 To every wight she waxen is so dear *To e. person she became*
 And worshipfull that folk where she was born *And honored*
 And from her birthè knew her year by year,
 Unnethè trowèd they, but durst have sworn *Hardly believed / dared*
 That to Janicle, of which I spoke before,
 405 She daughter were, for as by cónjecture,
 Them thought she was another créature. *It seemed to them*
- For though that ever virtuous was she,
 She was increasèd in such excellence
 Of thewès good, y-set in high bounty, *manners*
 410 And so discreet and fair of eloquence,
 So benign and so digne of reverence, *worthy of*
 And couldè so the people's heart embrace, *win*
 That each her loved that lookèd in her face.
- Not only of Salúces in the town
 415 Published was the bounty of her name, *good reputation*
 But eke beside in many a region, *But also*
 If one said well, another said the same;
 So spread of her high bounty the fame *great goodness*
 That men and women, as well young as old,
 420 Go to Saluce upon her to behold. *to look at her*

Thus Walter lowly (nay, but royally!)

	Wedded with fortunatè honesty, In Godè's peace liveth full easily At home, and outward grace enough had he; ¹	<i>virtue</i>
425	And for he saw that under low degree Was often virtue hid, the people him held A prudent man, and that is seen full seld.	<i>And because / rank considered him seldom</i>
	Not only this Griselda through her wit Could all the feat of wifely homeliness, ²	<i>wisdom Had all the skills</i>
430	But eke, when that the case requirèd it, The common profit couldè she redress. There n'as discórd, rancor, nor heaviness In all that land that she ne could appease And wisely bring them all in rest and ease.	<i>But also public good promote bitterness</i>
435	Though that her husband absent were anon, If gentlemen or others of her country Were wrath, she wouldè bringen them at one; So wise and ripè wordès haddè she, And judgèments of so great equity,	<i>Were angry / to agree mature fairness</i>
440	That she from heaven sent was, as men wend, People to save and every wrong t'amend.	<i>thought</i>
	Not longè time after that this Griseld Was wedded, she a daughter has y-bore.	<i>borne</i>
445	All had her lever have had a knavè child, ³ Glad was the marquis and the folk therefore; For though a maidè child came all before, She may unto a knavè child attain By likelihood, since she is not barrén.	<i>girl / first boy child probability</i>

Part Three

¹ 424: *outward* may mean "apparently, to all appearances," or it may contrast with "home" and mean "abroad, in foreign policy."

² 429: "Knew everything about managing a household."

³ 444: "Although she would rather have had a boy" (to ensure the succession).

*The marquis inexplicably decides to test his wife's obedience in cruel fashion.
She quietly submits*

.	There fell, as it befalleth timès more,	<i>It happened / often</i>
450	When that this child had suckèd but a throw, This marquis in his heartè longeth so To tempt his wife, her sadness for to know, ¹ That he ne might out of his heartè throw This marvellous desire his wife t'assay;	<i>nursed a short while</i>
455	Natheless, God wot, he thought her for t'affray.	<i>to test God knows / to frighten</i>
	He had assayèd her enough before, And found her ever good; what needed it Her for to tempt, and always more and more, Though some men praise it for a subtle wit?	<i>tested to test</i>
460	But as for me, I say that evil it sit To assay a wife when that it is no need, And putten her in anguish and in dread.	<i>it is evil To test</i>
	For which this marquis wrought in this mannér: He came alone a-night, there as she lay, 465 With sternè face and with full troubled cheer, And saidè thus: "Griseld," quod he, "that day That I you took out of your poor array, And put you in estate of high noblesse, You have not that forgotten, as I guess?	<i>acted at night expression clothes noble rank</i>
470	" I say, Griseld, this present dignity, In which that I have put you, as I trow, Maketh you not forgetful for to be. That I you took in poor estate full low, For any weal, you must yourselfen know. ²	<i>I hope</i>
475	Take heed of every word that I you say;	

¹ 452: "To test his wife to find out her constancy."

² If 474 goes with 473, as my punctuation suggests, it might mean "in spite of any wealth you might have had" (i.e. nothing), or "You must know that I took you for richer for poorer," as the marriage ceremony put it. If it goes with what follows, it may mean "For your own good," "If you know what is good for you, take heed..."

- There is no wight that hears it but we tway. *nobody / we two*
- "You wot yourself well how that you came here
 Into this house, it is not long ago;
 And though to me that you be lief and dear,
 480 Unto my gentles you be nothing so.
 They say, to them it is great shame and woe
 For to be subjects and be in serváge
 To thee, that born art of a small villáge. *You know
 you are beloved
 nobles
 owe allegiance*
- "And namely since thy daughter was y-bore
 485 These wordès have they spoken, doubtéless.
 But I desire, as I have done before,
 To live my life with them in rest and peace.
 I may not in this casè be reckless;
 I must do with thy daughter for the best,
 490 Not as I would, but as my people lest. *And especially / born
 Not as I wish / desire*
- "And yet, God wot, this is full loath to me,
 But natheless withouten your witting
 I will not do; but this will I," quod he,
 "That you to me assent as in this thing.
 495 Show now your patience in your working
 That you me hight and swore in your villáge
 That day that makèd was our marriage." *G. knows / distasteful
 knowledge
 promised me*
- When she had heard all this, she not a-moved
 Neither in word, nor cheer, nor countenance;
 500 For, as it seemed, she was not aggrieved.
 She saidè: "Lord, all lies in your pleasance.
 My child and I, with hearty obeisance,
 Be yourès all, and you may save or spill
 Your ownè thing; worketh after your will. *changed
 manner
 pleasure
 obedience
 or destroy
 do as you please*
- 505 "There may no thing, God so my soulè save,
 Liken to you that may displeasè me;
 Nor I desirè no thingè for to have,
 Ne dreadè for to lose, save only ye.
 This will is in mine heart, and aye shall be; *Please you
 and ever*

