

Reading Like a Mother: A New Approach to the Griselda Tale

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Introduction

In a 1912 article “Chaucer’s Discussion of Marriage,” George Kittredge proposed a reading of *The Canterbury Tales* that focused on the connective tissue between tales, a smart interpretive move for the whole text but one that would oversimplify the meaning of several tales, the story of Griselda in *The Clerk’s Tale* in particular. Kittredge argues for the establishment of a “marriage group” which includes the Clerk, the Wife of Bath, the Friar, the Summoner, the Merchant, and the Franklin as a way of understanding how the prologues and tales of the included figures respond to one another on the theme of marriage. Despite the intervening century since the publication of the article, Kittredge’s theory of the marriage group continues to inform more modern readings of *The Canterbury Tales*. As an unfortunate side effect, however, of relegating the set of tales to commenting on marriage, the tales become difficult to evaluate with any complexity beyond the theme of marriage.

No member of the marriage group has suffered this consequence more acutely than the Clerk. With the help of Kittredge’s argument and others like it, not only *The Clerk’s Tale* but in fact all Griselda texts remain trapped within the interpretive confines of marriage, which overshadows several other important threads woven throughout the tale. Kittredge calls the Griselda tale “a plain and straightforward piece of edification... [of which] nobody has ever questioned its appropriateness to the Clerk, who, as he says himself, had traveled in Italy and had heard it from the lips of the laureate Petrarch” (Kittredge 2), failing to note the ways in which the Clerk purposefully deviates from the Petrarchan tradition. The marriage shadow has transformed Griselda into a monolith of wifhood, ignoring her identity of mother that complicates the marriage between Griselda and Walter – a tale not so plain or straightforward. The marriage group restriction limits the Clerk’s tale to “a retort ... to the Wife of Bath’s heretical doctrine

that the woman should be the head of the man” (Kittredge 12) that challenges the Wife of Bath’s ideas of sovereignty by telling “of a wife who had no such views, – who promised ungrudging obedience and kept her vow” (12). While the Clerk certainly does reply to the Wife of Bath on the topic of marriage, he appeals to the Griselda tale to respond to a more complex set of themes specific to the tradition of Griselda. In this thesis, I argue for a new reading of the Griselda tale that privileges her motherhood over her wifeness. Though translators try to conceal Griselda’s motherhood and scholars try to avoid it, motherhood permeates the text. In creating a new reading of the Griselda tale, I relocate Griselda’s motherhood and recenter the story on a “motherhood plot,” seeing a story less about a wife surviving the cruelty of her husband and more about a mother who dearly loves her children.

The Griselda tale does indeed begin with a marriage, but the introduction of motherhood takes it in a new direction. The tale tells the rather disturbing story of Walter, the Marquis of Saluzzo, and his wife Griselda, the most virtuous and perfect wife to ever live. When Walter’s subjects beg him to take a wife and thus produce an heir, he does so on one condition: that he chooses the woman. Having noticed Griselda’s values and inner beauty despite her incredible poverty, Walter chooses Griselda and asks her for her complete obedience in word, deed, and thought, to which she readily agrees. As they transition into married life, Walter finds no fault with her, but after she bears him a daughter, he feels the urge to test the limits of her loyalty and obedience. He orders the daughter to be taken away and killed, though he secretly sends her to his sister in Bologna, to which Griselda agrees without hesitation or objection. When she later gives birth to a son, Walter feels the same urge to test her and orders the removal of the son just as he did the daughter. Again, Griselda shows no resistance.

Several more years go by, and Walter devises his most wicked test, divorcing Griselda with a forged papal bull. He sends Griselda home to her poor father Janiculum, but after some time passes, he summons her back to his palace. As a further test, he asks her to take the lead in preparing the palace for a special event: Walter is getting remarried. Again, Griselda obeys without comment, even congratulating Walter on his new choice of bride when she arrives. When Walter sees her constancy throughout these tests, he breaks down and reveals the truth of his actions. The new bride is in fact their daughter, who has returned with their son, not so that Walter could remarry, but so they can reunite the family. Griselda cries and clutches her children, showing her first emotion, but in no way reproaches Walter for his lies or extreme cruelty. They all live happily ever after.

The complexly strange story stirs up controversy even within the text in which it is told, the various storytellers that share it citing it as an example of good behavior as much as an example of what not to do. In the most basic terms, the storyteller either focuses on Griselda as the perfect wife or Walter as the tyrannical husband. Looking to the various interpretations and applications of the Griselda tale, I point to the role of Griselda's motherhood as a counter to her importance as wife. The testing both begins and ends with Griselda's children, and the tale simply does not work without their presence. Furthermore, the test of abandoning her children could not be a true test if Griselda did not deeply love and care for her children. The story makes meaning and creates controversy specifically because of the mother-child relationship. For this reason, and to contribute to the recent attention being paid to historical notions of motherhood, I will spend this project evaluating the Griselda story, in all its iterations, primarily through the lens of motherhood.

My focus also means privileging a woman's identity as mother over her identity as wife, two roles which conflict even as they depend on one another. I want to disentangle the two for the sake of clarifying how Griselda's motherhood both comes as a requirement to wifedom and exists as a separate part of her identity. As the Griselda story makes clear, a husband could expect his wife to bear him children, especially strong, healthy sons to eventually work the fields, take over the business, or accept the inheritance of the father. In this way, motherhood directly and necessarily resulted from wifedom; however, the connection breaks down in the reverse. Wifedom meant motherhood in a way that motherhood did not mean wifedom. As part of the distinction, I also play with the concept of the marriage plot, coining the term "motherhood plot." The Griselda story represents a double marriage plot. The marriage between Walter and Griselda happens early on, and the text also sees the birth of two children, usually only implied at the end of a marriage plot. The tale then follows through to a second marriage plot, ending with the reunion of Walter and Griselda. Along with the unstable double marriage plot, the tale follows a structure I call the motherhood plot, which depends on the two acts of abandonment and reconstitution. It follows a mother losing her children but ultimately reuniting with them. Reading the tale as a motherhood plot, rather than marriage plot, centers the story back on Griselda's motherhood.

The distinction identity of mother comes into focus with the historical context. Especially through the first years of a child's life, mothers dealt with the potential horrors of disease, famine, accident, and even the dangers of her own body that might end the child's life early. Medieval doctors considered menstrual blood and breast milk as two forms of the same substance, which came into special importance during pregnancy and childbirth. Medical writers like William of Conches regarded menstrual blood as a superfluity of a woman's body, a result

of poor digestion based on the cold nature of women (MacLehose 6). The menses stopped during pregnancy because the blood nourished the fetus and was thus used up entirely. Thirteenth-century writers expanded on the nature of menstrual blood by fleshing out more of its potential dangers to the fetus as a substance prone to corruption; in order to nourish and not kill the fetus, menstrual blood had to pass through the liver, which purified the blood by boiling it (MacLehose 10). Medical writers relying on the traditions of Galen, Hippocrates, and Aristotle linked the substance of menstrual blood to breast milk, which could also pose dangers to the infant despite further heating (MacLehose 11-12). The natural heat of the breasts boiled the superfluous menstrual blood and thus purified it to nourish the newborn outside of the fetus. Still the physical exertion of labor threatened a new mother's ability to produce uncorrupted milk, requiring the services of a wet nurse.

Wet nurses, though a seemingly safer option than the child's mother, could still pose a threat to the health of the child. In choosing a wet nurse, a parent considered the woman's physical appearance, healthy habits, and moral character, all of which could have an impact on the quality of her milk (MacLehose 14-5). Should a nurse violate her contract by changing one of these conditions, especially by becoming pregnant herself, the child might go on to a secondary nurse to preserve its well-being (Klapisch-Zuber 145). At least in Tuscany from the thirteenth through the fifteenth centuries, the state officially recommended the child stay with a wet nurse for a period of two or three years (Klapisch-Zuber 156). In England during the same centuries, the practice of hiring a wet nurse remained mostly limited to aristocratic families (Goldberg 417). Interestingly, many versions of the Griselda tale have Walter wait until the daughter is weaned to have her taken away from her mother, but only in Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale* does the text specifically indicate the use of a wet nurse, fitting for the child of a marquis.

Though some contemporaries express a preference for a biological mother's milk, the character of Lionardo in Leon Battista Alberti's *Della famiglia* for example, some have argued the value of wet nursing on the basis of allowing the mother time to recover (Haas 96). The somewhat misleading threat to the mother's milk aside, medieval ideas around childbirth did acknowledge the immense toll pregnancy and birth took on a woman's body. The survival of the mother remained equally up to fate as the survival of the child. Based on Florentine *catasto* records from 1424, 1425, and 1430, David Herlihy and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber estimate that complications from pregnancy and childbirth accounted for one-fifth of the deaths of Florentine married women in a year (Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 277). While women's bodies held myriad threats to the health of their children, the process of bearing those children also posed a threat to their survival.

In terms of infant survival, several factors beyond the quality of its nourishment might spell an early death. The Griselda tale comes close to imagining infanticide, a present but not common phenomenon in the Middle Ages; when it did happen, it was usually the result of an accident, like a parent rolling over on a child in bed and suffocating them in their sleep (Klapisch-Zuber 146-8). Children were abandoned much more often than killed, which might result in death by exposure or, hopefully, in someone else assuming responsibility for the child (Boswell 44-5). In times of financial hardship and lacking resources, whether from a personal struggle or larger societal upheaval like plague or war, parents let go of their children with the hopes that someone with more resources, or a state institution like a hospital, would care for them (Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 145). Children might also be abandoned if they resulted from illicit unions and could not stake a claim to the father's household (Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 145-6). While Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber's studies of the *catasto* records shed significant light

on the phenomena of child abandonment and infanticide in Italy, equivalent data does not exist for medieval England; based on a lack of recorded cases and institutions to care for abandoned children, both infanticide and abandonment seem to have occurred very rarely (Goldberg 417). Finally, even if a child avoided the bad luck of accidental infanticide and the threat of abandonment, they still had to survive inevitable disease and illness. Bouts of plague and gastrointestinal disorders killed children at a disproportionately high rate compared to adults (Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 278). For all of the dangers facing a newborn, mothers did not necessarily love or connect with their children less to create distance as a coping mechanism.

The cultural understanding of motherhood through the medieval period also hinged on the popularity of the Marian Cult. Veneration of the Virgin Mary, whose body stood on the threshold between mundane and divine, was widely practiced through the Middle Ages. The redeeming counterpart to Eve, Mary put her body in the service of salvation, specifically by mothering Jesus. Her body remained fully human, experiencing a menstrual cycle that demonstrated her body's insufficiencies (Reed 19-20). Yet, the purity of her soul imbued her with divinity, making her the most perfect woman to ever walk the earth. Griselda comes as close to the Virgin Mary as possible without divine intervention, an obvious religious parallel, but unlike the discourse around Mary that celebrates her as divine mother, the discourse surrounding Griselda continuously overlooks motherhood, complicating the parallel.

In attempting to bring Griselda's motherhood back to the surface of these texts, I pay consistent attention to the story's narrators and audiences, both within the frame narrative and outside of it. Through the texts of the first chapter, and to some extent in the images of the third, the narrative voice plays a risky game of double-speak, simultaneously upholding the behavior of Griselda – and more troublingly the behavior of Walter – and resisting the tale's parallels to

reality. The narrators consistently find themselves husbanding the text, testing it in the same way that Walter tests Griselda, but they avoid identifying with Walter, especially in texts written for women readers. *The Clerk's Tale*, however, takes the opposite approach, with the Clerk leaning into personal commentary that positions him in the space of Griselda rather than Walter. The absence of the narrator's contradictory speech in Chaucer's text reveals the troubling effects of it that have haunted the text up until this point in the tradition. The narrative mode of the story, prior to Chaucer's rendition, allows for another core contradiction of a story that hinges on motherhood without ever having to acknowledge the mother.

In Chapter One, I examine three distinct and striking versions of the Griselda tale to argue that though obscured by the multi-layered sartorial translations of male authors, motherhood makes up the core of the Griselda figure. Starting in Italy, Boccaccio's rendering of the tale marks the first written copy of the tale, which appears as the last of a hundred stories in his *Decameron*. Fathering the tale, Boccaccio and his writing serve as a template that later authors will appropriate for their various interpretative purposes. Italian humanist Petrarch translates Boccaccio's story from the vernacular into Latin then returns the translation to the original father in a letter asking for judgment. Finally, moving to France and a much different understanding of Griselda's value, the conduct manual *Le Ménagier de Paris* incorporates the Griselda myth as an exemplum for proper wifely behavior. Passing among Boccaccio, Petrarch, and the conduct manual's husband-narrator, each time translated and reinterpreted, Griselda holds fast to her maternal identity, which lurks just beneath the surface until the tale falls into the hands of Chaucer.

