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,
with its stories of the Seven Sleepers, St. Mary of Egypt, or St. James the Dismembered, and the like, which strained belief and were dubiously edifying. Similarly, even Petrarch, from whom Chaucer takes his tale, finds the story of Griselda both fascinating and grotesque, and to make it acceptable even to medieval tastes allegorizes it or turns it into an exemplary tale the details of which were not expected to be always plausible. Chaucer follows him, or purports to:

*This story is said not for that wives should
Follow Griseld as in humility,
For it were importâble though they would,
But for that every wight in his degree
Should be constant in adversity
As was Griselda; therefore Petrarch writes
This story which with high style he endites.*

*For since a woman was so patient
Unto a mortal man, well more us ought
Receiven all in gree that God us sent*  
(1142 ff)  
in patience

According to this reading Griselda represents the faithful soul which, like Job, patiently endures the hardships that God sends even when it least understands. One may, however, find it difficult to take the human, whim-driven, wifebaiting cruelty of Walter as something Godlike. Sympathizing with Griselda against "God" is almost impossible to avoid. At a number of points in the poem Chaucer uses his considerable power to evoke pathos on Griselda's behalf, as when Griselda's children are taken away, and when she herself is dismissed half naked and followed by a crowd back to the wretched cabin of her father, who tries to cover her nakedness with the old clothes that no longer fit. The closest she ever comes to complaint is at this point, with the words spoken more in sorrow than in anger, the whole passage from 815-896 including this:

*O goodê God! How gentle and how kind
You seemed by your speech and your viságe
The day that makêd was our marriage
But sooth is said (algate I find it true) . . .
Love is not old as when that it is new.*

*Let me not like a worm go by the way.
Remember you, mine ownê lord so dear,
I was your wife, though I unworthy were*  
(852 - 882)
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
And putten her in anguish and in dread

O needless was she tempted in assay

But now of women would I asken fain
If these assayès mightè not suffice?

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?
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 (Griseldis) 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, créâtúre (3 syllables); or -age like couráge, messáge, viságe, though it is clearly viságe in 1085. Similarly pleasánce, patient (3 syllables). Pity (142) with second-syllable stress rhymes with me because it was originally pitye 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 crúel 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: cunningly (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 against your liking." The situation in the MS form does not improve matters much: Is as ye wole, nor ayeynes youre likynte. 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 thinks necessary. See also 1080-83.

fairnéss rhymes with richesse (384-5) and shares its stress. Similarly witnëss / mistrëss (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
That unto logic haddé long y-go.¹
As leanē was his horse as is a rake,
And he was not right fat, I undertake,
But lookéd hollow, and thereto soberly.

Full threabare was his overest courtepy,
For he had gotten him yet no benefice
Nor was so worldly for to have office,
For him was lever have at his bed's head
Twenty bookés clad in black or red

Of Aristotle and his philosophy
Than robe's rich or fiddle or gay psalt'ry.
But albeit that he was a philosopher,
Yet haddé he but little gold in coffer,²
But all that he might of his friendés hent

On bookés and on learning he it spent,
And busily gan for the soulés pray
Of them that gave him wherewith to scholay.
Of study took he most care and most heed.
Not one word spoke he moré than was need,

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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."
And that was spoke in form and reverence,
And short and quick and full of high senténcé.
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 Host said,
You ride as coy and still as does a maid
Were new espoused sitting at the board.
This day ne heard I of your tongue a word.

I trow you study about some sophime.
But Solomon says: 'Everything hath time.'
For God's sake as be of better cheer;
It is no timé for to study here.
Tell us some merry thingé, by your fay,
For what man that is entered in a play
He needs must unto the play assent.
But preacheth not, as Friars do in Lent
To make us for our oldé sinné weep.
Nor that thy talé make us not to sleep!

Tell us some merry thing of aprèsnts.
Your terméés, your coloúrs, and your figúres —
Keep them in store till so be you endite
High style, as when that men to kingés write.
Speaketh so plain at this time we you pray

That we may understanden what you say."

This worthy Clerk benignély answeréd:
"Host," quod he, "I am under your yard.
You have of us as now the governance,
And therefore will I do you obeisance
As far as reason asketh hardly.
I will you tell a talé which that I

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1 16: Terms and tropes (of rhetoric), figures of speech.
Learned at Padua of a worthy clerk
As provêd by his words and by his work.
He is now dead and nailêd in his chest.
I pray to God to give his soulê rest.
Francis Petrarch, the laureate poet
Hightê this clerk, whose rhetoriê sweet
Illumined all Itaille of poetry
As Linian did of Philosophy,
Or law or other art particular.
But death, that will not suffer us dwellen here
But as it were a twinkling of an eye,
Them both has slain. And allê shall we die.
But forth to tellen of this worthy man
That taughtê me this tale, as I began,
I say first that with high style he enditeth,
(Ere he the body of his talê writeth)
A prohemie in which describeth he
Piedmont, and of Saluces the country,
And speaks of Apennines, the hillês high
That be the boundês of West Lombardy,
And of mount Vesulus in special
Where as the Po, out of a wellé small,
Taketh his firstê springing and his source
That eastward aye increaseth in his course
To Emeliaward, to Ferrara and Venice,
The which a longê thing were to devise.
And truly, as to my judgêment
Methinketh it a thing impertinent
Save that he will conveyen his matter.²
But this his talê, 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 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.