- 510 No length of time or death may this deface,
Nor change my courage to another place." *my determination*
- Glad was this marquis of her answering,
But yet he feignèd as he were not so; *he pretended*
All dreary was his cheer and his looking, *manner and face*
515 When that he should out of the chamber go.
Soon after this, a furlong way or two, *a few minutes*
He privily hath told all his intent *secretly*
Unto a man, and to his wife him sent.
- A manner sergeant was this privy man, *A kind of / discreet man*
520 The which that faithful oft he founden had
In thingès great, and eke such folk well can
Do execution in thingès bad.
The lord knew well that he him loved and dread; *dreaded*
And when this sergeant wist his lordè's will, *knew*
525 Into the chamber he stalkèd him full still. *walked quietly*
- "Madame," he said, "you must forgive it me,
Though I do thing to which I am constrained.
You be so wise that full well knowen ye
That lordès' hestès must not been y-feigned; *commands / evaded*
530 They may well be bewailèd or complained,
But men must needs unto their lust obey, *their desire*
And so will I; there is no more to say.
- "This child I am commanded for to take";
And spoke no more, but out the child he hent *pulled*
535 Despitously,¹ and gan a cheer to make *Roughly*
As though he would have slain it ere he went.
Griselda must all suffer and all consent;
And as a lamb she sitteth meek and still,
And let this cruel sergeant do his will.
- 540 Suspicious was the défame of this man, *reputation*
Suspéct his face, suspéct his word also;

¹ 534-6: "He pulled the child away roughly and looked as if he would kill it before he went."

- Suspect the time in which he this began.
 Alas! her daughter that she lovèd so,
 She wend he would have slain it rightè tho. *thought / right then*
- 545 But natheless she neither wept nor sighed
 Conforming her to what the marquis liked. *C. her(self)*
- But at the last to speaken she began,
 And meekèly she to the sergeant prayed,
 So as he was a worthy gentle man, *Since he was ...*
- 550 That she might kiss her child ere that it died.
 And in her barm this little child she laid *lap*
 With full sad face, and gan the child to bless,
 And lullèd it, and after gan it kiss.¹
- And thus she said in her benignè voice,
 555 "Farewell my child! I shall thee never see.
 But since I thee have markèd with the cross
 Of thilkè Father — blessèd may he be,—
 That for us died upon a cross of tree, *wood*
 Thy soul, my little child, I Him betake, *commend to Him*
- 560 For this night shall thou dien for my sake."
- I trow that to a nursè in this case *I think*
 It had been hard this ruthè for to see; *this pitiful thing*
 Well might a mother then have cried "Alas!"
 But natheless so sad steadfast was she *so constantly*
- 565 That she endured all adversity,
 And to the sergeant meekèly she said,
 "Have here again your little youngè maid.
- "Go now," quod she, "and do my lord's behest; *orders*
 But one thing will I pray you of your grace,
 570 That, but my lord forbade you, at the least *unless my lord*
 Bury this little body in some place
 That beastès nor no birdès it to-race." *tear it apart*
 But he no word will to that purpose say, *will promise*

¹ 552-3: Both uses of *gan* here illustrate its use as a mere past tense marker used to manoeuver the infinitive words into rhyme position: *bless / kiss*, == *blisse, kisse* in the MSS.

But took the child and went upon his way.

575 This sergeant came unto his lord again,
 And of Griselda's words and of her cheer *behavior*
 He told him point for point, in short and plain,
 And him presented with his daughter dear.
 Somewhat this lord had ruth in his mannér, *had pity*
 580 But nathelees his purpose held he still,
 As lordès do, when they will have their will,

And bade this sergeant that he privily *secretly*
 Should this childè softly wind and wrap
 With allè circumstances tenderly, *with all due care*
 585 And carry it in a coffer or in a lap, *box or blanket*
 But, upon pain his head off for to swap, *of being beheaded*
 That no man should ne know of his intent,
 Not whence he came, nor whither that he went.

But at Bologna to his sister dear,
 590 That thilkè time of Panik was countess, *at that time*
 He should it take, and show her this mattér, *and explain to her*
 Beseeching her to do her busyness *her best*
 This child to foster in all gentleness; *to raise*
 And whose child that it was he bade her hide
 595 From every wight, for aught that may betide. *everyone / happen*

The sergeant goes, and has fulfilled this thing;
 But to this marquis now returnè we.
 For now goes he full fast imagining
 If by his wifè's cheer he mightè see, *behavior*
 600 Or by her wordè áperceive that she
 Were changèd; but he never could her find
 But ever in one alikè sad and kind. *always constant and*

As glad, as humble, as busy in service,
 And eke in love as she was wont to be *accustomed*
 605 Was she to him in every manner wise; *in every way*
 Nor of her daughter not a word spoke she.
 No accident, for no adversity, *No change (of demeanor)*

Was seen in her, ne never her daughter's name
 Ne naméd she, in earnest nor in game.