In Chapter Two, I turn to Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*, arguing that for the first time, the translator embraces rather than obscures Griselda's motherhood. Chaucer's extended treatment

of the story pulls on threads present in previous versions to fashion an entirely new Griselda. I deal further with the politics of translation and the metaphor of translation as a re-clothing, a theme continuous across versions but especially important in Chaucer's expanded rendition. I then look to moments of touch, especially between mother and child, to argue that Griselda by necessity channels her motherhood at her husband Walter rather than at her children; applying the psychoanalytical analysis of Donald Winnicott, I find that the stunted physical and emotional state of Walter requires his wife to become a mother figure for him, in turn requiring the threat of the children be removed. At the same time, however, touch occurs exclusively between Griselda and her children, while the denial of marital touch persists until Walter's psychological breakthrough represented in the reunion scene. Finally, the Clerk allows for the visibility of Griselda's maternal character through his own style of reading. For the first time in the tale's long history, the narrator, instead of mirroring Walter as a husband figure, speaks from a maternal viewpoint. Expanding on Carolyn Dinshaw's concept of "reading like a woman" and Glenn Burger's specification of "reading like a wife," I see the Clerk as engaging in an even narrower practice of "reading like a mother." Through the eyes and voice of the Clerk, Griselda emerges as a good mother.

Finally, in Chapter Three, I shift focus from the textual tradition to the visual one, in part to access the utility of the tale for a variety of women and its applications to the everyday lives of viewers. First, the fourteenth-century *Abandonment and Restitution of Children* fresco on the façade of the Florentine Misericordia, a piece of highly visible public art, serves as an example of the Griselda tale providing an analogue to the actual experiences of mothers. The motif of abandonment and restitution from the Griselda tale comes to life in the image. In contrast, I look to a set of fifteenth-century panel paintings from Siena that illustrate the Griselda tale in great

detail. Though a product of a different artistic tradition than the fresco, the two make an interesting pair. Instead of public art, the panels were created for an intimate audience inside a bedchamber; it also literalizes the Griselda tale, while the fresco relates only thematically; and finally, it addresses a woman of a much higher class than does the fresco. Between the two, Griselda's wide scale of applicability comes through, a proper model for all mothers, all of whom feel the pressure to reproduce and all of whom face the danger of losing their children. The pair also allows for a similar reading to that of the texts, in which the fresco asks the viewer to read like a mother and the panel paintings attempt to avoid motherhood. As I maintain throughout, the latter artist and the translators that come before him fail to escape Griselda's motherhood, the core part of her identity.

In the course of the project, I uncover the elements of the tale that the narrators insert but are too afraid to recognize, discussing in detail for the first time the concealment of the essential motherhood plot. I argue that reading this quartet of texts in unison removes the shadows cast on Griselda in her identity as mother, revealing a narrative technique of subtle and purposeful contradiction. Doing so places the importance of the tale back on Griselda's motherhood, undoing centuries of male interpretations that ultimately fail to conceal the motherhood they would rather avoid and instead appealing to the more sympathetic practice of reading like a mother.

Chapter One: Failing to Escape Motherhood

While modern readers likely recoil from the cruelty of Walter and the anti-feminist clerical tradition at work on Griselda, medieval audiences turned to her time and again. As the story gained popularity in written rather than oral texts, several important fourteenth-century writers appropriated the Griselda myth in their collections of stories, while others looked to her as a literary model for real women. This chapter focuses on three written versions of the Griselda myth, leading to the next chapter which explores in depth Chaucer's version in *The Canterbury Tales*. First, Boccaccio, perhaps inspired by a popular folk tale, places Griselda in the final narrative of the *Decameron*.¹ Second, the foundational humanist scholar Petrarch translates her story into Latin and provides a commentary through the framework of an epistolary response to Boccaccio. Third and finally, a French gentleman includes Griselda as an exemplum in the conduct manual *Le Ménagier de Paris* for the edification of his young wife. The three texts, reaching different interpretive conclusions for different audiences, share a troubling position in relation to their translators, the Griselda text becoming to the translators what Griselda herself is to Walter. As a result, each text puts limitations on Griselda's motherhood.

Passing among translators as Griselda passes between husband and father, the Griselda text exhibits a sort of negative movement, following the passive transport of any commodity. Griselda moves not of her own volition, but as a sign of obedience to her current translator. She moves between spaces: from her home to Walter's palace, then back to her father's house only to return to Walter's palace once more – and on a macro level, from Italy to France to England. She

¹ Scholars have not been able to identify a written textual source for Boccaccio's Griselda story, but many have picked up on hints within his text that he appropriated the narrative from folk tales; the type or class of tale remains debated. For more on where the Griselda story started, see William Bettridge and Francis Lee Utley, "New Light on the Origin of the Griselda Story," *TSSL*, vol. 13, 1971, pp. 153–208.

also passes among the hands of male authorities, between her father and Walter, and of male authors, from Boccaccio to Petrarch to the author of *Le Ménagier*, and eventually to Chaucer. Finally, she travels through different spaces of language, cycling through Italian, Latin, French, and Middle English. The spaces of language, and the authors that receive her in each one, enact fundamental changes on the textual body, reshaped to best fit each context. Though the translators do not see or acknowledge it, her malleable body reads as maternal, for it stretches to accommodate the semantic offspring of each translator that uses her as a vessel for meaning. Further movement occurs as the male authors pass her among themselves, returning her to the progenitor much like Walter returns her to Janiculum for their final judgement or, alternatively, passing her onto a network of readers. Removed from the network of writers and readers, Griselda disintegrates, loses all meaning.

In this chapter, I track the changes in space and language as Griselda moves between the *Decameron*, the *Rerum Senilium Libri*, and *Le Ménagier de Paris*, with attention to her role as mother. In comparing how her motherhood comes through in each text, I argue that the authorial figures both center the Griselda tale on her motherhood and minimize it, shaping her malleable body to fit their needs without removing its core.

Boccaccio's *Decameron*

Writing in 1351, in the wake of the 1348 wave of Black Death that severely affected Florence's health and stability, Boccaccio relies on Griselda as a mother to initiate transformation, movement, hope, and healing. The motif of abandonment and restitution and the comforting notion of a resilient and maternal body politic make the Griselda story an appropriate interface between the terrified brigata and the city facing possible extinction. The action of the *Decameron* begins in the midst of the disease spreading through the city, bringing together the

brigata even as it separates families and friends. From the first sentence of the text, Boccaccio cites his stories as a source of comfort, prefacing them with “umana cosa è aver compassione degli afflitti: e come che a ciascuna persona stea bene, a coloro è massimamente richiesto li quali già hanno di conforto avuto mestiere e hannol trovato in alcuni” (“’Tis humane to have compassion on the afflicted; and as it shews well in all, so it is especially demanded of those who have had need of comfort and have found it in others”; Boccaccio Introduction 2; Rigg Introduction 2), before extending the need for comfort to the aftermath of the recent “pestifera mortalità” (“mortal pestilence”; Introduction 2).² He spares no detail in describing the horrors of Florence in the midst of the Black Death, remembering how “E assai n’erano che nella strada publica o di dí o di note finivano, e molti, ancora che nelle case finissero, prima col puzzo de’ lor corpi corrotti che altramenti facevano a’ vicini sentire sé esser morti: e di questi e degli altri che per tutto morivano, tutto pieno” (Many died daily or nightly in the public streets; of many others, who died at home, the departure was hardly observed by their neighbours, until the stench of their putrefying bodies carried the tidings; and what with their corpses and the corpses of others who died on every hand the whole place was sepulchre”; Introduction 37). The brigata leaves the tomb of the city with only stories and songs to distract them, comfort them, and prepare them to return to the city. From her place in the final tale, the mother Griselda walks the line between life and death, and Griselda holds the hands of the brigata as they return to a city on the threshold between extinction and survival.

Griselda acts as a similar support for the secondary layer of readership that exists outside of the text. While the hundred tales inside the frame comfort the sufferers of the Black Death, the

² All translations of *The Decameron* come from Decameron Web’s 1903 English translation by J.M. Rigg, unless otherwise stated. The numerical citation information is identical for Italian and English texts, so rather than duplicate it, the citation provided belongs to both the Italian quotation and the English translation.

whole text comforts the readers, a group the narrator identifies as “i quelle che amano” (“such as them who love”; Introduction 13), or women in love. The male authorial voice of Boccaccio speaks to women readers as the storyteller Dioneo addresses a mixed group of men and women. Thus, the first written iteration of the Griselda story unanimously comes from a male author, while women dominate the overall audience.³ Men, however, dominate the text, writing, interpreting, and passing it along, sometimes returning it to other men but other times pushing it onto women. As the story passes through different writer-reader relationships and gender dynamics, it participates in a network of exchange, a phenomenon that begins when Boccaccio writes the *Decameron*. Whether or not women in love actually read his book or other readers also enjoy it, Boccaccio’s wish to provide comfort comes through sincerely in this respect. Neither he nor Dioneo, as men, can empathize with the woman reader as themselves; it takes a mother to comfort.

Griselda also stars in the final tale for her mobility, her ability to safely crisscross spaces and slide through boundaries. She transitions and transforms, and therefore she survives. Her story acts as transitional material, sharing the same burden as the first of the one hundred tales; it concludes the fifteen-day vacation period spent out in the country, away from the city in which the Black Death threatens the continued existence of the city-state. Neither the interior nor exterior audiences receive a sign that the threat has passed, but after telling the hundredth story, Dioneo, as King for the Day, suggests they return. Supposedly worried about the effects longer delay could have on the company, he urges:

³ Indeed, every text that appears in this study was written by a man. There exists, however, at least one contemporary version of Griselda written by a woman, within Christine de Pizan’s *The Book of the City of Ladies*, written around 1405.

E per ciò, acciò che per troppa lunga consuetudine alcuna cos ache in fastidio si convertisse nascer non ne potesse, e perché alcuno la nostra troppo lunga dimoranza gavillar non potesse, e avendo ciascun di noi, la sua giornata, avuta la sua parte dell'onore che in me ancora Dimora, guidicherei, quando piacer fosse di voi, che convenevole cosa fosse omai il tornarci là onde ci partimmo. (Conclusion 6-7)

Wherefore, lest too long continuance in this way of life might beget some occasion of weariness, and that no man may be able to misconstrue our too long abidance here, and as we have all of us had our day's share of the honour which still remains in me, I should deem it meet, so you be of like mind, that we now go back whence we came. (Conclusion 6-7)

The company readies themselves for the return journey after some debate, despite lacking assurance of the city's health or the safety of their own lives. Dioneo's reasons for wanting to return, to prevent them from getting tired of living this way or hurting their social reputations, seem flimsy in comparison to the great dangers possibly still ravaging the city. Ultimately, Dioneo's reasoning does not give them the fortitude to return, leaving the Griselda story to do the work of preparing them. Thus, Griselda initiates the brigata's brave return.

To help the brigata return to the city, Griselda proves the safety of a return journey by her example within the tale, the mother teaching her children by first modelling the behavior herself. Within the tale, Griselda makes two similar return journeys, first returning to her father's house and then to Walter's. The latter exemplifies a hopeful restitution that acknowledges changes to Griselda's body while restoring her to her former position. When Griselda returns to Walter's court to prepare it for the new wife, she does not lack the effects of her time away from the court at her peasant father's house. She evidences a physical change by her shift in clothing, "e

entratasene co' suoi pannicelli romagnuoli e grossi in quella casa della qual poco avanti era uscita in camiscia" ("And so, clad in her sorry garments of coarse romagnole, she entered the house, which, but a little before, she had quitted in her shift"; X.10.52). The text notes the physical change to reflect an equivalent change in her position, from head of the house to head of the domestic help, but also an interior change. The dynamic between traveler and space is reversed from that within the framework. Instead of the space being transformed, but the travelers escaping transformation by escaping the space, the space remains as it has always been, but the traveler has changed. She then enacts further transformation on the space, by cleaning it in preparation for the wedding, "cominciò a spazzar le camere e ordinarle e a far porre capoletti e pancali per le sale, a fare apprestar la cucina, e a ogni cosa, come se una piccolo fanticella della casa fosse, porre le mani, né mai ristette che ella ebbe tutto acconcio e ordinato quanto si conveniva" ("And addressed her to sweep the chambers, and arrange arras and cushions in the halls, and make ready the kitchen, and set her hand to everything, as if she had been a paltry serving-wench; nor did she rest until she had brought all into such meet and seemly trim as the occasion demanded"; X.10.52). The work she leads and herself engages in reminds Griselda of her lowered position in the same household by doing work she would never have been asked to do in her former position as Walter's wife. Her interior virtues might not have changed, but the value placed on them by external parties has, and therefore her identity, always defined according to the outside world, has changed radically. Regardless, her story demonstrates a restitution of the basic family unit after its destruction, exemplifying a successful journey home. The restoration of Griselda to nobility and the restitution of her family represents a promise of the Florentine city-state's ability for restoration after losing much of itself to the plague. The parallel oversees the institution of a maternal body politic, fertile and comforting.