There is, at the west side of Itaille, Italy
Down at the root of Vesulus the cold, Mt Viso
A lusty plain, abundant of vitaille, fertile w. crops

Where many a tower and town thou mayst behold, 60
That founded were in time of fathers old,
And many another délitable sight,
And Sáluces this noble country hight. was called

A marquis whilom lord was of that land, was once
As were his worthy elders him before;
And obeisant, aye ready to his hand, obedient, always
Were all his lieges, both less and more. subjects, b. high & low
Thus in delight he lives, and has done yore, for long time
Beloved and dread, through favor of Fortúne, Loved & feared
Both of his lordès and of his commune. by his l. & common people

Therewith he was, to speak as of lineage, ancestry
The gentilest y-born of Lombardy, most nobly
A fair person, and strong, and young of age,
And full of honor and of courtesy;

Discreet enough his country for to gye, guide (rule)
Save in some thingês that he was to blame;
And Walter was this youngê lordê's name.

I blame him thus, that he considered naught not at all
In timé coming what might him betide,
But on his lust presént was all his thought, desires of the moment
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 — would not
Wed no wife, for naught that may befall.

Only that point his people bore so sore resented so much
That flockmeal on a day they to him went, in a group
And one of them that wisest was of lore, of learning
Or else that the lord best would assent either because
That he should tell him what his people meant

Or else could he show well such mattér, ¹
He to the marquis said as you shall hear:
knew best how to

"O noble marquis, your humanity
Assureth us and gives us hardiness, courage
As oft as time is of necessity,

That we to you may tell our heaviness. problem
Accepteth, lord, now of your gentleness Accepteth: polite plur.
What we with piteous heart unto you 'plain,
And let your ear not my voice disdain.
complain

"All have I naught to do in this matter Although / nothing
More than another man has in this place,
Yet for as much as you, my lord so dear,
Have always showèd me favour and grace a moment
I dare the better ask of you a space
Of audience, to showen our request,
to present

And you, my lord, to do right as you lest. as pleases you

"For certès, lord, so well us liketh you you please us
And all your work, and ever have done, that we
Ne could we not ourselves devisen how
We mighten live in more felicity,

Save one thing, lordé, if it your will be,
That for to be a wedded man you lest; agree to marry
Then were your people in sovereign heartése' rest. completely at ease

"Boweth your neck under that blissfull yoke pleasant harness collar
Of sovereignty, not of service,

Which that men clepe espousal or wedlock; men call
And thinketh, lord, among your thoughtés wise
How that our dayés 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.
CLERK'S TALE

For though we sleep, or wake, or run, or ride,
Aye flees the time; it n'ill no man abide.

"And though your greenë youthë flower as yet,
In creepeth age always, as still as stone,
And death menaces every age, and smites
In each estate, for there escapeth none;
And all so certain as we know each one
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,
And we will, lord, if that you will assent
Choose you a wife, in short time at the least,
Born of the gentilest and of the most
Of all this land, so that it ought to seem
Honour to God and you, as we can deem.

"Deliver us out of all this busy dread,
And take a wife, for highë God's sake!
For if it so befell, as God forbid,
That through your death your lineage should slake,
And that a strangë successor should take
Your heritage, O, woe were us alive!
Wherefore we pray you hastily to wive."

Their meek prayer and their piteous cheer
Madë the marquis's heart to have pity.
" You will," quod he, "my ownë people dear,
To that I never erst thought strainë me."

I me rejoicëd of my liberty,
That seldom time is found in marriage;
Where I was free, I must be in servage.

"But nathelees I see your true intent,
And trust upon your wit, and have done aye;
150 Wherefore of my free will I will assent
To wedđe me, as soon as ever I may.
But there as you have proffered me to-day
To choosē me a wife, I you release
That choice, and pray you of that proffer cease.

155 "For God it wot, that children often been
Unlike their worthy elders them before;
Bounty comes all of God, not of the strain
Of which they been engendered and y-bore.¹
I trust in Godē's bounty, and therefore

160 My marriage and my estate and rest
I Him betake; He may do as Him lest.

"Let me alone in choosing of my wife;
That charge upon my back I will endure.
But I you pray, and charge upon your life,
That what wife that I take, you me assure
To worship her while that her life may dure,
In word and work, both here and everywhere,
As she an emperour's daughter were.

165 "And furthermore, this shall you swear, that ye
Against my choice shall neither grouch nor strive;
For since I shall forgo my liberty
At your request, as ever may I thrive,
There as my heart is set, there will I wive;
And but you will assent in such manné,
I pray you, speak no more of this mattér."