or in jest

Part Four

*Griselda bears a son whom the marquis treats as he had treated the daughter.
 Again Griselda quietly submits.*

- 610 In this estate there passéd been four years *In this fashion*
 Ere she with childè was, but, as God willed, *became pregnant*
 A knavè child she bore by this Walter, *boy child*
 Full gracious and fair for to behold. *charming & beautiful*
 And when that folk it to his father told,
- 615 Not only he, but all his country, merry
 Was for this child, and God they thank and hery. *praise*
- When it was two years old, and from the breast
 Departed of his nurse, upon a day
 This marquis caughtè yet another lest *got another fancy*
 620 To tempt his wife yet oftener, if he may. *To test*
 O needless was she tempted in assay! *tested in trial*
 But wedded men ne knowen no measúre,
 When that they find a patient creätúre.
- "Wife," quod this marquis, "you have heard ere this,
 625 My people sickly bear our marriage; *take it badly*
 And namely since my son y-boren is, *especially was born*
 Now is it worse than ever in all our age.
 The murmur slays my heart and my couráge, *complaints / spirit*
 For to mine earès comes the voice so smart *rumor so bitter*
 630 That it well nigh destroyèd has my heart. *very nearly*
- "Now say they thus: `When Walter is agon,
 Then shall the blood of Janicle succeed
 And be our lord, for other have we none.'
 Such wordès say my people, out of dread. *without doubt*
 635 Well ought I of such murmur taken heed;
 For certainly I dreadè such senténce, *opinion*

- Though they not speak plain in mine audience. *openly in my hearing*
- "I wouldè live in peace, if that I might.
Wherefore I am disposèd utterly,
640 As I his sister servèd have by night, *treated*
Right so think I to serve him privily. *secretly*
This warn I you, that you not suddenly *so that*
Out of yourself for no woe should outrey. *make outburst*
Be patient, and thereof I you pray."
- 645 "I have," quod she, "Said thus, and ever shall.
I will no thing, nor n'ill no thing, certain,
But as you list. Naught grieveth me at all, *as you wish / Nothing*
Though that my daughter and my son be slain
At your commandèment, this is to sayn.
650 I have not had no part of children twain *two children*
But first sickness, and after, woe and pain.
- "You be our lord; do with your ownè thing
Right as you list; asketh no rede of me. *no advice*
For as I left at home all my clothing,
655 When I first came to you, right so," quod she,
"Left I my will and all my liberty,
And took your clothing; wherefore I you pray,
Do your pleasáncè, I will your lust obey. *pleasure / your wish*
- "And certès, if I haddè prescience *certainly / foreknowledge*
660 Your will to know, ere you your lust me told, *your desire*
I would it do withouten negligence;
But now I wot your lust, and what you would,¹ *I know your desire*
All your pleasáncè firm and stable I hold;
For wist I that my death would do you ease, *If I knew*
665 Right gladly would I dien, you to please.
- "Death may not makè no comparison
Unto your love." And when this marquis saw

¹ 662-3: "Now that I know your desire and your will, I hold firmly and steadily to your wishes."

The constance of his wife, he cast adown
 His eyen two, and wondereth that she may
 670 In patiencè suffer all this array;
 And forth he goes with dreary countenance,
 But to his heart it was full great pleasánce.

constancy
eyes
this torture

This ugly sergeant, in the samè wise
 That he her daughter caughtè, right so he,
 675 Or worsè, if men worsè can devise,
 Has hent her son, that full was of beauty.
 And ever in one so patient was she
 That she no cheerè made of heaviness,
 But kissed her son, and after gan it bless.

Has seized
And constantly
no sign of grief

Save this, she prayèd him that, if he might,
 Her little son he would in earthè grave,
 His tender limbs, delicate to sight,
 From fowlès and from beastès for to save.
 But she no answer of him mightè have.
 685 He went his way as him no thingè raught;
 But to Bologna tenderly it brought.

bury

cared nothing

This marquis wondered, ever longer the more,
 Upon her patience, and if that he
 Ne haddè soothly knowen therebefore
 690 That perfectly her children lovèd she,
 He would have wend that of some subtlety,
 And of malice, or of cruel courage,
 That she had suffered this with sad visage.

truly

thought / trickery

heart

unmoved expression

But well he knew that next himself, certain,
 695 She loved her children best in every wise.
 But now of women would I asken fain
 If these assayès mighten not suffice?
 What could a sturdy husband more devise
 To prove her wifhood and her steadfastness,
 700 And he continuing ever in sturdiness?

like to ask

tests

stern

But there been folk of such condition

- That when they have a certain purpose take,
 They can not stint of their intention, *stop*
 But, right as they were bounden to a stake, *as if tied*
 705 They will not of that firstè purpose slake. *desist from*
 Right so this marquis fully hath proposed
 To tempt his wife as he was first disposed.
- He waiteth if by word or countenance
 That she to him was changèd of couráge; *in her heart*
 710 But never could he findè variance.
 She was aye one in heart and in viságe; *always / face*
 And aye the further that she was in áge, *ever*
 That morè true (if that it were possible)
 She was to him in love, and more penible. *ready to please*
- 715 For which it seemèd thus, that of them two
 There was but one will; for, as Walter lest, *desired*
 The samè lust was her pleasánce also. *desire / pleasure*
 And, God be thankèd, all fell for the best.
 She showèd well, for no worldly unrest
 720 A wife as of herself ne nothing should *(That) a wife should not*
 Will in effect but as her husband would. *Wish / wishes*
- The slander of Walter often and widè spread, *scandal*
 That of a cruel heart he wickedly,
 For he a poorè woman wedded had, *Because he*
 725 Has murdered both his children privily. *secretly*
 Such murmur was among them commonly.
 No wonder is, for to the people's ear
 There came no word, but that they murdered were.
- For which, whereas his people therebefore
 730 Had loved him well, the slander of his defame *scandal of his crime*
 Made them that they hated him therefore.
 To be a murderer is a hateful name;
 But natheless, for earnest nor for game,
 He of his cruel purpose would not stent;
 735 To tempt his wife was set all his intent. *desist*
To test