Another way in which the Griselda story comforts is through the children, who leave the motherland but return safe and sound. To the brigata who have also left their motherland fearing for its continued health and their own lives, the Griselda tale communicates a secret hope of restitution. The city finds itself in a Griselda-like position when facing the Black Death, its members forced to surrender to overwhelming death or try to leave. The members of the brigata then parallel the journey of Griselda's children, who leave their motherland, quite literally, and are assumed dead, only to return to their mother's lap years later. The brigata only escapes the city for a couple of weeks, but they make the same return voyage after sharing the Griselda story, having avoided the real possibility of death with the hope that the city will return to its normal fullness and vivacity. The motif of abandonment and restitution, a pillar of the Griselda tale, matters for understanding the everyday reality of Florentines struggling to survive the Black Death.

The mother also bestows hope, starting with the same anxiety about the survival of a people, of Walter's line within the tale and of Florence's population. In parallel with the threat to Florence's continued population, the Griselda tale begins with a threat to a singular family line. Walter marries in response to the urging of his subjects, who "la qual cosa a'suoi uomini non piacendo, piú volte il pregaron che moglie prendesse, acciò che egli senza erede né essi senza signor rimanessero" ("brooking it ill, did oftentimes entreat him to take a wife, that he might not die without an heir, and they be left without a lord"; X.10.5). The anxiety about an heir and the symbol of immortality should not remind contemporary Florentine readers of their Italy, whose republican nature prevented dependence on a single noble line, but in the midst of the Black Death, the end of Walter's line mirrors the end of generalized Florentine bloodlines. The small story of Griselda replicates in miniature the form of the larger frame narrative. The *Decameron*

too comes about as an effort to persevere in the face of impending death, a beginning fashioned from an ending. Boccaccio reminds his readers, namely women in love, to prepare themselves for the difficult memories within, references to the Black Death that has recently decimated the Florentine population:

Quantunque volte, graziosissime donne, meco pensando riguardo quanto voi naturalmente tutte siete pietose, tante conosco che la presente opera al vostro iudicio avrà grave e noioso principio, sí come è la dolorosa ricordazione della pestifera mortalità trapassata, universalmente a ciascuno che quella vide o altramenti conobbe dannosa, la quale essa porta nella sua fronte. (Introduction 2)

Whenever, fairest ladies, I pause to consider how compassionate you all are by nature, I invariably become aware that the present work will seem to you to possess an irksome and ponderous opening. For it carries at its head the painful memory of the deadly havoc wrought by the recent plague, which brought so much heartache and misery to those who witnessed, or had experience of it. (McWilliam Introduction 4)

The existence of the *Decameron*, as well as the existence of its readership, represents survival and healing, but it also acknowledges vast swaths of population now buried. Boccaccio comes full circle by opening his stories in this context and closing them with the Griselda story, which itself opens with the danger of a noble line dying off and closes with the restitution of that line. Within the tale, Griselda loses both of her children and, for the interval of her fake divorce, her husband, but ultimately reunites with all of them, preserving the family unit. In this way, the Griselda tale takes on elements of the therapeutic, a balm for those readers who have likewise survived the deaths of their children and spouses. Storytelling becomes both medicine and prophylaxis.

Griselda in her role as mother activates the process of healing from trauma, like a survivor sharing her own story to assist the healing of another. She survives a more domestic sort of trauma, but a trauma nonetheless, as her children are taken from her and her husband continues to abuse her emotionally and psychologically. She also experiences a sort of survivor's guilt, allowed to live while her children die – so far as she knows – though she is equally as vulnerable to Walter's mandates. The brigata too must question their own survival when loved ones fall down around them seemingly at random. Their ability to vacation away from the city, and the very existence of such a country home, marks the group as all upper-class, having an economic privilege that perhaps provided them with a limited protection from disease through better nutrition, housing, and medical care. However, they experience the death of their city no less acutely for their privilege. They suffer the same dissolution of their home that Griselda does, and in seeing Griselda regain the children she believes lost to death, they can find hope for resolution in their own lives. Her survival, and more importantly the reunion with her children, signifies hope in even the most impossible situations.

Motherhood comes through in Boccaccio's version of the Griselda tale especially through the context of plague. Boccaccio makes a smaller translative leap than future translators will since he moves from oral tradition to text; as future translators occupy a Walter-like space vis-à-vis the Griselda text, Boccaccio's narrator resists identification with Walter. Dioneo prefaces his tale by previewing his reason for telling it: "vo' ragionar d'un marchese, non cosa magnifica ma una matta bestialità, come che ben ne gli seguisse alla fine; la quale io non consiglio alcun che segue, per ciò che gran peccato fu che a costui ben n'avenisse" ("I am minded to tell you somewhat of a Marquis; certes, nought magnificent, but a piece of mad folly, albeit there came good thereof to him in the end. The which I counsel none to copy, for that great pity 'twas that it

turned out well with him"; X.10.3). The themes of motherhood resonate more in Dioneo's telling because he speaks against the husband Walter and not as him. Dioneo still somewhat obscures Griselda's motherhood, however, by making Walter and his bad example the ostensible focus of his story.

Because of the context of the Black Death, Boccaccio's Griselda tale takes on tones that no other version needs to replicate. The abandonment and restitution motif, however, stays with the Griselda tale across time and space. No matter the changes brought about in each iteration, every writer of Griselda owes to his predecessor, and no other version can as closely claim the title of original. As the tale moves through new languages, it strays from the dominion of the original father Boccaccio, becoming more unstable as the meanings attached to it become even more complex. Its maternal core, however, remains consistent.

Petrarch's Response

Following Boccaccio, Petrarch wrote another foundational version of the Griselda story in direct response to the original. Francesco Petrarca known as Petrarch was a foundational figure in the humanist movement, reviving interest in classical texts through a new Christian viewpoint. Petrarch applies the same Christian lens to the Griselda story, after supposedly encountering it in Boccaccio's *Decameron*. He provides his own Latin translation in the form of a letter to Boccaccio that simultaneously praises the story and degrades Boccaccio's telling of it. Petrarch's letter also represents the first movement of Griselda, a simultaneous voyage to a new linguistic space and return to homeland.

Petrarch's relationship with Boccaccio extends outside of reimagining the Griselda tale. In the *Rerum Senilium Libri*, the collection of letters in which the Griselda tale appears, Petrarch

includes a total of eighteen letters written to Boccaccio, through which he expresses a simultaneous admiration of and mastery over his friend (Wallace 322). When he writes to Boccaccio, Petrarch engages in both academic and emotional conversations, especially in the letters he writes later in life as he reflects on his legacy. The relationship between the two men maps onto relationships within the text, complicating Petrarch's relationships both to Boccaccio and to the texts. Petrarch, like every writer of *Griselda*, mirrors Walter in that he exhibits complete control over the text, dressing her in the new language of Latin. He husbands the text in the process of repackaging the story and bringing out the value of the text, much as Walter does for *Griselda* when he ushers her out of poverty and into public view. Neither Petrarch nor Walter creates these facets, but they claim responsibility for drawing them out where they might be appreciated. If Petrarch husbands the text, then Boccaccio fathers it as the original author, his native Italian vernacular her original home. Though lowly and impoverished, the Italian nevertheless embraces the same beautiful qualities as *Griselda*. She makes the same return journey to her father when Petrarch writes his letter and when Walter returns her to Janiculum's after their fake divorce. As Petrarch himself puts it, "Illic enim orta, illuc redit; notus iudex, nota domus, notum iter" ("It returns to where it began, knowing its judge, its home, and the way there"; Petrarch 44-5; Farrell 110).⁴

Petrarch's engagement with the *Griselda* text also mirrors Walter's engagement with *Griselda* in that he remakes her and tests to see if his changes have had any effect. While insisting that he writes about man's relationship to God, he fashions himself as a "Walterus who gets it right, a man who knows how to "husband" the tale properly by discerning the virtue of the

⁴ All translations come from Thomas Farrell's full translation as it appears in Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel's *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*.

Griselda story, testing it out, and sending it back to its father reclothed and beautified” (Burger 156). Petrarch demonstrates his need for the father figure’s approval through choosing an epistolary form, asserting the primacy of the original author or father, Boccaccio. Before he enters into the real tale, he puts the burden of judgement on Boccaccio, requiring “Quam quidem an mutata veste deformaverim an fortassis ornaverim, tu iudica” (“Whether the change of vestment has disfigured it or perhaps adorned it, you be the judge”; 43-4; 110). Petrarch importantly puts himself in the position of Walter as he considers his translation a change in clothing that replicates the multiple sartorial translations Walter enacts on Griselda within the tale.

From the position of Walter, Petrarch’s writing forms a larger network of male commentators than only a path between himself and Boccaccio. In his letter, Petrarch hints that several other men, all within his scholarly social circle, have passed their eyes over the text as well. Petrarch’s love of the tale causes him to memorize it, “ut et ipse earn animo quociens vellem non sine voluptate repeterem, et amicis ut fit [confabulantibus] renarrarem” (“So that I might recall its pleasures as often as I wished and retell it in conversation with my friends”; 26-7; 110) and having done so, found “gratamque audientibus” (“That it pleased my audience”; 28; 110). As Petrarch shares the tale with a circle of fellow scholars, he modifies the tale in both form and content to properly meet the new audience, creating in the process a community of *legentes* who perform the same reading of the text (Dinshaw 149). While the text itself remains gendered female, Petrarch nudges the story’s meaning away from women, Boccaccio’s original intended audience. The translation overlooks “the particular concerns of women and subsumes them into a larger vision of *mankind*” (Dinshaw 150), concealing Griselda’s identities as wife and mother. Petrarch’s ultimate goal of translating, “ut legentes ad imitandam saltern femine

constanciam excitarem, ut quod hec viro suo prestitit, hoc prestare deo nostro audeant” (“To arouse readers to imitate her womanly constancy, so that they might dare to undertake for God what she undertook for her husband”; 398-9; 128) moves the focus of the tale to the woman while denying the importance of her gender and the positions she occupies as a result of it. His translation works successfully only because of the audience to which he presents the final product. Chaucer will later prove Petrarch’s inability to permanently change Griselda by reviving her femininity.

Petrarch works hard to erase, or at least recast, Griselda’s gender through the telling of his version. Most importantly, he speaks of Griselda as female in form but male in substance. Her physical beauty always pales in comparison to the loveliness of her inner virtues, but in reminding the reader, “Forma corporis satis egregia, sed pulcritudine morum atque ammi adeo speciosa ut nichil supra” (“Her body was fair enough, but no one surpassed the beauty of her conduct and spirit”; 115; 114), Petrarch calls attention to her female body that houses these beautiful values. When it comes to the interior values, however, “virilis senilisque animus virgineo latebat in pectore” (“a mature, manly spirit lay hidden in her virginal breast”; 118; 114). Her “animus” which refers to her soul or spirit, the core of her identity, matches that of “virilis senilis” or an older man. Describing her in precisely this way also forms an uneasy connection between Griselda and Petrarch, a *vir senilis* himself still in pursuit of such a beautiful soul. However, the brief moment of connection happens only because Petrarch refashions Griselda to fit his needs, not because Petrarch himself is willing to look at the world from Griselda’s point of view. In presenting his story to the *legentes*, Petrarch remakes Griselda’s character into something legible to male readers, but he cannot fully escape her gender, just as he cannot escape the femininity and maternity of text as he reshapes it into a story for men.

In essence, Petrarch can downplay Griselda's importance as a mother by dressing her as a man, but he cannot remove her motherhood and still extract his religious moral. His religious mode of reading helps him conceal some of Griselda's gendered qualities, ultimately asking his readers to all take on her disempowered position in relation to God. However, he tellingly avoids allusions to the most obvious religious parallel, the Virgin Mary. Mary, Griselda's semi-divine maternal counterpart, is also separated from her child by death and from her position as a mother makes incredible sacrifices for her God. Yet, Petrarch makes no mention, not even a tangential allusion, to the Virgin Mary, even in recasting the tale as a lesson in obedience to God. Petrarch avoids the threat of gender to the viability of his religious reading by denying Griselda's maternity, but from his position as a husband of the text, he nevertheless shows his cards. A reader actively looking for motherhood sees his trick, and he ultimately fails to remake her convincingly as a man or separate her from her maternal identity.