With hearty will they swear and they assent
To all this thing; there said no wightē nay,
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;

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,
Lest that the marquis no wife wouldé wed.

He granted them a day, such as him lest,
On which he would be wedded sikerly,
And said he did all this at their request.
And they, with humble intenté, buxomly,
Kneeling upon their knees full reverently,
Him thankéd all; and thus they have an end
Of their intent, and home again they wend.

And hereupon he to his officers
Commandeth for the feasté to purvey,
And to his privy knightés and his squires
Such chargé gave as him list on them lay;
And they to his commandément obey,
And each of them does all his diligence
To do unto the feasté reverence.

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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 thilké palace honorable,¹
Where as this marquis shoop his marrïage,
There stood a thorp, of sité delitable,
In which that pooré folk of that village

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¹ All the riming words in this stanza are of French derivation and probably in Chaucer's day bore French stress: honorábile, villáge, ábundánce, 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, according as
After that th'earthè gave them abundance.

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; village
Janicula men of that thorp him call.
A daughter had he, fair enough to sight,

210 And Gríselda this youngè maiden hight. 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.

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 enclosèd ripe and sad couráge; mature & serious spirit
And in great reverence and charity
cared for
Her oldè poorè father fostered she.
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 seethèd 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

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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
As he on hunting rode peradventure;
And when it fell that he might her espy,
He not with wanton looking of folly
His eyen cast on her, but in sad wise
Upon her cheer he would him oft avise,
Commending in his heart her womanhood,
And eke her virtue, passing any wight
Of so young age, as well in cheer as deed.
For though the people have no great insight
In virtue, he considerèd full right
Her bounty, and disposèd that he would
Wed her only, if ever he wed should.

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

But natheles this marquis hath done make
Of gemmes set in gold and in azure,
Brooches and ringsè for Griselda's sake,
And of her clothing took he the mesure
Of a maiden like to her stature,
And eke of other ornamentès all
That unto such a wedding should befall.

The time of undern of the samè day
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 stuffed with plenty storehouses  
There mayst thou see, of dainteous vitaille delicious foods  
That may be found as far as last Itaille. furthest part of Italy

This royal marquis richly arrayed, dressed  
Lordés and ladies in his company, invited  
The which that to the feasté were y-prayed,  
And of his retinue the bachelry, young knights  
With many a sound of sundry melody,  
Unto the village of the which I told,  
In this array the rightē way have hold. In this fashion

Griseld of this, God wot, full innocent, unaware  
That for her shapen was all this array, was destined  
To fetché water at a well is went, has gone  
And cometh home as soon as ever she may; that day  
For well had she heard said that thilké day  
The marquis shouldé wed, and if she might,  
She wouldé fain have seen some of that sight. would like to see

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

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;  
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 countenancē kneeleth still serious
This thoughtful marquis spoke unto this maid
Full soberly, and said in this manner:
"Where is your father, O Griseld?" he said.
And she with reverence, in humble cheer,
Answered: "Lord, he is already here."

Then in she goes without longer let,
And to the marquis she her father fet.

He by the hand then took this old man,
And said thus, when he him had aside:
"Janicula, I neither may nor can
Longer the pleasure of my heart hide.
If that thou vouch safe, what so betide,
Thy daughter will I take, ere that I wend,
As for my wife, unto my life's end.

"Thou lovest me, I wot it well certain,
And art my faithfull liegeman y-bore;
And all that liketh me, I dare well sayn
It liketh thee, and specially therefore
Tell me that point that I have said before,
If that thou wilt unto that purpose draw
To tak me as for thy son-in-law."

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

"Yet will I," quod this marquis softly,
"That in thy chamber I and thou and she
Have a collation, and wost thou why?
For I will ask if it her willè be
To be my wife, and rule her after me."
And all this shall be done in thy presence;
I will not speak out of thine audience."

And in the chamber, while they were about
Their treaty, which as you shall after hear,
The people came unto the house without,
And wondered them in how honest manner
And tentively she kept her father dear.

But utterly Griselda wonder might,
For never erst ne saw she such a sight.

No wonder is though that she were astonished
To see so great a guest come in that place;
She never was unto such guests woned,

For which she lookèd with full pale face.
But shortly forth this matter for to chase,
These are the wordès that the marquis said
To this benignè, very faithful maid.

"Griseld," he said, "you shall well understand
It liketh to your father and to me
That I you wed, and eke it may so stand
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,
Will you assent, or else will you avise? ¹

"I say this, be you ready with good heart
To all my lust; and that I freely may
As me best thinketh, do you laugh or smart, ²
And never you to grudge it, night nor day?

And eke when I say `Yea,' ne say not `Nay,'
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 allegiance.

Wondering upon this word, quaking for dread, She said, "Lord, undigne and unworthy
Am I to thilk honoûr that you me bid,
But as you will yourself, right so will I.
And here I swear that never willingly, In work nor thought, I n’ill you disobey,
For to be dead, though me were loath to die."