The marquis makes the motions of divorce from Griselda

- When that his daughter twelve years was of age,
 He to the court of Rome, in subtle wise *secretly*
 Informèd of his will, sent his message,
 Commanding them such bullès to devise *papal documents*
 740 As to his cruel purpose may suffice,
 How that the pope, as for his people's rest, *satisfaction*
 Bade him to wed another, if him lest. *if he wished*
- I say, he bade they shouldè counterfeit
 The popè's bullès, making mention *documents*
 745 That he has leave his firstè wife to let, *permission to divorce*
 As by the popè's dispensation
 To stintè rancor and dissension *to stop*
 Bitwixt his people and him; thus said the bull,
 The which they have published at the full. ¹
- 750 The rudè people, as it no wonder is, *common*
 Wenden full well that it had been right so; *Thought*
 But when these tidings came to Gríseldis,
 I deemè that her heart was full of woe. *I judge*
 But she, alikè sad for evermo' *steadfast always*
 755 Disposèd was, this humble creäture,
 Th'adversity of Fortune all t'endure,
- Abiding ever his lust and his pleasánce, *Enduring / desire*
 To whom that she was given heart and all,
 As to her very worldly suffisánce. *As her whole world*
 760 But shortly if this story I tell shall,
 This marquis written has in special
 A letter, in which he showeth his intent,
 And secretly he to Bologna sent.

¹ 738-749: Walter goes to the extraordinary length of having documents forged, purporting to be from the Pope and saying that, in order to stop dissension among his nobles about the "baseborn" Griselda, he has a dispensation from the Pope to leave his wife and marry another woman. A "bull" is literally a seal, hence a document with the papal seal.

To the Earl of Panik, which that haddè tho *who had then*
 765 Wedded his sister, prayed he specially
 To bringen home again his children two
 In honorable estate all openly, *In honorable fashion*
 But one thing he him prayèd utterly,
 That he to no wight, though men would enquire, *to nobody*
 770 Should not tell whose children that they were,

But say the maiden should y-wedded be *was to be married*
 Unto the Marquis of Saluce anon. *Saluzzo*
 And as this earl was prayèd, so did he; *was asked*
 For at the day set he on his way is gone *appointed day*
 775 Toward Saluce, and lordès many a one
 In rich array, this maiden for to guide,
 Her youngè brother riding her beside.

Arrayèd was toward her marriage *Dressed for*
 This freshè maidè, full of gemmès clear; *bright*
 780 Her brother, which that seven years was of age,
 Arrayèd eke full fresh in his mannér.
 And thus in great noblesse and with glad cheer,
 Toward Salúces shaping their journey,
 From day to day they riden on their way.

Part Five

Griselda is dismissed from the Marquis's household in humiliating circumstances. She submits with dignity.

785 Among all this, after his wick'd uságe, *in his wicked fashion*
 This marquis, yet his wife to temptè more
 To th'utterestè proof of her couráge, *supreme test / spirit*
 Fully to have experience and lore *& knowledge*
 If that she were as steadfast as before,
 790 He on a day, in open audience, *in public*
 Full boistously hath said her this senténcé: *loudly*

"Certès, Griseld, I had enough pleasance

- To have you to my wife for your goodness,
 As for your truth and for your obeisance,
 795 Not for your lineage, nor for your riches;
 But now know I in very soothfastness
 That in great lordship, if I well advise,
 There is great servitude in sundry wise.
- in truth
if I consider it
various ways*
- "I may not do as every plowman may.
 800 My people me constraineth for to take
 Another wife, and crien day by day;
 And eke the popè, rancour for to slake,
 Consenteth it, that dare I undertake;
 And truly thus much I will you say,
 805 My newè wife is coming by the way.
- pressure me
to calm anger
I assure you
is on her way*
- "Be strong of heart, and void anon her place,
 And thilkè dowry that you brought to me,
 Take it again; I grant it of my grace.
 Returneth to your father's house," quod he;
 810 "No man may always have prosperity.
 With even heart I rede you to endure
 The stroke of Fortune or of aventure."
- vacate at once
W. calm heart I advise
of chance*
- And she again answered in patience,
 "My lord," quod she, "I wot, and wist alway,
 815 How that bitwixen your magnificence
 And my povertè no wight can nor may
 Maken comparison, it is no nay.
 I ne held me never digne in no mannér
 To be your wife, no, nor your chamberer.
- know and knew
no question
considered myself worthy
chamber maid*
- 820 "And in this house, where you me lady made —
 The highè God take I for my witness,
 And all so wisly he my soulè glad,¹
 I never held me lady nor mistress,
 But humble servant to your worthiness,
 825 And ever shall, while that my life may dure,
- considered myself
may last*

¹ 822: "As surely as I hope He will make my soul glad."