Petrarch's translation, besides circulating the text among homosocial networks, also marks a movement through linguistic space, inseparable from his change in audience. Petrarch takes note of Boccaccio's narrative techniques as he contextualizes his own design. He starts in with Boccaccio's choice of language for his entire book, "*quem nostro materno eloquio*" ("Which was in our mother tongue"; 1; 108), or Italian. Learned humanist Petrarch shows a disgust for the vernacular: "*Nam si dicam legi, menciar. Siquidem ipse magnus valde, et ad vulgus et soluta scriptus oratione*" ("I would be lying if I were to say that I read it, since it is very lengthy and written in vernacular prose for the masses"; 2-4; 108). The use of the vernacular provides excuse enough for him to only skim Boccaccio's book and yet provide commentary on it. The introduction also explains one of the reasons Petrarch takes an interest in the following project. He sees something in the Griselda story worth translating into Latin, the language of

high truth.⁵ He simultaneously throws Boccaccio a compliment while insulting him for composing in Italian, crediting his translation as an exercise in making the story more accessible, since “subito talis interloquendum cogitacio supervenit, fieri posse ut nostri [eciam] sermonis ignaros tam dulcis historia delectaret” (“suddenly it occurred to me that this beautiful story would perhaps also delight those ignorant of Italian”; 29-30; 110). Petrarch further flatters Boccaccio, “te haut dubie gavisurum sperans, ultro rerum interpretem me tuarum fore. Quod non facile alteri cuicumque prestiterim, egit me tui amor et historic” (“I certainly hoped to make you glad by translating your work on my own initiative. Love of you and the story impelled me to what I would hardly have done for anyone else”; 36-8; 110). What follows, however, strays from a literal translation, and Petrarch embraces his own intuitions and feelings to compose his *Griselda*, dressing her properly for an introduction to his audience, a network of scholars.

An act of translation signifies an act of reclothing. The metaphor figures within the *Griselda* story – and especially matters in *The Clerk’s Tale* – and within Petrarch’s framework. He sends back his version to the progenitor, granting, “Quam quidem an mutata veste defornaverim an fortassis ornaverim, tu iudica” (“Whether the change of vestment has disfigured it or perhaps adorned it, you be the judge”; 43-4; 110). Petrarch readily admits that the act of translation brings about certain irrevocable changes, even translations that seek to recreate the same story out of different pieces. He does not attempt to recreate the original or leave *Griselda* entirely unchanged. To fit her comfortably in his erudite space, Petrarch makes alterations to her inner meaning as well as her outer form. Petrarch therefore excavates a Christian moral from Boccaccio’s tale for women. Petrarch finishes his telling with an exposition

⁵ The tale will be rendered back into the vernacular with Philippe de Mézières’ *Le Miroir des dames mariées*, which transforms Petrarch’s translation into French. Chaucer will also compose his version in the vernacular of Middle English, having the Clerk openly reject Petrarch’s high Latinate style at the beginning of his story. For more on the language changes between versions, see Glenn Burger, *Conduct Becoming*, 159-90.

in which he tells the reader in a one-sided way the lesson he should take from the tale, the single possible interpretation of his translation. Unlike the other versions of the tale in which characters take sides over whether or not to imitate Griselda, Petrarch clarifies the ultimate meaning and his reason for translating. He leaves his audience thus:

Hanc historiam stilo nunc alio retexere visum fuit, non tam ideo, ut matronas nostri temporis ad imitandam huius uxoris pacienciam, que michi vix mutabilis videtur, quam ut legentes ad imitandam saltern femine constanciam excitarem, ut quod hec viro suo prestitit, hoc prestare deo nostro audeant. (396-9)

I thought it fitting to re-tell this story in a different style, not so much to urge the matrons of our time to imitate the patience of this wife (which seems to me almost unchanging) as to arouse readers to imitate her womanly constancy, so that they might dare to undertake for God what she undertook for her husband. (128)

A clear Christian allegory lays embedded in the Griselda tale. Petrarch strips away the politics of gender and family to reveal what he sees as the pearl of truth. Again, Petrarch explains that to refit the meaning of the tale, one must redress it entirely, and clad it in new language. By introducing his high Latinate style, Petrarch must “retexere” or reclothe Griselda to remake her. Through the politics of translation, Petrarch also husbands the text, attempting to erase Griselda’s motherhood in the process.

Despite the laborious efforts of rewriting, reclothing, and recontextualizing, Petrarch ultimately fails to change the nature of the Griselda tale because he fails to escape the fact of Griselda’s motherhood. He tries to purify Boccaccio’s tale by taking it out of the “mother tongue,” forgetting that the new language Latin is the real mother tongue, which gave birth itself

to Italian. Through the lens of motherhood, Petrarch's translation fails to completely make over the Griselda tale for men. Petrarch's attempt to re-gender Griselda as having the interiority of a man, he cannot remove the fact of her having the body of a woman, proved by bearing two children. Perhaps the good wife is a masculine figure, but the good mother is not.

Interestingly, as much as Petrarch's new reading owes to Boccaccio's original, his Griselda tale nearly replaces Boccaccio's as the primary text. Chaucer's Clerk claims his story hearkens back to Petrarch's learned style, as does the husband-narrator of *Le Ménagier de Paris*. The later texts interact with Boccaccio's story only through the intermediary of Petrarch, focusing the text through the tradition of his style and Christian interpretation. The relationship among the textual variations extends the network of male authors and translators as the story moves into more languages, spaces, and meanings – all connecting to Petrarch, and through him, to Boccaccio.

The Husband-Narrator of *Le Ménagier de Paris*

Departing from Boccaccio's negative example of behavior and Petrarch's religious allegory, *Le Ménagier de Paris* includes the Griselda story as an example of how women should behave, bringing Griselda in front of a new audience and linguistic space. The late fourteenth-century conduct manual instructs its reader on all sorts of helpful topics, like gardening, cooking, shopping, medicine, morality, and how to properly treat a husband. Though the husband himself did not write it so much as commission it, his voice narrates and instructs, as if he were speaking directly to his wife. The didactic tone lands more uncomfortably for its encouraging nature, at once recognizing the wife's cluelessness and assuming she will eventually be up to the task. Alongside tips for handling the mundane details under a woman's purview, the manual touches on exemplary figures throughout history from whom a wife may glean a moral education and a

model for behavior. The tales of Susanna, Lucretia, and of course Griselda all appear as honorable exempla for their various proofs of loyalty, chastity, and obedience. Despite the exempla gaining a mythic or at least religious significance, they feature here as real-life examples, glimpses of extraordinary but seemingly attainable behavior. The husband-narrator's less than comforting reassurance that "croy que ce ne fust oncques vray" ("I don't believe it [the Griselda tale] was ever true"; Project Gutenberg 224; Greco and Rose 119) in the conclusion does little to diminish the weight of the expectation for Griselda-like behavior.⁶ Always obedient becomes the minimum expectation, with the understanding that a rational husband will not ask of such things as does Walter – and a second layer of understanding that it is within his rights to ask anyway with the expectation of a Griselda-like obedience.

In the case of conduct manuals, Griselda serves as a model for women of a certain class and learnedness. These women were wealthy, or at least had a proximity to wealth through their husbands; usually young and inexperienced, and therefore in need of a manual to tell them how to behave; and learned, or else a written manual might not be so useful in their further domestic education. To some extent, the manual restores Griselda to her original Boccaccian audience, women, though married and not in love. At the same time, however, the husband-narrator loops in a second audience for which he writes and teaches: his wife's potential future husbands. In this way, the husband-narrator recreates and adds to the homosocial network, already imagining passing his wife into the hands of another patriarch. Like Petrarch seeking approval from

⁶ All translations come from Gina L. Greco and Christine M. Rose's full translation in *The Good Wife's Guide: Le Ménagier de Paris: A Medieval Household Book*.

Boccaccio, the husband-narrator hopes for the praise of the future husband(s) when he sees how well his bride was educated by her former husband.

The husband-narrator also reveals an inner tension as he weighs the benefits of including this story with the potentially damaging portrait of a husband represented in Walter. Knowing that they share the identity of husband, he takes caution to shape Walter's character charitably, imbuing him with a more compassionate nature in his roles as both husband and father. The husband-narrator paints Walter's tests as happening almost against his will. He struggles to go through with the tests he devises, hesitating when it comes time to send away his daughter, as he "considéra la grant vertu de sa femme et regarda sa fille et à lui prist une paternelle compassion" ("considered his wife's great virtue and while looking upon his daughter was overtaken with fatherly compassion"; 221; 110). The removal of his son too gives him pause, and when Griselda consents to let him take away her second child, Walter "ne respondi riens, mais ainsi comme s'il fust troublé de ce que faire se devoit de son fils" ("did not reply but went forth with bowed head, as if troubled by what he must do to his son"; 221; 112). Several years later, when Walter lands on pretending to divorce Griselda as yet another means of testing her, he struggles to contain his emotions, even knowing that the divorce is feigned. As Griselda assents to leave, "Lors, ne se pot plus le marquis tenir de plourer de la pitié qu'il eust de sa très loyale espouse. Il tourna sa face ... larmoiant" ("The marquis could not hold back tears of pity for his loyal wife. He turned his face away...weeping"; 222; 114), the careful emotional façade – which Griselda must maintain for the entirety of her marriage – cracking in Walter. The narrator also sneakily tries to show the typical husband as of a nicer general character than Walter, as he consoles the wife-reader at the end, "me excuse se l'histoire parle de trop grant cruaulté, à mon advis, plus que de raison" ("I apologize if the story contains excessive amounts of cruelty, in my opinion more than is fitting";

224; 119). The tale could easily get out of the narrator's hands should he not carefully navigate Walter's character and explain his testing. Through his edits, the husband-narrator tries to negotiate his connection with Walter to his own benefit, but the result remains troubling.

In the same vein, the guidebook creates a different picture of marriage than other texts to sell the wife-reader on the situation she is about to enter. The text constantly emphasizes how satisfying and pleasant Griselda's obedience makes her marriage, painting husband and wife as equal partners and beneficiaries. Instead of struggling with the adjustment, Walter to the adjustment of married life and Griselda to wifedom as well as wealth and social status, husband and wife join lives with instantaneous peace, "le marquis et Grisilidis vivoient joyusement ou palais en paix et en repos, à la grâce de Dieu, et dehors à la grâce des hommes" ("and thus the marquis and Griselda lived happily in the palace in peace and quiet, in the grace of God, and in good favor with all men"; 219; 109). Under the couple, the kingdom experiences no hardship, for Griselda provides the cure to any social ills, so "Mais quant le cas li offroit des débas et discors des nobles, par ses douces paroles, par si bon jugement et si bonne équité les appaisoit, que tous à une voix disoient que pour le salut de la chose publique ceste dame leur avoit esté envoyée par provision céleste" ("when debate and discord arose among the nobles, she so appeased them by her discreet words, excellent judgment, and perfect fairness that with one voice all said that his lady had been sent to them by heaven for the salvation of the realm"; 219; 109). Not even Walter's cruel tests and the removal of her children can ruin the household peace or the marital relationship; afterwards, "Et ainsi passèrent quatre ans ensemble le marquis et la marquise en grant amour et menant vie amoureuse et paisible" ("the marquis and his wife spent four years together in great affection, leading a loving and peaceful life"; 221; 111). Griselda represents not only the perfect wife, but the way to a perfect marriage, no matter how outrageously the husband

behaves. Importantly, the husband-narrator does not provide any commentary on Griselda as a mother; in fact, on the topic of children the manual says only that the mother is responsible for teaching proper conduct to her daughters. Wife and mother diverge into separate identities, with the husband taking little interest in the latter.