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

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

And for that nothing of her oldé gear
She shouldè bring into his house, he bade
That women should despoilen her right there;
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
Full rudely, and with their fingers small
A coronet on her head they have y-dressed,
And set her full of nowches great and small.
Of her array what should I make a tale?
Unnethe the people her knew for her fairness,
When she transformèd was in such riches.

This marquis hath her spousèd with a ring
Brought for the samè cause, and then her set
Married

Brought for that purpose
Upon a horse, snow-white and well ambling,  
And to his palace, ere he longer let,
390 With joyful people that her led and met,  
Convey’d her, and thus the day they spend
In revel, till the sun ’gan to descend.

And shortly forth this tale for to chase,
I say that to this newè marquisess
395 God hath such favour sent her of his grace,
That it ne seemèd not by likeliness
That she was born and fed in rudèness,
As in a cote or in an ox’s stall,
But nourished in an emperourè’s hall.

To every wight she waxen is so dear
And worshipfull that folk where she was born
And from her birthè knew her year by year,
Unnethè trowèd they, but durst have sworn
That to Janicle, of which I spoke before,
400 She daughter were, for as by conjecture,
Them thought she was another créature.

For though that ever virtuous was she,
She was increasèd in such excellence
Of thewe’s good, y-set in high bounty,
And so discreet and fair of eloquence,
So benign and so digne of reverence,
And couldè so the people’s heart embrace,
That each her loved that lookèd in her face.

Not only of Salúces in the town
415 Published was the bounty of her name,
But eke beside in many a region,
If one said well, another said the same;
So spread of her high bounty the fame
That men and women, as well young as old,
420 Go to Saluce upon her to behold.

Thus Walter lowly (nay, but royally!)
Wedded with fortunatē honesty,
In Godē's peace liveth full easily
At home, and outward grace enough had he;\(^1\)

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.

Not only this Griselda through her wit
Could all the feat of wifely homeliness,\(^2\)

But eke, when that the case requirèd it,
The common profit could 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.

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 ripê wordès haddè she,
And judgèments of so great equity,
That she from heaven sent was, as men wend,
People to save and every wrong t'amend.

Not longè time after that this Griseld
Was wedded, she a daughter has y-bore.
All had her lever have had a knavê child,\(^3\)

Glad was the marquis and the folk therefore;
For though a maidê child came all before,
She may unto a knavê child attain
By likelihood, since she is not barrén.

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\(^1\) 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 timês more,
450 When that this child had suckêd but a throw,
This marquis in his heartê longeth so
To tempt his wife, her sadness for to know,¹
That he ne might out of his heartê throw
This marvellous desire his wife t'assay;
455 Nathëless, God wot, he thought her for t'affray.

He had assayêd 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?
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.

For which this marquis wrought in this mannêr:
He came alone a-night, there as she lay,
465 With sternê face and with full troubled cheer,
And saidê 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?
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
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.

"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,
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.

"And namely since thy daughter was y-bore
These wordés 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 casé be reckless;
I must do with thy daughter for the best,
Not as I would, but as my people lest.

"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.
Show now your patïence in your working
That you me hight and swore in your villáge
That day that makéd was our marriáge."

When she had heard all this, she not a-moved
Neither in word, nor cheer, nor countenance;
For, as it seemed, she was not aggrieved.
She saidé: "Lord, all lies in your pleasance.
My child and I, with hearty obeisance,
Be yourés all, and you may save or spill
Your owné thing; worketh after your will.

"There may no thing, God so my soulé save,
Liken to you that may displeasé me;
Nor I desiré no thingé for to have,
Ne dreadé for to lose, save only ye.
This will is in mine heart, and aye shall be;
No length of time or death may this deface,
Nor change my courage to another place."

Glad was this marquis of her answering,
But yet he feignèd as he were not so;
All dreary was his cheer and his looking,

When that he should out of the chamber go.
Soon after this, a furlong way or two,
He privily hath told all his intent
Unto a man, and to his wife him sent.

A manner sergeant was this privy man,
A kind of / discreet man

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;
And when this sergeant wist his lordé's will,
Into the chamber he stalkèd him full still.

"Madame," he said, "you must forgive it me,
Though I do thing to which I am constrained.
You be so wise that full well knownen ye
That lordès' hestès must not been y-feigned;
They may well be bewailed or complained,
But men must needs unto their lust obey,
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

Despitously,¹ and gan a cheer to make
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.

Suspicious was the défame of this man,
Suspéct his face, suspéct his word also;

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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 lovéd so,
She wend he would have slain it righté tho.

545 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 natheless she neither wept nor sighed
Conforming her to what the marquis liked.