Aboven every worldly creäture.

"That you so long of your benignity
 Have holden me in honour and nobley,
 Where as I was not worthy for to be,
 830 That thank I God and you, to whom I pray
 Foryield it you; there is no more to say.
 Unto my father gladly will I wend,
 And with him dwell unto my life's end.

*kindness
 & high rank*

*Reward you
 go*

"Where I was fostered of a child full small,
 835 Till I be dead my life there will I lead,
 A widow clean in body, heart, and all;
 For since I gave to you my maidenhead,
 And am your truè wife, it is no dread,
 God shieldè such a lordè's wife to take
 840 Another man to husband or to make!

was reared

*virginity
 without question
 God forbid
 mate*

"And of your newè wife God of his grace
 So grantè you weal and prosperity!
 For I will gladly yelden her my place,
 In which that I was blissfull wont to be.
 845 For since it liketh you, my lord," quod she,
 "That whilom weren all my heartè's rest,
 That I shall go, I will go when you lest.

joy

*used to be
 it pleases you
 Who once were
 when you wish*

"But there as you me proffer such a dower
 As I first brought, it is well in my mind
 850 It were my wretched clothès, nothing fair,
 The which to me were hard now for to find.
 O goodè God! how gentle and how kind
 You seemèd by your speech and your viságe
 The day that makèd was our marriage!

offer / dowry

It would be only

manner

855 "But sooth is said — algate I find it true,
 For in effect it provèd is on me —
 Love is not old as when that it is new.
 But certès, lord, for no adversity,
 To dien in the case, it shall not be

truth / certainly

Even if I die

860 That ever in word or work I shall repent
That I you gave my heart in whole intent.

"My lord, you wot that in my father's place
You did me strip out of my poorè weed,
And richèly me cladden, of your grace.
865 To you brought I naught elsè, out of dread,
But faith and nakedness and maidenhead;
And here again your clothing I restore,
And eke your wedding ring, for evermore.

*you know
poor clothes
clothed me / goodness
certainly
virginity*

"The remnant of your jewels ready be
870 Inwith your chamber, dare I safely sayn.
Naked out of my father's house," quod she,
"I came, and naked must I turn again.
All your pleasáncè will I follow fain;
But yet I hope it be not your intent
875 That I smockless out of your palace went.

*Within

gladly
without a shift*

"You could not do so díshonest a thing,
That thilkè womb in which your children lay
Should before the people, in my walking,
Be seen all bare; wherefore I you pray,
880 Let me not like a worm go by the way.
Remember you, mine ownè lord so dear,
I was your wife, though I unworthy were.

*shameful
the very womb*

"Wherefore, in guerdon of my maidenhead,
Which that I brought, and not again I bear,
885 As vouchèsafe to give me, to my meed,
But such a smock as I was wont to wear,¹
That I therewith may wry the womb of her
That was your wife. And here take I my leave
Of you, mine ownè lord, lest I you grieve."

*in return / virginity
do not take back
Be good enough / reward

may cover*

890 "The smock," quod he, "that thou hast on thy back,

¹ 885-6: "Be good enough (*vouchèsafe*) to give me as my reward only such a shift as I used to wear."

- Let it be still, and bear it forth with thee."
 But well unnethès thilkè word he spoke, *could barely speak*
 But went his way, for ruth and for pity. *sorrow*
 Before the folk herselfen strippeth she,
 895 And in her smock, with head and foot all bare,
 Toward her father's house forth is she fare. *gone*
- The folk her follow, weeping in her way,
 And Fortune aye they cursen as they go; *constantly curse*
 But she from weeping kept her eyen dry, *eyes*
 900 Nor in this timè word ne spoke she none.
 Her father, that this tiding heard anon,
 Curseth the day and timè that Natúre
 Shope him to be a live creätúre. *Made*
- For out of doubt this oldè poorè man
 905 Was ever suspect of her marriage; *suspicious*
 For ever he deemèd, since that it began, *thought*
 That when the lord fulfilled had his couráge, *satisfied his desire*
 Him would think it were a dísparáge *dishonor*
 To his estate so low for to alight,¹ *rank / to stoop*
 910 And voiden her as soon as ever he might. *get rid of her*
- Against his daughter hastily goes he, *Towards*
 For he by noise of folk knew her coming,
 And with her oldè coat, as it might be *as well as possible*
 He covered her, full sorrowfully weeping.
 915 But on her body might he not it bring, *not fit it*
 For rudè was the cloth, and more of age *rough / older*
 By dayès fele than at her marriage. *By many days*
- Thus with her father, for a certain space,
 Dwelleth this flower of wifely patience,
 920 That neither by her words nor by her face,

¹ The father had always thought that when the marquis had satisfied his sexual infatuation with Griselda, it would seem to him a dishonor to have stooped so far below his rank, and he would get rid of her as soon as possible. *Him would think* is not bad grammar; it means literally: "It would seem to him."

- Before the folk, nor eke in their abséncé,
 Ne showéd she that her was done offence;
 Nor of her high estate no rémémbrance
 Ne haddé she, as by her countenance. *to her
high rank
by her manner*
- 925 No wonder is, for in her great estate
 Her ghost was ever in plain humility; *her spirit, heart*
 No tender mouth, no hearté delicate,
 No pompé, no sembláncé of royalty, *No love of show, no pretence
goodness*
 But full of patient benignity, *always*
- 930 Discreet and pridéless, aye honorable,
 And to her husband ever meek and stable. *faithful*
- Men speak of Job, and most for his humblesse, *humility*
 As clerkès, when them list, can well endite
 Namely of men, but as in soothfastness,¹ *but in truth*
- 935 Though clerkès praisen women but a lite,
 There can no man in humblesse him acquit *but little
distinguish himself*
 As woman can, nor can be half so true
 As women been, but it be fall of new.