The husband-narrator also attempts to soften the blow of the Griselda tale by making her a religious example, though he fails to provide much cushion. After the husband-narrator presents the story of extreme marital obedience, he rushes to justify including the tale as a religious model. He calls upon Petrarch to solidify his reading of the marital relationship as the relationship between God and man. He names Petrarch's writing, and the inseparable interpretation, claiming, "ceste histoire fut translátée par maistre François Pétrarque poète couronné à Romme" ("This story was translated by Master Francis Petrarch, crowned poet in Rome"; 223; 125). He also explains Petrarch's reason for translating the tale: "non mie pour mouvoir les bonnes dames à avoir patience ès tribulations que leur font leurs maris pour l'amour d'iceulx maris tant seulement" ("Not to persuade good ladies purely for the love of their husbands to be patient in the tribulations that their husbands cause them"; 223; 125). Petrarch writes to remake Griselda and Walter's marriage as a Christian allegory for the relationship between God and man. Referencing his source material, however, also seems to put the Griselda exemplum in contrast with Petrarch's, suggesting that the reason for including it in the manual might have more to do with the dynamics between husband and wife than those between God and man after all. The husband-narrator betrays his true intentions moments later when he insists, "que encores et néantmoins icelles bonnes dames les doivent celer et taire et nonobstant ce les rappaisier, rappeller, et elles retraire et raprouchier tousjours joyusement à la grâce et amour d'iceulx maris qui sont mortels" ("Nonetheless these good ladies should conceal their sufferings and be silent

concerning them, yet despite it all appease and reconcile themselves to their husbands and always joyfully reclaim and cherish the affection and love of these husbands who are mortal” (223; 125); the marital lesson still stands. He continues to skirt around the real reason a wife needs to bear Griselda in mind, vacillating between not expecting such obedience from a mortal wife and requiring her to always bend to her husband’s needs and desires. Ultimately, the husband-narrator communicates both messages with the same unified bottom line as before: a wife is to be obedient.

The husband-narrator also fails to convincingly present Griselda as a religious exemplum because of where he places it within the text as a whole. It appears in the first section of the work, which focuses on how a wife should cultivate moral goodness in herself. The structure of the first section relies on Griselda as a touchstone to stabilize the rest of the moral instructions, the lesson of obedience at their center. In their introduction to the first full-length English translation of *Le Ménagier*, Gina Greco and Christine Rose consider Griselda “the paradigmatic wife of the whole book” (8), as she “is recalled in each anecdote about wifely behavior and echoed in the later sections on domestic management” (8). If the wifely reader remembers only one thing – as the husband-narrator often worries she will since it might be too much information to absorb – she should remember to be obedient. A constant general expectation, obedience breaks down into two particular kinds: obedience to God and obedience to one’s husband. In the opening pages of the book, the husband-narrator briefly introduces and outlines the following material. Here he explains to his wife-reader that the first section “acquérir l’amour de Dieu et la salvacion de vostre âme et aussi nécessaire pour acquérir l’amour de vostre mary” (“teaches you how to attain God’s love and the salvation of your soul, and also to win your husband’s love”; 105; 50). Conveniently, Griselda’s story encompasses both lessons and provides a solid base

upon which the husband-narrator layers further instruction. He goes on to justify his proposed order and primes his wife-reader to gratefully embrace and remember Griselda by commenting, “Et pour ce que ces deux choses, c’est assavoir la salvacion de l’âme et la paix du mary, sont les deux choses plus principalment nécessaires qui soient, pour ce sont-elles mises cy premièrement” (“And because these two things, salvation of the soul and the contentment of your husband, are the two most important things that exist, they are placed first in this book”; 105; 50). Though he does not explicitly preview the inclusion of Griselda’s exemplum, he implicitly structures the section around her model, so everything either leads to her story or refers to it. He makes the Griselda tale “the centerpiece of the moral treatise” (Greco and Rose 8), the backbone of the woman reader’s introduction to being a wife. When the wife-reader finally arrives at the Griselda tale, the sixth of nine articles, the introduction the husband-narrator provides cannot escape the shadow of the first introduction to the entirety of the section. No matter what explicit reason the narrator provides for including it where he does, he has already established obedience as a constant expectation of God and husband alike.

The talked-around double application of obedience reveals a second contradictory doubling that occurs between husband figure narrating and Walter, the husband figure within the tale. While other married men do interact with the tale in the course of its provenance – the Host in *The Canterbury Tales*, for instance, complains that his wife at home is nothing like Griselda – only in this text does a husband directly narrate the story to his wife. When he does, especially within a didactic context, he puts himself in Walter’s role even as he resists identifying with him. In this case, Greco and Rose note that “he dissociates himself from Walter, while performing Walter’s character at every opportunity in his wife’s guidebook” (8). Again, the author of the Griselda story husbands the text, a troubling dynamic that continues to haunt the Griselda tale.

The husband-narrator also, while denying the tale models any marital relationship let alone their own, adds his own coda exhorting his wife to forgive anything he puts her through and to always perform her duties to him with patience.

The husband-narrator also makes a significant change from Petrarch's version in describing Griselda's nature to better fit as a wifely model. The narrator very nearly repeats Petrarch's complicated line, "virilis senilisque animus virgineo latebat in pectore" ("a mature, manly spirit lay hidden in her virginal breast"; Petrarch 118; Farrell 114) with one important change. In the guidebook, she is described by way of introduction as "Un courage vertueux plein de toute meurté en son pis virginal doucement habitoit" ("a mature and virtuous heart dwelt sweetly in her virgin breast"; 218; 107), a line which owes to its Petrarchan source but does not replicate the same complicated gender dynamic of Petrarch's text. Here is one moment when the language and the transformation between languages has a radical effect on the text. The husband-narrator takes Petrarch's Griselda and returns her to the female reader remade.

Griselda's translators resist identification with Walter in various ways, with Dioneo interpreting him as a bad example, Petrarch fashioning the tale into religious allegory and excluding the Virgin Mary, and the husband-narrator denying associations with Walter's cruelty. At the same time however, Dioneo displaces Griselda as the focus of the tale, Petrarch thinks of his translation like a change in clothing, and the husband-narrator identifies the lessons of the tale as lessons for a wife in how to behave towards her husband. They all ultimately fail to see the Griselda text from a position other than Walter's. From such a place, each translator primarily values Griselda as a wife, as does Walter, and attempts to separate her from her motherhood to better fit her to the wifely model. Yet, no translator can remove Griselda's motherhood completely.

Despite the ever-changing nature of the Griselda tale in the hands of the homosocial network, a composite image emerges from across the collection of texts. In each of the three versions examined here, the marriage occurs out of a need for an heir and Walter's testing begins with the children, putting Griselda's wifedom in direct conflict with her motherhood. No matter how minimally the authors comment on her maternity and despite the paucity of attention scholarship has given to Griselda's children, the story hinges on her motherhood. Chaucer resolves the tension between Griselda the good wife and Griselda the good mother through his Clerk, but prior to his version, the various authors of the Griselda tale breeze past the complications of her maternal identity to focus on her marital status. Their ignorance of her motherhood speaks volumes itself, however. It remains a kernel of true identity for any discerning reader, a thread visible enough that Chaucer can tug on it comfortably and bring it to the surface of the story in *The Clerk's Tale*.

Chapter Two: A Maternal Reading

Before it reaches Chaucer, the Griselda tale makes manifest the problematic effects of translation, with each translative authority husbanding the text as a Walter figure. The resultant text contains a latent but potent maternal significance; it looks for a different sort of translator to see the text for what it really is. Enter Chaucer's Clerk, who performs a new kind of reading that acknowledges Griselda's motherhood and sympathizes with it from a maternal place. The text represents a translation that does not replicate the problematic mirroring of translator with husband. For the first time, the translator sees the Griselda text not as admirable for being an object of his own creation, but as a figure worthy of sympathy in its own right. I turn to *The Clerk's Tale* as a fourth and final textual version of the Griselda tale that both uncovers the tradition of translation and reforms it.

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which the Clerk locates Griselda's motherhood, primarily through the mode of reading like a mother. To reach a new mode of reading, I start by further unpacking the metaphor of translations as acts of reclothing. Though it impacts the texts included in the previous chapter as well, the metaphor deserves more attention here as the Clerk recognizes the tradition in order to dismantle it. I then turn to the concept of maternal touch to emphasize the ways in which the Clerk teases out Griselda's motherhood from a textual tradition that attempts to elide it. In moments of touch, Griselda communicates a love for her children that does not extend to her husband, who I argue requires his wife to act as a mother figure to nurse him out of a stunted psychological state. The Clerk thus retains not only the basic fact of Griselda's motherhood but goes so far as to characterize her as a good mother, who is precluded from mothering her children by a husband who needs her mothering more. Finally, I consider the Clerk as reading like a mother, placing himself in the position of Griselda to put motherhood at

the rightful heart of the text. The Clerk then also reads the tale as a motherhood rather than marriage plot. Through his reading practice, the Clerk takes advantage of the maternal nature of the text to generate a much more fruitful reading that explains and understands Griselda primarily as a mother.

Translation and Reclothed Texts

The Griselda story always exists as a frame narrative. In the *Decameron*, Dioneo shares her story; Petrarch translates the tale within the form of a letter; older gentlemen copy it down with their commentary in conduct manuals; the Clerk offers it in the contest among the pilgrims. The technique of a frame narrative allows for each translator to articulate his interpretation of the tale as well; Griselda always comes with an interpreter attached. As a result, the translators can claim one meaning while actually demonstrating another, creating all sorts of tricky parallels in the process. The husband-narrator of *Le Ménagier de Paris*, for example, can claim to mean the story as a religious allegory and still communicate a moral focused on the marital relationship. Furthermore, as the texts of the previous chapter demonstrate, in the case of the Griselda tale, translations happen both inside and outside the text, requiring a deeper look at translation.

Carolyn Dinshaw argues that the appeal of the Griselda tale, the reason it is refashioned so many times, lies in the fascinating puzzle of interpreting the relationship between Griselda and Walter. To begin solving the puzzle, one must translate the story surrounding it, making “the story of Griselda ... a story of translation” (Dinshaw 132). For Dinshaw, the act of translation, or *translatio*, is “a masculine hermeneutic gesture performed on the woman, on the text” (133). Performing a masculine act, translators typically act from a masculine place that holds an authority over the feminized text. The masculinity of translation stems less from the gender identity of the translator and more from it being an intellectual type of labor, which Dinshaw

compares to the patriarchal practice of glossing (133). Women, like the Wife of Bath for example, can gloss or translate, but to do so is to appropriate a masculinity that makes no effort to dismantle the patriarchal system. Dinshaw also refers to translation as hermeneutic, meaning that the act of translating is inseparable from the act of interpreting. As an act of interpretation, translation acts as a process of reading, which makes meaning in addition to an explicit meaning a translator might identify within the translation; thus, Griselda's translators may engage in a contradictory double-speak, their translations saying something different from their interpretations. Within *The Clerk's Tale*, to interpret the text is to interpret the way the Clerk himself reads Griselda, as a woman and as a text.

As a last piece of the definition, Dinshaw considers translation as a gesture. Translation contains a sense of movement, quite literally a carrying across, that leaves someone or something transformed. Movement holds a central symbolic meaning in the Griselda story as she goes back and forth between her father and husband in new clothes and between translators in new languages. Finally, translation must be "performed on the woman" (133). The performative quality reemphasizes the gesture of translation, and the fact that translation has an effect on the woman sets up the gender dynamics of translation that complicate the Griselda story. If the translator takes on a masculine role by doing the intellectual labor of refashioning the meaning of the text, the female body and text becomes more obviously stuck in the physical and emotional realms for having this labor done to it. Translation remakes the body of a text but also the body of the woman, so the translated text represents the female body. Establishing the connection makes any translation of the text legible as a translation of Griselda, but also as the translation of Griselda's body within the tale as a translation of the text. The hermeneutics of *translatio* make it

an act of interpretation as well. Therefore, the translation of Griselda's body within the text also serves to interpret the text.

Three layers of translation appear in any Griselda text. The husband translates his wife within the text; the narrator translates the text of Griselda within their commentary or framework; the author translates the entirety of the story by rewriting the tale. The relationship between the layers looks different in each version, but within *The Clerk's Tale*, the analogy should look like this: Walter is to Griselda as the Clerk is to his narration as Chaucer is to *The Clerk's Tale*. A similar analogy follows for any Griselda text, meaning that translations always come out of a Walter-like sentiment toward the text. The Clerk however, cognizant of the tradition in which the Griselda tale remains entrenched, actively changes the location from which he translates. The way in which he discusses the translations that happen within the tale provides the first hint of his reading from outside the translator's typical space.

Within the tale, Walter performs multiple acts of translation on the body of Griselda by orchestrating changes in her clothes, sartorial translations that reinterpret her body. In the medieval consciousness, the word for translation could mean both "linguistic metamorphosis" and "the act of reclothing" (Jones and Stallybrass 220), creating a clear metaphorical link on which Chaucer, and nearly all of the Griselda story translators, may draw. Every time that Walter orchestrates an act of translation, he requires a change in Griselda's clothes. The text also contains many references to "array," a term which refers to both Griselda's inner virtues and outer appearance. Though array appears a multitude of times, costume changes happen thrice within the text: when Walter has Griselda stripped and reclothed in his finery to leave her father's house, when Griselda is stripped to return to her father's house, and when she is again decorated and reinstalled as a marquess at the end. Each reclothing of Griselda represents an

interpretive move of Walter on Griselda, and his intermittent tests evaluations of the stability of the translations.