But at the last to speaken she began,
And meekely she to the sergeant prayed,
So as he was a worthy gentle man,

550 That she might kiss her child ere that it died.
And in her barm this little child she laid
With full sad face, and gan the child to bless,
And lulléd it, and after gan it kiss.¹

And thus she said in her benigné voice,
"Farewell my child! I shall thee never see.
But since I thee have markéd with the cross
Of thilké Father — blesséd may he be,—
That for us died upon a cross of tree,
Thy soul, my little child, I Him betake,

555 For this night shall thou dien for my sake."

I trow that to a nursé in this case
It had been hard this ruthè for to see;
Well might a mother then have cried "Alas!"

560 That she enduréd all adversity,
And to the sergeant meekely she said,
"Have here again your little youngé maid.

"Go now," quod she, "and do my lord's behest;
But one thing will I pray you of your grace,

570 That, but my lord forbade you, at the least
Bury this little body in some place
That beastès nor no birdès it to-race."
But he no word will to that purpose say,

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
He told him point for point, in short and plain,
And him presented with his daughter dear.
Somewhat this lord had ruth in his manner,
But natheles his purpose held he still,
As lordes do, when they will have their will,

And bade this sergeant that he privily
Should this childé softly wind and wrap
With allé circumstances tenderly,
585 And carry it in a coffer or in a lap,
But, upon pain his head off for to swap,
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 thilké time of Panik was countess,
He should it take, and show her this mattér,
Beseeching her to do her busyness
This child to foster in all gentleness;
And whose child that it was he bade her hide
From every wight, for aught that may betide.

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 wife's cheer he mightè see,
600 Or by her wordé áperceive that she
Were changèd; but he never could her find
But ever in one alikey sad and kind.

As glad, as humble, as busy in service,
And eke in love as she was wont to be
605 Was she to him in every manner wise;
Nor of her daughter not a word spoke she.
No accident, for no adversity,
Was seen in her, ne never her daughter's name  
Ne namèd 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 fashion  
_In this estate there passèd been four years_ 
Ere she with childè was, but, as God willed, 
_A knavè child she bore by this Walter,_ 
Full gracïous and fair for to behold. 
_And when that folk it to his father told,_ 
Not only he, but all his country, merry 
_Was for this child, and God they thank and hery._

When it was two years old, and from the breast 
_Departed of his nurse, upon a day_ 
_This marquis caughtè yet another lest_ 
_To tempt his wife yet oftener, if he may._ 
_O needless was she tempted in assay!_ 
_But wedded men ne knowen no measúre,_ 
_When that they find a patient créâtúre._

"Wife," quod this marquis, "you have heard ere this,
625 My people sickly bear our marriage; 
_And namely since my son y-boren is,_ 
_Now is it worse than ever in all our age._ 
_The murmure slays my heart and my couráge,_ 
_For to mine earès comes the voice so smart_ 
_That it well nigh destroyéd has my heart._

"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._

635 Well ought I of such murmure taken heed; 
_For certainly I dreadè such senténce,
Though they not speak plain in mine audience.  

"I would live in peace, if that I might.  
Wherefore I am disposéd utterly,  
640  As I his sister servéd have by night,  
Right so think I to serve him privily.  
This warn I you, that you not suddenly  
Out of yourself for no woe should outrey.  
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,  
Though that my daughter and my son be slain  
At your commandément, this is to sayn.  
650  I have not had no part of children twain  
But first sickness, and after, woe and pain.  

"You be our lord; do with your ownë thing  
Right as you list; asketh no rede of me.  
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 pleasánce, I will your lust obey.  

"And certés, if I haddé prescience  
660  Your will to know, ere you your lust me told,  
I would it do withouten negligence;  
But now I wot your lust, and what you would,¹  
All your pleasáncë firm and stable I hold;  
For wist I that my death would do you ease,  
665  Right gladly would I dien, you to please.  

"Death may not makë 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
In patïenc suffer all this array;
And forth he goes with dreary countenance,
But to his heart it was full great pleasânce.

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

Save this, she prayéd him that, if he might,
Her little son he would in earthé grave,
His tender limbs, delicate to sight,
From fowlés and from beastés for to save.
But she no answer of him mighté have.

He went his way as him no thingé raught;
But to Bologna tenderly it brought.

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

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

But there been folk of such condition
That when they have a certain purpose take,
They can not stint of their intention,
But, right as they were bounden to a stake,
They will not of that first purpose slake.

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 changéd of couráge;
But never could he findé variance.
She was aye one in heart and in viságe;
And aye the further that she was in âge,
That moré true (if that it were possible)
She was to him in love, and more peníble.

For which it seeméd thus, that of them two
There was but one will; for, as Walter lest,
The samé lust was her pleasánce also.
And, God be thankéd, all fell for the best.
She showéd well, for no worldly unrest
A wife as of herself ne nothing should
Will in effect but as her husband would.