Part Six

Griselda is brought back to prepare the household for the marquis's new marriage. Again she readily submits to this humiliation.

- From Bologna is this Earl of Panik come,
 940 Of which the fame up sprang to more and less, *rumor / to rich & poor*
 And to the people's earès, all and some, *one and all*
 Was couth eke that a newè marquiss *became known also*
 He with him brought, in such pomp and richesse *splendor & richness*
 That never was there seen with mannè's eye
- 945 So noble array in all West Lombardy.

¹ 933-8: "As scholars, when they please, can write, especially about men, but in truth, though clerics praise women little, no man can distinguish himself for humility the way a woman can, nor be as faithful as women, unless there is something totally new in the world." *when them list* means "when it pleases them." *Clerk*

	The marquis, which that shaped and knew all this, Ere that this earl was come, sent his messáge For thilkè silly poorè Gríseldis;	<i>who had planned that poor unfortunate G.</i>
950	And she with humble heart and glad viságe, Not with no swollen thought in her couráge, ¹ Came at his hest, and on her knees her set, And reverently and wisely she him gret.	<i>at his command solemnly / greeted</i>
955	"Griseld," quod he, "my will is utterly, This maiden, that shall wedded be to me, Receivèd be to-morrow as royally As it is possible in my house to be, ² And eke that every wight in his degree Have his estate, in sitting and service And high pleasánce, as I can best devise.	<i>absolutely is to be received also / person / rank his (proper) place as far as I can</i>
960	"I have no women suffisant, certáin, The chambers for t'array in ordinance After my lust, and therefore would I fain That thínè were all such manner governance. Thou knowest eke of old all my pleasánce;	<i>no women good enough arange properly As I wish / I wantyou to manage it all</i>
965	Though thine array be bad and evil bisey, ³ Do thou thy devoir at the leastè way."	<i>thy duty</i>
970	"Not only, lord, that I am glad," quod she, "To do your lust, but I desire also You for to serve and please in my degree Withouten fainting, and shall evermo'; Ne never, for no wealè nor no woe, Ne shall the ghost within my heartè stent To love you best with all my true intent."	<i>your wish slacking neither joy nor the spirit / cease</i>

¹ 950: "Not with a heart (*courage*) swollen with anger (or vanity?)."

² 954-9: The marquis gives orders that his bride-to-be is to be received with highest possible honor, and that every guest is to be assigned a place and servants appropriate to his rank to give him the greatest satisfaction.

³ 965-6: "Even though your clothes are bad and look poor, do your best ..."

- 1005 To have a newè lady of their town.
 No more of this make I now mentïon,
 But to Griseld again will I me dress, *I'll turn*
 And tell her constancy and busyness.
- 1010 Full busy was Griseld in every thing
 That to the feastè was apertinent. *appertained to*
 Right not was she abashed of her clothing, *not ashamed*
 Though it were rude and somedeal eke to-rent; *rough & somewhat torn*
 But with glad cheerè to the gate she went
 With other folk, to greet the marquissess,
 1015 And after that does forth her busyness. *her duties*
- With so glad cheer his guestès she receiveth,
 And so cunningly, ever each in his degree, *tactfully / rank*
 That no defaultè no man aperceiveth,
 But aye they wonder what she mightè be *all the time*
 1020 That in so poor array was for to see, *poor clothes*
 And could such honour and such reverence,¹ *knew*
 And worthily they praisen her prudence.
- In all this meanè whilè she ne stent *did not cease*
 This maid and eke her brother to commend
 1025 With all her heart, in full benign intent,
 So well that no man could her praise amend.
 But at the last, when that these lordès wend *went*
 To sitten down to meat, he gan to call
 Griseld, as she was busy in his hall.
- 1030 "Griseld," quod he, as it were in his play, *as if in play*
 "How liketh thee my wife and her beauty?"²

¹ 1021: "And who knew so much about the right kind of honour and respect (to give to each guest)." The stanza expresses the understandable surprise of the aristocratic guests that they are being received by a woman dressed in rags who is nevertheless exquisitely tactful and perfectly courteous; nobody feels slighted because she knows exactly how each is to be treated according to rank.

² 1031: Again this is not poor grammar. The line means literally "How does my wife please thee?" i.e. What do you think of my wife?

"Right well," quod she, "my lord; for, in good fay,
 A fairer saw I never none than she.
 I pray to God give her prosperity;
 1035 And so hope I that He will to you send
 Pleasance enough unto your livès' end.

faith

"One thing beseech I you, and warn also,
 That you ne prickè with no tórmenting
 This tender maiden, as you have done mo';
 1040 For she is fostered in her nourishing
 More tenderly, and, to my supposing,
 She couldè not adversity endure
 As could a poorè fostered crëature."

*torture**more (i.e. me)**reared / upbringing**reared in poverty*

And when this Walter saw her patience,
 1045 Her gladè cheer, and no malice at all,
 And he so oft had done to her offence,
 And she aye sad and constant as a wall,
 Continuing ever her innocence overall,
 This sturdy marquis gan his heartè dress
 1050 To rue upon her wifely steadfastness.