Kristine Gilmartin was the first to write extensively on the notion of “array” in *The Clerk’s Tale* in 1979. Looking at the motif of clothing as well as circumstances described as part of an “array,” she argues that Chaucer’s focus on array that “both conceals and reveals” (Gilmartin 234) plays up the theme of knowledge. With translation in mind, I will extend her argument to say that the knowledge privileged in this tale is the knowledge of the translator and that the success of the translation depends on the wide-spread knowledge of the accompanying interpretation. In reclothing and then testing Griselda, Walter tests the strength of his interpretations of her and the permanence of his changes. Walter reveals the desire to test Griselda’s constancy against the backdrop of the first reclothing through his wording of the first test (Gilmartin 236). Walter approaches Griselda:

And seyde thus: "Grisilde," quod he, "that day
 That I yow took out of youre povere array,
 And putte yow in estaat of heigh noblesse --
 Ye have nat that forgeten, as I gesse? (Chaucer IV.466-9)

Walter wonders whether removing her “povere array” changed something of her character along with her clothing, and thus wondering, orders the removal of his daughter from the court. As Walter applies the second test, the removal of his son from the court, he is again shocked at the constant obedience of his wife, stunned at his own power of translation in making her a good wife. When Griselda again assents to his demands, “The constance of his wyf, he caste adoun / His eyen two, and wondreth that she may / In pacience suffre al this array” (IV.668-70). “Array” now refers not only to Griselda’s clothing and her circumstances, but also the specific

circumstances of being a wife tested by her husband. In reverting to this word, Chaucer reinforces the connection between the clothes and “the theme of knowledge, the motivation for Walter’s ill-treatment of his wife” (Gilmartin 237). In all of the material translations that happen throughout the text, Walter does the work of uncovering the ‘real’ Griselda that he so anxiously wants to know. At the same time however, he can only see Griselda as he has remade her, fooling himself into believing his translation amounts to the real thing.

Despite clothing being such a central concern, the text as a whole also takes advantage of contemporary knowledge of fashion and asks the audience to imagine the details themselves. In her book *Chaucer and Array*, Laura Hodges argues that Chaucer’s rich descriptions of clothing often appear against tradition and readerly expectation (Hodges 3). *The Clerk’s Tale* is no exception to the rule of reversals. While playing up the importance of the multiple costume changes, Chaucer denies the audience a look at the details, leaving the text “rhetorically undressed” (117), Griselda’s textual body speaking for itself. The fact that the first reclothing takes place within the context of marriage makes the lack of detail even more surprising, as richly ornamented clothing often made up the bulk of a woman’s dowry.⁷ Dowry also comes back into play with the second unclothing of Griselda, when she notes that she has no dowry to reclaim from her husband, and therefore asks to retain only the humble smock. The lack of detail that Hodges points to emphasizes the changes that happen to Griselda herself, merely signified by the changes in clothing. In each act of reclothing and translating, Walter shapes Griselda into the ideal wife and cements his authority over her body. By not redressing the textual body with rhetorical flourishes and figures befitting his profession, the Clerk tries to see the text without the marks of the husband.

⁷ For more on the practice of including clothing in a woman’s dowry, see Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*.

The first translation Walter makes both elevates and diminishes Griselda. In translating Griselda from peasant girl to noble wife, Walter “hath doon make / Of gemmes, set in gold and in asure, / Brooches and rynges, for Grisildis sake” (Chaucer IV.253-5). Rather offensively, Walter pairs the enrichment with an act of patterning:

Of hir clothyng took he the mesure
 By a mayde lyk to hire stature,
 And eek of othere aornamentes alle
 That unto swich a weddyng sholde falle. (IV.256-9)

He does not make the garments to Griselda’s specifications, but to another woman’s measurements. From the outset, Walter crafts his translation around another model, a stand-in for any other woman, though Griselda ultimately wears the transformative clothes. She is both an ideal and a commonality. Walter has a specific pattern for the perfect wife that he expects Griselda to fit once she wears his clothes and enters his court. Her body is of no interest to him except as a means to signify his ultimate control.

The Clerk focuses just as much on what Griselda must lose to make the change as he does on what she gains. In taking on these garments and making the transition from peasant to marquess, Griselda must shed her natural garb:

And for that no thyng of hir olde geere
 She sholde brynge into his hous, he bad
 That women sholde dispoillen hire right there;
 Of which these ladyes were nat right glad
 To handle hir clothes, wherinne she was clad.
 But natheless, this mayde bright of hewe

Fro foot to heed they clothed han al newe.
 Hir heris han they kembd, that lay untressed
 Ful rudely, and with hir fynGRES smale
 A corone on hire heed they han ydressed,
 And sette hire ful of nowches grete and smale. (IV.372-82)

Though Walter enacts the translation by ordering the change in clothing, other women perform the act on Griselda's body. As far as the reader gets to see, Walter touches Griselda only once and after she passes each of his tests. Though it may not be an appropriate time for Walter to touch Griselda, considering they are in a public space, and she is indeed being undressed, it is still telling that other women under his orders carry out the act and not Griselda herself. Walter will not touch Griselda nor allow her to touch herself, and in doing so, he also denies her the act of self-translation.

In contrast with the changes to her form, one part of Griselda cannot be fully translated: her hair. Though the women comb through her hair, it remains in the same dirty locks as those of Griselda in peasant form. The unwashed hair serves as a reminder that for all the ornaments placed on Griselda's body, her natural form remains underneath, her body untranslated. The translator Walter fails to make a convincing copy, as the atypical translator represented in the Clerk leaves a piece of Griselda belonging only to her. As Glenn Burger puts it, "[w]e witness, simultaneously, both an ennobling crown placed on the head of the new bride *and* the peasant girl's still disheveled hair on which the crown rests" (Burger 146). The duality also complicates our reading of Griselda's body and text. Can she really be both the peasant girl and the noblewoman? As her clothing changes eventually indicate, Griselda constantly blurs what look like clear boundaries.

The Clerk ends the scene of reclothing by calling attention to the work of previous translators, and he makes obvious his resistance to such translation. To conclude his description of her transformative garb, the Clerk asks, “Of hire array what sholde I make a tale?” (Chaucer IV.383). Unlike the translators interested in the beauty of a Griselda text clothed in the sartorial meanings of their own invention, the Clerk crafts a tale centered on her textual body that persists underneath the clothing. He also acknowledges the metaphor at work by describing the moment as “Whan she translated was in swich richesse” (IV.385). The Clerk recognizes the masculine hermeneutic gesture Walter performs on Griselda, but by not making his tale of such materials, he refuses to mirror Walter’s actions on the Griselda text. He asserts his knowledge of previous translators to reveal their disturbing treatments of the text and correct them by actively approaching the Griselda text in a new way.

The second act of translation, the undressing of Griselda, centers around the covering of her womb, which may be read as a failed erasure of her maternity, a seemingly necessary effect of her ‘divorce.’ When Walter approaches Griselda to tell her that their marriage is over, Griselda unsurprisingly submits without a fight, but she also offers up her clothes since they were provided to her by Walter. She brought no dowry with her, and therefore she does not expect to take anything with her from Walter’s estate. In exchange for giving up her “maydenhede” Griselda makes one request, that she may hold onto a shift for the sake of modesty:

“Wherfore, in gerdon of my maydenhede,
 Which that I broghte, and noght agayn I bere,
 As voucheth sauf to yeve me, to my meede,
 But swich a smok as I was wont to were,

That I therwith may wrye the wombe of here

That was youre wyf. (IV.883-8)

In this moment, Griselda seems as constant as ever, still concerned with maintaining her womanly virtue as much as possible after the disgrace of a failed marriage. However, she fixates not on her heart or chest, but her “wombe.” The passage, which uses “wombe” once in the previous ten lines and a second time here, represents the only place the word appears in the text. In comparison “herte” appears close to thirty times, in reference to Griselda, Walter, and the people of his court. The womb stands out as the body part experiencing net change after being un-translated. Even though it logically follows that by losing her status as a wife Griselda should also lose her status as a mother, the maternal translation cannot be undone.

The womb signifies the site of Walter’s violence, translation, and the first touch between mother and child all at once. Griselda’s desire to cover her womb represents an attempt to reclaim her body and therefore the text. Importantly, when Griselda asserts her own identity outside of Walter’s dominion, she focuses on the changes motherhood has wrought upon her body. Instead of the women of Walter’s court stripping her, “Biforn the folk hirselves strepeth she, / And in hir smok, with heed and foot al bare, / Toward hir fadre hous forth is she fare” (IV.894-6). Her literal shrugging-off of Walter’s garments parallels with her abandonment of wifhood, though the physical and interpretative changes enacted by having children remain. The costume changes also draw attention to the changes of her physical body underneath. When Griselda returns to her father’s home in just her smock, the one piece of her pre-Walter clothing still around, a coat of coarse fabric, no longer fits her body. Not only has she grown and her body matured over the several years she has spent as Walter’s wife, but Griselda’s body has also been fundamentally changed by bearing two children (Hodges 114-5). In the same way that Griselda

identifies her womb as the site of irreversible physical change, her clothing acts as a reminder that the changes have taken place. She is first and foremost a mother, no matter if she remains at Walter's estate or returns to her childhood home.

Griselda's children also catalyze Griselda's final translation, which fashions her back into a wife without stripping her of her maternity. Griselda returns to Walter's estate to prepare for his wedding to a young bride, who of course turns out to be his daughter. Though Griselda does not know it at the time, her return coincides with that of her long-lost children. When Walter reveals the identity of the children to Griselda, he performs the final act of translation to put Griselda's textual body back in order. Immediately after the reunion, the ladies-in-waiting return to reclothe Griselda in riches as they did before:

Thise ladyes, whan that they hir tyme say,
 Han taken hire and into chambre gon,
 And strepen hire out of hire rude array,
 And in a clooth of gold that brighte shoon,
 With a coroune of many a riche stoon
 Upon hire heed, they into halle hire broghte,
 And ther she was honored as hire oghte. (Chaucer IV.1114-20)

For the first time, Griselda's stripping and redressing takes place in the private company of ladies, away from male interpreters. Though the act still happens on Walter's behalf and not necessarily according to Griselda's choice, the final translation strikes a balance between the first two. Also in this scene, Walter touches his wife for the first time, when "hire in armes took and gan hire kesse" (IV.1057), but only after revealing all his tests of virtue. Before the embrace, Griselda's pregnancies serve as the only evidence that Walter has ever touched his wife in over a

decade of marriage. Notably, Griselda never initiates or even responds to any affection from Walter; she does, however, embrace and cry over her children. The Clerk's unique haptic focus allows him to make Griselda's motherhood visible.

Maternal Touch

Since the children take up so little space in the narrative, the mother-child relationship gets condensed into brief moments of touch. It is in these moments that Griselda establishes her motherliness. More specifically, I argue that there are two types of touch in the text: the kiss and the embrace. The kiss stands in as the parting communication between mother and child, the embrace a return. When the sergeant comes to take away Griselda's first child, her daughter, to her presumed death, Griselda cannot resist a request to say goodbye. In her farewell, Griselda places her daughter in her lap – a space representative of a child's dependence on its mother – and kisses her: “in hir barm this litel child she leyde / With ful sad face, and gan the child to blisse, / And lulled it, and after gan it kisse” (IV.551-3). Griselda also kisses her son goodbye, the farewell condensed into a single line, she “kiste hir sone, and after gan it blesse” (IV.679). The kisses form the last link between mother and child, the manifestation of all Griselda's resistance, love, and protection.

The kiss communicates, blesses, and releases all at once – a message, a prayer, and an exhalation in one. The medieval understanding of a kiss included all of these functions since the mouth was the site of piety, breath, and language (Walter 115-6). The kiss itself is an act of communication, as it brings together the internal and the external; it is an act that “does things to and between bodies” (Walter 116). With her kisses, Griselda leaves an everlasting mark on her children that irrevocably changes her as much as it does her children. Her kisses are also special in that they are not eroticized or in any way tainted by desire. The text emphasizes Griselda's

chastity by showing the audience only the most innocent of touches. By eliminating all mention of sex, which is of course necessary to bear children, the text brings Griselda as close to the Virgin Mary as possible. The kiss also references a religious element, as many devotional practices included a ritualistic sort of kissing that connected God and man (Walter 119-20). The touch of a kiss embodies an immense amount of feeling Griselda cannot express in words but must channel in another way. The way Griselda kisses her children represents a great deal of maternal connection that most versions of the Griselda tale do not try to describe.