The slander of Walter often and widé spread,
That of a cruel heart he wickedly,
For he a poorè woman wedded had,
Has murdered both his children privily.
Such murmúr 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
Had loved him well, the slander of his defame
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;
To tempt his wife was set all his intent.
When that his daughter twelve years was of age,
He to the court of Rome, in subtle wise
Informèd of his will, sent his message,
Commanding them such bullès to devise

As to his cruel purpose may suffice,
How that the pope, as for his people's rest,
Bade him to wed another, if him lest.

I say, he bade they shouldè counterfeit
The popè's bullès, making mention

That he has leave his firstè wife to let,
As by the popè's dispensation
To stintè rancor and dissension
Bitwixt his people and him; thus said the bull,
The which they have published at the full. ¹

The rudè people, as it no wonder is,
Wenden full well that it had been right so;
But when these tidings came to Gríseldis,
I deemè that her heart was full of woe.
But she, alikè sad for evermo'

Disposèd was, this humble créature,
Th'adversity of Fortune all t'endure,

Abiding ever his lust and his pleasânce,
To whom that she was given heart and all,
As to her very worldly suffisânce.

But shortly if this story I tell shall,
This marquis written has in specièl
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 haddē tho
Wedded his sister, prayed he specially
To bringen home again his children two
In honorable estate all openly.
But one thing he him prayēd utterly,
That he to no wight, though men would enquire,
Should not tell whose children that they were,
But say the maiden should y-wedded be
Unto the Marquis of Saluce anon.
And as this earl was prayēd, so did he;
For at the day set he on his way is gone
Toward Saluce, and lordēs many a one
In rich array, this maiden for to guide,
Her youngē brother riding her beside.

Arrayēd was toward her marriage
This freshē maidē, full of gemmēs clear;
Her brother, which that seven years was of age,
Arrayēd eke full fresh in his mannēr.
And thus in great noblesse and with glad cheer,
Toward Salūces 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.

Among all this, after his wick’d usāge,
This marquis, yet his wife to temptē more
To th’utterestē proof of her courâge,
Fully to have experience and lore
If that she were as steadfast as before,
He on a day, in open audience,
Full boistously hath said her this sentênce:
"Certēs, Griseld, I had enough pleasance
To have you to my wife for your goodness,  
As for your truth and for your obeisance,  
Not for your lineage, nor for your richesse;  
But now know I in very soothfastness  
That in great lordship, if I well avise,  
There is great servitude in sundry wise.  

"I may not do as every plowman may.  
My people me constraineth for to take  
Another wife, and crien day by day;  
And eke the popé, rancour for to slake,  
Consenteth it, that dare I undertake;  
And truly thus much I will you say,  
My newé wife is coming by the way.  

"Be strong of heart, and void anon her place,  
And thilké dowry that you brought to me,  
Take it again; I grant it of my grace.  
Returneth to your father's house," quod he;  
"No man may always have prosperity.  
With even heart I rede you to endure  
The stroke of Fortune or of áventure."  

And she again answered in patience,  
"My lord," quod she, "I wot, and wist alway,  
How that bitwixen your magnificence  
And my poverté 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.  

"And in this house, where you me lady made —  
The highé God take I for my witness,  
And all so wisly he my soulé glad,¹  
I never held me lady nor mistress,  
But humble servant to your worthiness,  
And ever shall, while that my lifé may dure,  

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

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

"Where I was fostered of a child full small,
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 true wife, it is no dread,
God shield such a lord's wife to take
Another man to husband or to make!

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

"But there as you me proffer such a dower
As I first brought, it is well in my mind
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!

"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
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 poor weed,
And richely me cladden, of your grace.

865 To you brought I naught else, out of dread,
But faith and nakedness and maidenhead;
And here again your clothing I restore,
And eke your wedding ring, for evermore.

"The remnant of your jewels ready be
In with your chamber, dare I safely sayn.
Naked out of my father's house," quod she,
"I came, and naked must I turn again.

870 All your pleasanc will I follow fain;
But yet I hope it be not your intent
That I smockless out of your palace went.

"You could not do so dishonest 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,

875 Let me not like a worm go by the way.
Remember you, mine own lord so dear,
I was your wife, though I unworthy were.

"Wherefore, in guerdon of my maidenhead,
Which that I brought, and not again I bear,

880 As vouchèsafe to give me, to my meed,
But such a smock as I was wont to wear,¹
That I therewith may wrý the womb of her
That was your wife. And here take I my leave
Of you, mine own lord, lest I you grieve."

885 "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."
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.

The folk her follow, weeping in her way,
And Fortune aye they cursen as they go;
But she from weeping kept her eyen dry,
Nor in this timé word ne spoke she none.

Her father, that this tiding heard anon,
Curseth the day and timé that Natúre
Shope him to be a live créatúre.

For out of doubt this oldé pooré man
Was ever suspect of her marrïage;
For ever he deeméd, since that it began,
That when the lord fulfilled had his couráge,
Him would think it were a disparáge
to his estate so low for to alight,
And voiden her as soon as ever he might.

Against his daughter hastily goes he,
For he by noise of folk knew her coming,
And with her oldé coat, as it might be
He covered her, full sorrowfully weeping.