*ever firm**harsh m. / dispose**To have pity*

*The marquis finally announces the true identity of the "bride" and her brother,
 and receives back Griselda as his wife.*

"This is enough, Griselda mine," quod he;
 "Be now no more aghast nor evil apaid.
 I have thy faith and thy benignity,
 As well as ever woman was, assayed,
 1055 In great estate and poorly arrayed.
 Now know I, dearè wife, thy steadfastness,"
 And her in arms he took and gan her kiss.

*frightened nor angry**goodness**tested**In high place & low*

And she for wonder took of it no keep;
 She heardè not what thing he to her said;
 1060 She fared as she had start out of a sleep,
 Till she out of her mazédness abreyd.
 "Griseld," quod he, "by God, that for us died,

*didn't notice**suddenly woken**awoke*

Thou art my wife, nor no other I have,
Ne never had, as God my soulé save!

- 1065 "This is thy daughter, which thou hast supposed
To be my wife; that other faithfully *t. other = their son*
Shall be mine heir, as I have aye disposed; *always intended*
Thou bore him in thy body truly.
At Bologna have I kept them privily; *secretly*
- 1070 Take them again, for now mayst thou not say
That thou hast lorn none of thy children tway.¹
lost
- "And folk that otherwise have said of me,
I warn them well that I have done this deed
For no malice, nor for no cruelty,
- 1075 But for t'assay in thee thy womanhood, *to test*
And not to slay my children. God forbid!
But for to keep them privily and still, *secretly & securely*
Till I thy purpose knew and all thy will."
- When she this heard, a-swoonè down she falls
- 1080 For piteous joy, and after her swooning
She both her youngè children to her calls,
And in her armès, piteously weeping,
Embraces them, and tenderly kissing
Full like a mother, with her saltè tears
- 1085 She bathed both their visage and their hairs. *face*
- O which a piteous thing it was to see
Her swooning, and her humble voice to hear!
"Gramércy, lord, God thank it you," quod she, *Great thanks / G. reward*
"That you have savèd me my children dear! *saved for me*
- 1090 Now reck I never to be dead right here; ²
Since I stand in your love and in your grace,

¹ 1070-71: The double negative is unfortunate. The sentence means what it would mean without the "not" in 1070: "You cannot say that you have lost either of your two children".

² 1090-92: "I do not care if I die right here. Since I am once more in your love and favor; death, the departure of my soul, does not matter now. Death, when my soul leaves my body, is unimportant"

	No force of death nor when my spirit pace!	<i>No matter / goes</i>
	"O tender, O dear, O youngè children mine! Your woeful mother wendè steadfastly	<i>thought for sure</i>
1095	That cruel houndès or some foul vermin Had eaten you; but God, of his mercy, And your benignè father tenderly Hath do you kept." And in that samè stound	<i>rats</i> <i>moment</i>
	All suddenly she swapped down to the ground.	<i>she fell</i>
1100	And in her swoon so sadly holdeth she Her children two, when she gan them t'embrace, That with great sleight and great difficulty	<i>tightly</i> <i>effort</i>
	The children from her arm they gan arace. O many a tear on many a piteous face	<i>detach</i>
1105	Down ran of them that stooden her beside; Unneth abouten her might they abide. ¹	
	Walter her gladeth, and her sorrow slaketh; She riseth up, abaisèd, from her trance, And every wight her joy and feastè maketh ²	<i>comforts her / subsides</i> <i>dazed</i>
1110	Till she hath caught again her countenance. Walter her doth so faithfully pleasance ³	<i>composure</i>
	That it was dainty for to see the cheer Betwixt them two, now they be met y-fere.	<i>a pleasure / the joy</i> <i>together</i>
1115	These ladies, when that they their timè saw, Have taken her and into chamber gone, And strippen her out of her rude array,	<i>rough clothes</i>
	And in a cloth of gold that brightly shone, With a coronet of many a richè stone Upon her head, they into hall her brought,	
1120	And there she was honourèd as her ought.	

¹ 1106: "They could hardly (*unneth*) bear to stay near her" (they were so moved).

² 1109: "Everyone cheers her up and makes much of her."

³ 1111: "Walter tries to please her so assiduously ..."

- Thus hath this piteous day a blissfull end,
 For every man and woman does his might *his best*
 This day in mirth and revel to dispend *to spend*
 Till in the welkin shone the starrès light. *sky*
- 1125 For more solemn in every mannè's sight
 This feastè was, and greater of costàge, *expense*
 Than was the revel of their marriage.
- Full many a year in high prosperity
 Liven these two in concord and in rest,
 1130 And richèly his daughter married he
 Unto a lord, one of the worthiest
 Of all Itaille; and then in peace and rest *Italy*
 His wifè's father in his court he keeps,
 Till that the soul out of his body creeps.
- 1135 His son succeeded in his heritage *His = Walter's*
 In rest and peace, after his father's day,
 And fortunate was eke in marriage, *was also*
 All put he not his wife in great assay. *Although / test*
 This world is not so strong, it is no nay, *no denying*
- 1140 As it has been in oldè timès yore,
 And hearken what this author says therefore. *author = Petrarch*

The Clerk's envoy: the moral of the story

- This story is said, not for that wivès should
 Follow Griseld as in humility,
 For it were inportáble, though they would.¹
- 1145 But for that every wight in his degree, *person / own walk of life*
 Should be constant in adversity
 As was Griselda; therefore Petrarch writeth
 This story which with high style he enditeth. *composes*
- For since a woman was so patient
 1150 Unto a mortal man, well more us ought
 Receiven all in gree that God us sent, *in patience*

¹ 1144: "It would be impossible (unendurable) even if they wanted to."