The other important type of touch is the embrace. The essential nature of the primal touch between mother and child clearly emerges in the work of twentieth-century English psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott. In his article “Withdrawal and Regression,” Winnicott provides several insights about the role of touch in psychological development by sharing a series of observations about a certain male schizoid-depressive patient. Reading *The Clerk’s Tale* in conjunction with Winnicott’s work brings two things into view. One, Griselda’s embracing of her children, as infants and as older children, signals a metaphorical regression back to the moment of pregnancy, when the children were dependent on Griselda and her womb – and coincidentally free from their father’s harsh commands. Two, Walter, like Winnicott’s patient, experiences episodes of withdrawal and regression into a childlike state, so Griselda must mother him, at the expense of her actual children. In this way, Walter tests Griselda’s motherliness as much as her wifeliness. The confusing part of his test is that in order to be a good and proper wife, she must also be a good and proper mother to her husband. To mother her husband, Griselda must put the needs of Walter before the needs of her own children. While sacrificing her children to her husband’s whims, she may also be a good mother figure to Walter.

In his desire to test Griselda, Walter exhibits behavior indicative of episodes of withdrawal and regression. By withdrawal, Winnicott means “momentary detachment from a waking relationship with external reality” (255) and by regression, “regression to dependence” (255). Though Walter’s moments of withdrawal may not be so obvious, his desire for regression comes clearly through the text. Before Walter has even laid eyes on Griselda, he imagines finding a wife will mean the end of his “liberte, / That seelde tyme is founde in mariage” (Chaucer IV.145-6). He sets up a contrast, “Ther I was free, I moot been in servage” (IV.147), aligning bachelordom with independence and marriage with dependence, a clear dichotomy. Curiously, Walter believes he will be dependent on, or at least beholden to, his wife, rather than the other way around. He will be the servant, not the master. The attitude seems to come out of nowhere, and Walter spends the rest of the story trying to throw off these roles by constantly testing Griselda and bending her to his will. Walter’s central anxiety, and his primary reason for testing Griselda, stems from the tension he feels between needing to be the dominant ruler and the desire for regression.

Walter’s idea of motherhood too centers on dependence. Before Walter is even aware of Griselda’s existence, the children she will eventually have tie him to her. Their marriage rests on Walter’s need for heirs, though the text downplays the significance of the children, relegating them to the silent margins of the text. Often Griselda’s tale makes her children little more than a footnote, but the Clerk’s retelling predicates our understanding of Griselda through the lens of motherhood. One of the ways he does so is by focusing on the social anxieties about Walter producing an heir. His subjects complain:

"Delivere us out of al this bisy drede,
And taak a wyf, for hye Goddes sake!

For if it so bifelle, as God forbede,
 That thurgh youre deeth youre lyne sholde slake,
 And that a straunge successour sholde take
 Youre heritage, O wo were us alyve!

Wherfore we pray you hastily to wyve." (IV.134-40)

Their urgings compel Walter to take a wife, more so to ensure his legacy and sovereignty than to be a husband. Walter stands stuck between his subjects' current dependence on him and the reminder that he will become dependent on his progeny in the future.

Like Winnicott's patient, Walter is unable to resolve these tensions without revisiting the spaces of mother's womb and lap. In one of the first episodes that Winnicott recounts, the patient signals an emotional withdrawal by physically withdrawing his body, curling up on the couch, and later describing moving in a curled-up position. Together, Winnicott and the patient create a link between this state and existing in a medium, which they then connect to the state of being a fetus curled up in a womb (Winnicott 256-7). Through interrupting the withdrawal by cocooning the patient in the medium, or the womb, Winnicott transforms his withdrawn state into a more productive regression. He returns to the state of ultimate dependence on his mother. While experiencing emotional infancy, the patient may be guided into maturity with the help of the analyst, who provides a metaphorical mother's lap for stability and comfort. Walter also experiences withdrawal from reality that Griselda's presence translates into regression, so he is dependent on her as a child is on his mother. Griselda takes on a guiding role as she enables Walter to move through a series of regressions, always returning to her metaphorical lap until he is on the verge of independence – then he stages the divorce. However, Walter does not experience the essential maternal touch until the final moment of reunion that allows him to

complete his psychological growth towards independence and returns Griselda to the role of wife.

In Griselda's final test, Walter most clearly asks Griselda to play his mother. Walter asks that she return to the estate to prepare it for his new bride, and she of course proves her obedience once again by accepting. Griselda's role within this test is often understood as a humiliating fall from lady of the house to domestic help, but I propose that she is also fulfilling another role, that of Walter's mother. Her tasks within the estate are very specific, and Griselda retains some sense of authority over the rest of the servants:

And with that word she gan the hous to dighte,
 And tables for to sette, and beddes make;
 And peyned hire to doon al that she myghte,
 Preyngge the chambereres, for Goddes sake,
 To hasten hem, and faste swepe and shake;
 And she, the mooste servysable of alle,
 Hath every chambre arrayed and his halle. (Chaucer IV.974-80)

The main focus of her labor seems to be the sites where new husband and wife will come together, both the tables where they will eat and the beds that they will sleep in – after, of course, consummating the marriage. Griselda's interference with the bedchambers seems entirely inappropriate, unless we consider how Griselda has stepped in as a surrogate mother to Walter before. She manages to act as mistress of the house without returning as the master's wife, assuming the role of the mother-in-law preparing the home for the new wife.⁸

⁸ For another contemporary source in which the mother-in-law looks over the bed chamber in preparation for the new bride, see the French story of *Lay le Freine*.

In the reunion scene, both the kiss and the embrace reappear, with Walter having an emotional breakthrough that releases Griselda from her maternal duties and truly reunites her with her children. The revelation that Walter's new bride is actually his daughter sparks the most open display of emotion from everyone in the text. The restitution of the family begins with the first explicit touch between Walter and Griselda: a kiss *and* an embrace, specifically initiated by Walter. After a few lines of speech, which by no means clears up the situation for Griselda who remains unaware of her children's presence, Walter "hire in armes took and gan hire kesse" (IV.1057). Walter now closes the circle, having finally received the kiss both of Griselda's children experienced. Or rather, Walter now has the developed independence to resume his status as the man and father of the family, which he signals by putting Griselda on the receiving end of the same touch she earlier provides to her children. Only then may Griselda be restored to the position of wife to Walter and mother to her children. The transformation is perhaps made more obvious by comparing this kiss between husband and wife to the kiss between mother and children. When Griselda physically reunites with her daughter and son, the Clerk explicitly tells his audience that Griselda has made a complete return to her role as their mother, describing her as "tendrely kissynge / Ful lyk a mooder" (IV.1083-4). For the first time, Griselda is allowed to externalize her maternal feelings, which throughout her period of motherhood were repressed for Walter's sake.

Once the reunion gives her permission to be a proper mother, Griselda loses much of her previously displayed self-control. She may not cry when Walter divorces her, but she starts "pitously wepyng" (IV.1083) upon the restoration of her children. The moment also calls for another maternal touch, so "bothe hire yonge children to hire calleth, / And in hire armes, ... / Embraceth hem" (IV.1081-3). Griselda's attentions and touches allow the children to regress to a

degree. Although Walter, keeping up the game of disguising his daughter as his betrothed, refers to her as a “tendre mayden” (IV.1039), to Griselda she and her brother are “yonge children” (IV.1081). Griselda’s return to motherhood allows her children an equivalent return to childhood. Furthermore, by resuming her station as Walter’s wife, Griselda delays the marriage of her daughter and allows her to remain dependent on her parents at least a little bit longer.

Though the emotional impact of the event is enough to make her fall unconscious, Griselda refuses to let go of her children, metaphorically and quite literally. Through suspended touch, Griselda continues to channel unspoken emotion:

And in hire swough so sadly holdeth she
 Hire children two, whan she gan hem t'embrace,
 That with greet sleighte and greet difficultee
 The children from hire arm they gonne arace. (IV.1100-3)

Here, Griselda finally gets to hold like a mother. The literal holding reenacts the moment of abandonment and seeks to undo the emotional damage inflicted on mother and child alike. By recalling the moment of separation, the scene also implies that Griselda’s maternal feelings have existed during the intervening period. She does not lose the connection with her children, but rather downplays it in order to meet Walter’s needs. Though Griselda’s emotional outburst remains a constant feature of the tale across versions, the Clerk’s careful attention to the way Griselda touches and holds like a mother while Walter regresses into an emotional infancy requiring a mother not only centers her motherhood but considers her as a good mother.

Reading Like a Mother

Throughout his telling, the Clerk reads the Griselda tale like a mother. He willingly accepts a feminized position from which he can sympathize with Griselda and her text, breaking

the expected parallel between translator and husband. The Clerk must fit into several other reading traditions in order to qualify as reading like a mother. First, the Clerk must read like a woman, as Carolyn Dinshaw has argued. Dinshaw looks at the Clerk's interjections and outbursts to orient the Clerk's sympathies. His constant praise of Griselda compared with rage and disgust at Walter places his sympathies "not with the translator but with the translated, not with Walter but with Griselda, not with the man but with the woman" (Dinshaw 135). The Clerk always returns to Griselda to focalize his reasons for sharing her story. Dinshaw also argues that this way of reading encompasses a different hermeneutic than has ever been attached to this story before. By placing himself as the woman in the story, the Clerk undoes the "patriarchal hermeneutic" (Dinshaw 137) of Petrarch and the exclusively male community that Petrarch creates as the audience for his story. The Clerk then replaces it with a new way of reading and interpreting the story like a woman.

Expanding on Dinshaw's work, Glenn Burger argues that the Clerk reads like a specific kind of woman, a good wife. Burger forms the mode of reading by putting the Clerk's story in conversation with conduct manuals, some of which include Griselda as an exemplum (Burger 179). The Clerk simultaneously demonstrates an access to Griselda's inner emotions and a respect for her ability to control them, a sympathy which can only come from a fellow wife. Burger focuses on the way conduct manuals, written by men as exact guides for their wives to follow, cultivate the value of self-control, an essential quality of a good wife. While the Clerk himself does not evidence a good model of self-control and self-rule, he makes sure to show the audience how Griselda upholds these expectations. Yet, the Clerk does not refuse Griselda the ability to feel and emote, as she finally weeps and embraces her children at the story's conclusion. His reading then is a "complex reenvisioning of the role of male guide in conduct

literature for women” (Burger 180). While still fulfilling this role, the Clerk also sympathizes with pain Griselda is feeling and not showing and reads her self-control as any good wife would.

Narrowing the Clerk’s reading further, I argue that he reads specifically like a mother. First, he displaces the patriarchal authority that naturally falls to him as translator onto the host, so he can occupy the feminized position of the Griselda text. The Host exhorts the Clerk into speaking with an insult comparing him to a woman much like Griselda in the first stage of her story: “Ye ryde as coy and stille as dooth a mayde / Were newe spoused, sittynge at the bord” (Chaucer IV.2-3). Yet, the disparaging remark is not meant to prolong the Clerk’s feminine silence and self-control, but to invite him into the role of narrator, translator, and interpreter. Before he begins speaking, he holds the potential to occupy either a feminine or masculine narrative space. His response to the Host, however, slides him further towards the feminine side, the Clerk’s relationship to the Host mirroring Griselda’s relationship to Walter:

“Hooste,” quod he, “I am under youre yerde;

Ye han of us as now the governance

And therefore wol I do yow obeisance,

As fer as resoun axeth, hardily. (IV.22-25)

The Clerk’s “obeisance” especially parallels Griselda’s patient suffering, as she promises in her marriage vows to Walter “I nyl yow disobeye” (IV.363), with the same word appearing in line 794, as Walter is preparing to ‘divorce’ Griselda in one of his final tests. The parallels set the Clerk up to comment on Griselda as if he were experiencing the same pains and struggles. Meanwhile, the “governance” marks the authority of the Host over the Clerk, which mirrors the authority of Walter over Griselda, deepening the connection between the Clerk and Griselda.

Furthermore, as soon as the Clerk begins to speak, he asserts his intent to present a version of the Griselda story counter to the clerical tradition. The Clerk declares his anti-Walter sentiment from the beginning of the tale by establishing the distance between himself and his fellow clerk Petrarch. The Clerk primes his audience to abandon the strictly humanist, Petrarchan reading of the husband-wife relationship as the relationship between God and man.⁹ In the prologue, the Clerk evokes the “worthy clerk” (IV.27) only to show Petrarch “now deed and nayled in his cheste” (IV.29), the death of the translator signifying the death of his particular translation and interpretation. The Clerk’s text will altogether look and be different since he intends to abandon the “heigh stile” (IV.41) of Petrarch. What follows does come in a deceptively high style as the Clerk composes his tale in the sophisticated rhyme royal, but he writes in verse to oppose Petrarch’s highly stylized prose, the form of his Griselda text physically manifesting a departure from the tradition. The Clerk calls upon Petrarch to purposefully craft his reading of Griselda against the tradition.