But on her body might he not it bring,
For rudé was the cloth, and more of age
By dayês fele than at her marrïage.

Thus with her father, for a certain space,
Dwelleth this flower of wifely patïence,
That neither by her words nor by her face,

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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 rémembrance
Ne haddé she, as by her countenance.

925 No wonder is, for in her great estate
Her ghost was ever in plain humility;
No tender mouth, no hearté delicate,
No pompé, no semblánçé of royalty,
But full of patience benignity,
Nor of her high estate no rémembrance
Ne haddé she, as by her countenance.

930 Discreet and pridèless, aye honorable,
And to her husband ever meek and stable.

Men speak of Job, and most for his humblesse,
As clérks, when them list, can well endite
Namely of men, but as in soothfastness,¹
Though clérks praisen women but a lite,
There can no man in humblessé him acquit
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,
And to the people’s earés, all and some,
Was couth eke that a newé marquisess
He with him brought, in such pomp and riches
That never was there seen with manné’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, who had planned
Ere that this earl was come, sent his message that poor unfortunate G.
For thilkë silly pooré Griseldis;
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.

"Griseld," quod he, "my will is utterly, absolutely
This maiden, that shall wedded be to me,
Receivëd be to-morrow as royally
As it is possible in my house to be,²
And eke that every wight in his degree also / person / rank
Have his estate, in sitting and service
And high pleasânce, as I can best devise.

"I have no women suffisant, certáin, no women good enough
The chambers for t'array in ordinance arrange properly
After my lust, and therefore would I fain As I wish / I want ...
That thinë were all such manner governance. ...you to manage it all
Thou knowest eke of old all my pleasânce;
Though thine array be bad and evil bisey,³
Do thou thy devoir at the leastè way." thy duty

"Not only, lord, that I am glad," quod she, your wish
"To do your lust, but I desire also
You for to serve and please in my degree
Withouten fainting, and shall evermo'; slacking
Ne never, for no wealè nor no woe, neither joy nor
Ne shall the ghost within my heartë stent the spirit / cease
To love you best with all my true intent."

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 ..."
And with that word she gan the house to dight,
And tables for to set, and beds to make;
And painèd her to do all that she might,
Praying the chamberers, for Godè's sake,
To hasten them, and fastè sweep and shake;
And she, the most serviceable of all,
Hath every chamber arrayèd and his hall.

Abouten undren gan this earl alight,
That with him brought these noble children tway,
For which the people ran to see the sight
Of their array, so richèly bisey;
And then at erst amongést them they say
That Walter was no fool, though that him lest
To change his wife, for it was for the best.

For she is fairer, as they deemen all,
Than is Griseld, and more tender of age,
And fairer fruit between them shouldè fall,
And more pleasant, for her high lineage.
Her brother eke so fair was of viságe
That them to see the people hath caught pleasánce,
Commending now the marquis's governance.

O stormy people! unsad and ever untrue!
Aye indiscreet and changing as a fane!
Delighting ever in rumble that is new,
For like the moon aye waxè you and wane!
Aye full of clapping, dear enough a jane!
Your doom is false, your constance evil preeveth;¹
A full great fool is he that on you 'lieveth.

Thus saiden saddé folk in that city,
When that the people gazèd up and down;
For they were glad, right for the novelty,

¹ 999-1000: "Forever full of chatter, not worth a cent. Your judgement is wrong and your constancy does not stand the test."
1 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 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; And so hope I that He will to you send Pleasance enough unto your livès' end.

"One thing beseech I you, and warn also, That you ne prickè with no tormenting torture This tender maiden, as you have done mo'; more (i.e. me) For she is fostered in her nourishing reared / upbringing More tenderly, and, to my supposing, She couldè not adversity endure reared in poverty As could a poorè fostered créature."

And when this Walter saw her patience, Her glad 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 heartø dress harsh m. / dispose To rue upon her wifely steadfastness. 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; "This is enough, Griselda mine," quod he; "Be now no more aghast nor evil apaid. frightened nor angry I have thy faith and thy benignity, goodness As well as ever woman was, assayed, tested In great estate and poorly arrayed. In high place & low Now know I, dearè wife, thy steadfastness," And her in arms he took and gan her kiss. And she for wonder took of it no keep; didn’t notice She heardè not what thing he to her said; suddenly woken She fared as she had start out of a sleep, awoke Till she out of her mazedèness abreyd. "Griseld," quod he, "by God, that for us died,
Thou art my wife, nor no other I have, 
Ne never had, as God my soule save!

1065 "This is thy daughter, which thou hast supposed 
To be my wife; that other faithfully 
Shall be mine heir, as I have aye disposed; 
Thou bore him in thy body truly. 
At Bologna have I kept them privily; 
Take them again, for now mayst thou not say 
That thou hast lorn none of thy children tway."