	For great skill is that He prove what He wrought	
	But He ne tempteth no man that He bought ¹	<i>has redeemed</i>
	As says St. James, if you his 'pistle read.	<i>James 1: 13 / epistle</i>
1155	He proveth folk alday, it is no dread. ²	<i>no question</i>
	And suffers us, as for our exercise, ³	<i>permits us / our good</i>
	With sharpè scourges of adversity	
	Full often to be beat in sundry wise,	<i>different ways</i>
	Not for to know our will, for certès He,	
1160	Ere we were born, knew our frailty.	
	And for our best is all His governance.	
	Let us then live in virtuous sufferance.	<i>patience</i>
	But one word, lordings, hearken ere I go	<i>ladies & g'men</i>
	It were full hard to findè nowadays	
1165	In all a town Griseldas three — or two,	
	For if that they were put in such assays	<i>trials</i>
	The gold of them has now so bad allays	<i>alloys</i>
	With brass, that though the coin be fair at eye,	<i>fine to see</i>
	It wouldè rather burst a-two than ply.	<i>than bend</i>
1170	For which here, for the Wife's love of Bath,	<i>for love of the W o B</i>
	Whose life and all her sect may God maintain,	<i>all her kind</i>
	In high mastery — (and elsè were it scath)	<i>would be a pity</i>
	I will with lusty heartè, fresh and green	
	Say you a song to gladden you, I ween.	<i>I hope</i>
1175	And let us stint of earnestful mattér.	<i>stop / serious</i>
	Hearken my song that says in this mannér:	<i>Listen to</i>

Envoy de Chaucer

¹ 1152-53: "For it is very reasonable (or likely) (*great skill is*) that He should test (*prove*) what He has made (*wrought*), but He will not lead into temptation anyone that He has redeemed (*bought*)." 1151: *sent* is a contracted form of *sendeth*: sends.

² 1155: "He constantly tests people; there is no doubt about that."

³ 1156-8: "and He allows (*suffers*) us, for our good, to be beaten often in various ways with the sharp whips (*scourges*) of adversity."

- Griseld is dead, and eke her patience,
 And both at once are buried in Itaille
 For which I cry in open audience *publicly*
- 1180 No wedded man so hardy be t'assail
 His wifè's patience, in trust to find *hoping to*
 Griselda's, for in certain he shall fail.
- O noble wivès, full of high prudènce,
 Let no humility your tonguè nail
- 1185 Nor let no clerk have cause or diligence *or good reason*
 To write of you a story of such marvail
 As of Griselda, patient and kind,
 Lest Chichevache you swallow in her entrail.¹ *her gut*
- Followeth Echo that holdeth no silence
- 1190 But ever answereth at the contretail. *answers back*
 Be not bedaffèd for your innocence *fooled*
 But sharply take on you the governail. *mastery*
 Imprinteth well this lesson in your mind
 For common profit since it may avail. *may be for common good*
- 1195 You archèwives, standeth at defence,
 Since you be strong as is a great camail *camel*
 Ne suffer not that men you do offence. *don't allow men*
 And slender wivès, feeble as in batail, *battle*
 Be eager as a tiger yond in Inde. *India*
- 1200 Aye clappeth as a mill, I you counsail. *Chatter constantly*
- Nor dread them not; do them no reverence
 For though thy husband armèd be in mail,
 The arrows of thy crabbèd eloquence *bitter*
 Shall pierce his breast and eke his aventail. *neck armor*
- 1205 In jealousy I rede eke thou him bind *I advise*
 And thou shalt make him couch as does a quail. *cower / (bird)*
- If thou be fair, there folk be in présènce *pretty / in public*

¹ 1188: Chichevache: the name of the legendary cow which was eternally skinny because it fed on patient wives, in contrast to the well-fed Bicornè who grew fat on patient husbands.

	Show thou thy visage and thine ápparail.	<i>face / clothes</i>
	If thou be foul, be free of thy dispense;	<i>ugly / spend freely</i>
1210	To get thee friendès aye do thy travail.	<i>always do your best</i>
	Be aye of cheer, as light as leaf on lind,	<i>always cheerful / linden tree</i>
	And let him care, and weep and wring and wail.	

*Behold the merry words of the Host*¹

1212 a	This worthy Clerk, when ended was his tale,	<i>(To) This</i>
	Our Hostè said, and swore: "By Godè's bones,	
	Me were lever than a barrel ale	<i>I'd prefer before</i>
	My wife at home had heard this legend once!	<i>this story</i>
	This is a gentle talè for the nonce,	
	As to my purpose, wistè you my will.	<i>If you know what I mean</i>
1212 g	But thing that will not be, let it be still."	

¹ This last stanza (ll. 1212 a - g) stands after the Envoy in many manuscripts. It is omitted or footnoted in some editions to keep the neat connection between the last line of the Clerk's own words (1212 above) and the beginning of the Merchant's prologue:

End of Clerk's: *And let him care and weep and wring and wail.*
 Beginning of Merchant's: *Weeping and wailing, care and other sorrow.*