"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, 
But for t'assay in thee thy womanhood, 
And not to slay my children. God forbid! 
But for to keep them privily and still, 
Till I thy purpose knew and all thy will."

When she this heard, a-swooné down she falls 
For piteous joy, and after her swooning 
She both her youngé children to her calls, 
And in her armès, piteously weeping, 
Embraces them, and tenderly kissing 
Full like a mother, with her salté tears 
She bathed both their visage and their hairs. 
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, 
"That you have savéd me my children dear!"

Now reck I never to be dead right here; 
Since I stand in your love and in your grace,
No force of death nor when my spirit pace!

"O tender, O dear, O youngè children mine!
Your woeful mother wendë steadfastly
That cruel houndës 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
All suddenly she swapped down to the ground.

And in her swoon so sadly holdeth she
Her children two, when she gan them t'embrace,
That with great sleight and great difficulty
The children from her arm they gan arace.
O many a tear on many a piteous face
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
Till she hath caught again her countenance.
Walter her doth so faithfully pleasance
That it was dainty for to see the cheer
Betwixt them two, now they be met y-fere.

These ladies, when that they their timè saw,
Have taken her and into chamber gone,
And strippen her out of her rude array,
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,
And there she was honoûrèd 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
This day in mirth and revel to dispemd
Till in the welkin shone the starrès light.

1125 For more solemn in every mannë's sight
This feastë was, and greater of costáge,
Than was the revel of their marriage.

Full many a year in high prosperity
Liven these two in concord and in rest,

1130 And richëly his daughter married he
Unto a lord, one of the worthiest
Of all Itaille; and then in peace and rest
His wife's father in his court he keeps,
Till that the soul out of his body creeps.

1135 His son succeeded in his heritage
In rest and peace, after his father's day,
And fortunate was eke in marriage,
All put he not his wife in great assay.
This world is not so strong, it is no nay,

1140 As it has been in oldë timës yore,
And hearken what this author says therefore.

The Clerk's envoy: the moral of the story

This story is said, not for that wivës should
Follow Griseld as in humility,
For it were inportable, though they would.¹

But for that every wight in his degree,
Should be constant in adversity
As was Griselda; therefore Petrarch writeth
This story which with high style he enditeth.

For since a woman was so patient

1150 Unto a mortal man, well more us ought
Receiven all in gree that God us sent,

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
As says St. James, if you his 'pistle read.
He proveth folk alday, it is no dread.

And suffers us, as for our exercise,
With sharpé scourges of adversity
Full often to be beat in sundry wise,
Not for to know our will, for certês He,
Ere we were born, knew our frailty.
And for our best is all His governance.
Let us then live in virtuous sufferance.

But one word, lوردings, hearken ere I go
It were full hard to findé nowadays
In all a town Griseldas three — or two,
For if that they were put in such assays
The gold of them has now so bad allays
With brass, that though the coin be fair at eye,
It wouldé rather burst a-two than ply.

For which here, for the Wife's love of Bath,
Whose life and all her sect may God maintain,
In high mastery — (and elsé were it scath)
I will with lusty hearté, fresh and green
Say you a song to gladden you, I ween.
And let us stint of earnestful mattér.
Hearken my song that says in this mannér:

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

1180  No wedded man so hardy be t'assail 
His wife's patience, in trust to find
Griselda's, for in certain he shall fail.

O noble wives, full of high prudence, 
Let no humility your tongue nail

1185  Nor let no clerk have cause or diligence 
To write of you a story of such marvel
As of Griselda, patient and kind,
Lest Chichevache you swallow in her entrail.¹

Followeth Echo that holdeth no silence

1190  But ever answereth at the contestail. 
Be not bedaffèd for your innocence 
But sharply take on you the governail. 
Imprinteth well this lesson in your mind 
For common profit since it may avail.

1195  You archewives, standeth at defence, 
Since you be strong as is a great camel 
Ne suffer not that men you do offence. 
And slender wives, feeble as in batail, 
Be eager as a tiger yond in India.

1200  Aye clappeth as a mill, I you counsail.

Nor dread them not; do them no reverence 
For though thy husband armèd be in mail, 
The arrows of thy crabbèd eloquence 
Shall pierce his breast and eke his aventail.

1205  In jealousy I rede eke thou him bind 
And thou shalt make him cower as does a quail.

If thou be fair, there folk be in presence

¹1188: Chichevache: the name of the legendary cow which was eternally skinny because it fed on patient wives, in contrast to the well-fed Bicorne who grew fat on patient husbands.
Show thou thy visage and thine apprail.
If thou be foul, be free of thy dispense;
To get thee friendès aye do thy travail.
Be aye of cheer, as light as leaf on lind,
And let him care, and weep and wring and wail.

Behold the merry words of the Host

This worthy Clerk, when ended was his tale,
Our Hostè said, and swore: "By Godè's bones,
Me were lever than a barrel ale
My wife at home had heard this legend once!
This is a gentle talè for the nonce,
As to my purpose, wistè you my will.
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.