The structure of the Clerk’s Griselda tale also indicates a departure from the path of his predecessors. In Boccaccio’s original, Petrarch’s translation, and *Le Ménagier de Paris*, Walter’s desire to test Griselda begins with the birth of their daughter. The Clerk also cites the birth of the daughter as the beginning of his tale, but he indicates previous testing that he only references in the body of his tale. In the vaguest of terms, the Clerk describes that Walter “hadde assayed hire ynogh bifore, / And foond hire evere good” (IV.456-7), yet his real story begins with the separation of mother and child and ends with their reunion. The Clerk replaces the marriage plot

⁹ Petrarch’s reading of the Griselda story understands the text in a religious light. Though he does not wish for women to take Griselda as a literal example, he urges his educated male audience to model their relationship with God on her relationship with Walter. The Clerk ultimately settles on this sentiment as well, but he appeals to a very different audience than what Petrarch had in mind. For more on Petrarch, see Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics* and Glenn Burger, *Conduct Becoming*.

with the motherhood plot, centering the story on the abandonment and restitution of the children. He invents the previous tests as a way to emphasize the importance of removing the daughter as the beginning of the true plot. Not caring about the specifics of the tests before Griselda becomes a mother, the Clerk brings her motherhood clearly into focus.

The Clerk loses his self-control and expresses his deepest sympathies specifically at moments in the text when Griselda's maternal identity is at stake. When Walter takes away Griselda's second child and sees that she remains steadfastly emotionless, he feels the urge to continue testing her, as he of course will do later in the text. The Clerk outright objects to the cruelty of Walter in wanting more from Griselda after already separating her from her children and allowing her to believe them dead. Not only does the Clerk take a strong anti-Walter stance, but he appeals to the women in the audience to join him in his sympathy:

But now of wommen wolde I axen fayn
 If thise assayes myghte nat suffise?
 What koude a sturdy housbonde moore devyse
 To preeve hir wyfhod and hir stedefastnesse,
 And he continuyng evere in sturdinesse? (IV.696-700)

This womanly entreaty comes at a crucial moment in the text when Griselda, having been forced into motherhood, is now finally denied it. Although the Clerk does not directly appeal to mothers, he makes this appeal for sympathy when Griselda is suffering because of her status as a mother. The Clerk also defines this consistent connection with Griselda against the waffling opinion of society, unable to contain an outburst of "O stormy peple! Unsad and evere untrew!" (IV.995) in response to the crowd's approval of Walter's new bride. The Clerk doubly cements

his parallel role by first being the only constant sympathizer of Griselda and by echoing her steadfastness and loyalty himself.

The Clerk also recognizes that he is the first to praise Griselda in exactly this way, understanding and sympathizing with the impossible decisions she has to make as a woman. Previous narrators, especially Petrarch, credit Griselda with a certain masculine courage or steadfastness that makes her able to withstand Walter's cruelty. Petrarch's reading of Griselda as masculine also makes it easier for him to ultimately read the story as a metaphor for how men should conduct themselves towards God. Chaucer's Clerk abandons this reading and praises not only Griselda but women in general for the qualities that make them stronger and truer than men, saying "Though clerkes preise wommen but a lite, / Ther kan no man in humblesse hym acquite / As womman kan, ne kan been half so trewe" (IV.935-7). The Clerk signals to his audience that he is translating Griselda against tradition. The Clerk does indeed engage in an unusual reading style which ultimately has him reading like a mother.

Along with the commentary on the moment of separation between mother and children, the Clerk cannot restrain himself when Griselda reacts to the return of her children. "O which a pitous thyng it was to se / Hir swownyng, and hire humble voys to heere!" (IV.1086-7), he exclaims upon seeing her visceral reaction. Whereas the Clerk previously expressed emotion Griselda herself could not externalize, they may now share in the scene's emotions together. By privileging the moments involving the children and highlighting them with emotional outbursts, the Clerk allows the audience access to Griselda's inner turmoil. It is too easy to look at the tale and condemn Griselda for giving up her kids so easily, but the Clerk asks for a reconsideration of the depth of feeling happening inside. The Clerk's connection to Griselda opens a sympathetic

door that no prior narrator offers. In this way, the Clerk brings Griselda's maternity to the forefront and reclothes the text to offer us a solution to the good wife/mother paradox.

The problem looks like this: Griselda is, undeniably, a good wife. Part of the requirement for being a good wife is bearing and raising children, as the tale indicates when Walter's subjects approach him asking for an heir. How can Griselda fit that requirement when she is willing to give up those children? And yet she must in order to remain obedient and a good wife. The Clerk presents an interpretation in which Griselda does perform good mothering, just transferred onto Walter instead of her children. Griselda can be both a good wife and a good mother – to Walter – and once the maternal bond with Walter is severed, she may return to being a good mother for her biological children. The Clerk signals that he interprets the text in this way by interjecting precisely at the moments when Griselda is suffering as a mother. The Clerk finds these moments most heart-wrenching precisely because he positions himself as a similar maternal figure, mothering the text by acting as a conduit for Griselda's suffering, rather than husbanding the text by asserting interpretive control over Griselda's body. The Clerk is the one and only translator to take this stance and therefore preserve Griselda as both a good wife and a good mother, the latter identity most worthy of attention and sympathy.

Chapter Three: Picturing Griselda

A peasant woman elevated to nobility, Griselda signifies both the omnipresent mother figure of the Virgin Mary and the real-world analogue of a noblewoman's duty to provide an heir. She is a polyvalent signifier holding together the medieval maternal identity, simultaneously mirroring the Virgin Mary and the everyday mother. Her story may be extraordinary, but at its heart, it replicates the (potential) story of every fourteenth-century mother. To help bridge this gap, and in some ways fill the place of the folk narrative lost to the present day, this chapter will evaluate two visual interpretations of the Griselda myth, more accessible translations of the Griselda tale resonant with contemporary mothers. In focusing on their depictions of motherhood, I engage reading practices derived from the textual studies of the previous two chapters.

The fresco of *The Abandonment and Restitution of Children* on the façade of the Misericordia of Florence serves as a bridge between the literary mother and her real-world counterpart. The Misericordia acted like an orphanage, taking care of children until parents might be able to resume care for them (Levin 221). The fresco on its walls would have been visible to Florentines from all walks of life when they gathered for baptism ceremonies at the Baptistery across the street (Henderson, *Piety and Charity* 345). Women from across socioeconomic classes become Griselda in the image, some abandoning their children to the care of confraternity brothers and others reclaiming them and reforming the family unit. Though not a direct illustration of the Griselda story, the everyday parallels shine through. In contrast, the three-panel illustration of the Griselda story done by the titular master in late fifteenth-century Siena represents her utility as a model for wealthy, high-status women; the paintings originally belonged in a Sienese palace, commissioned to celebrate a noble wedding. As a pair then, the

fresco and panels emphasize Griselda's connection to simultaneously the poorest and wealthiest mothers alike.

The two also visually represent both sides of Griselda's motherhood, the invitation for maternal sympathy it extends and the obstacle to marital narratives it represents. Imagining a maternal audience, the fresco appeals to a maternal nature in the viewer, cultivating a sympathetic narrative about motherhood for larger public consumption. Like Chaucer's Clerk, it asks one to read like a mother. The panels meanwhile illustrate the more abusive marginalization of Griselda's motherhood, literally putting the maternal scenes along the edges of the composition. They center on marriage, like many of the textual narratives, and displace motherhood since they cannot avoid it altogether.

Everyday Mothers

Even given the tale's popularity, the Griselda texts divest little information about the real-world experience of medieval mothers on its own. To further a mother-focused reading of the Griselda narrative and to explore how images can encourage reading like a mother, I turn to *The Abandonment and Restitution of Children* fresco, also called *The Consignment of Abandoned Children and Orphans to Natural and Adoptive Mothers*. The *Abandonment and Restitution of Children* fresco no longer exists as a whole and is no longer located on the Bigallo's façade (fig. 1). It was removed from the building in the 1777, but before it was dissected, an anonymous artist preserved the whole by creating a watercolor copy (Bent 93; fig. 2). I will reference the fragments of the fresco as much as possible but will rely on the watercolor copy to fill in the gaps when necessary.

Understanding the fresco, and the real-world situational context it represents, as a Griselda story forges a connection between Griselda and real-world mothers, providing a sorely needed path forward to understanding the figure of medieval mothers. Though, unlike the second image I consider in this chapter, the fresco does not illustrate the Griselda tale, it reflects the motherhood plot that I have developed from the Griselda tale. In its two acts of abandonment and restitution, the image replicates the Griselda story in a more accessible way that provides a limited insight into the tale's relationship with reality.

The fresco abounds with women and children in various groupings. Several women appear on the left-hand side of the fresco. On the farthest end, a woman in a simple white dress including a white cloth draped over her head stands over two children, one of whom she caresses on the head. Her other hand reaches out, nearly touching the outstretched hand of the other child, raising a piece of half-eaten fruit. While the children look forward at the scene unfolding to the right, the woman glances back at something to the left, obscured by a damaged section of the fresco. Four more women appear to her right: a woman dressed in the full-body black of mourning clothes, turned only partially to the viewer, who shakes a pointing finger at the woman across from her; a woman in blue, hands crossed composedly in front of her to display a ring on her right hand; a woman in orange with the same white head covering as before, holding a child who in turn holds an object in his hand; and finally a woman in red, back to the viewer to reveal an uncovered head and braided hair that extends past her waist. Above the group of women and children tower several architectonic structures. On the far left of the composition stands the façade of some pink and white building with two niches, containing one male figure and one female figure. The woman reaches one hand up to cover her chest and the other hand down to cover her genitals, while the man stands with arms away from his body, holding a staff in his

right hand that crosses over his torso to his left shoulder. A smaller arched entryway appears behind the group of four women.

A final scene unfolds on the left-hand side of the fresco. A scowling man in pink and gold garments grabs the arm of a struggling child below him, preparing to lift the child out of the women's space and into his own. The child stares up in fright at the man but lifts one leg as if preparing to mount the steps in front of him. None of the women seem to be looking at or reacting to this scene, but their position in a circle suggests a conversation. Another architectonic frame partially separates this scene from the groups of women; the man pops out from inside the archway of a loggia to seize the child, the fingers of his right hand just brushing the edge of the frame but not extending outside of it as he pulls the child closer. These scenes may be linked to the other side of the fresco by the buildings in the background, but the way this man faces away from the building separates this section from the next.

On the right side of the fresco, similar figures engage in different gestures. A trio of men emerge from another archway of the loggia, the leader in front gently ushering a child out of the building. The child extends his hands out of the doorway reaching towards a woman in front of him, who reciprocates his gesture of welcome. Another child wraps her hand around the first child's elbow, tying herself to him. A third child gazes up from the bottom of the composition, holding something up for the woman, though fading of the pigments has greatly obscured the third child. Behind the woman in orange, four blonde women cluster together, all making eye contact with one another instead of interacting with the scene happening just beside them. A haloed Virgin and Child hover above them in the lunette of the doorway in the background. A single man glares over the shoulders of this quartet of women, his body hidden by yet another woman, who holds a child in her arms. Yet another child stands at her feet, reaching up to show

something to two more women, one of whom looks down to acknowledge her while the other looks at the child being held. The scene seems to extend farther to the right to show a crowd of happy mothers with their children.

The fresco represents two sides of the Misericordia's service caring for orphans, rendering the events that frequently took place within the Misericordia in paint.¹⁰ By the fourteenth century, confraternities – groups overwhelmingly male who joined together to worship and do acts of service for the good of the commune – played an important role in upholding the civic scaffolding of Florence. Confraternities grew out of a dual need to perform charity, showing love for one's metaphorical brothers in the social network formed by membership and love for God through devotional acts of service to the community (Henderson, *Piety and Charity* 9). Feeding, clothing, educating, doctoring, and otherwise caring for residents in need, confraternities proved incredibly popular and highly beneficial to the good of Florentine society. One such group, the Compagnia Maggiore di Santa Maria della Misericordia, took responsibility for orphans, as well as caring for the sick and burying the dead (Saalman 5). In 1355, the Misericordia received a gift of land, a small corner of the Piazza San Giovanni, upon which they built their headquarters (FLAW).¹¹ Over the next several years, the company provided for the construction of an open-air loggia, later decorated with sculptures and

¹⁰ The Misericordia was not the only institution in Florence to care for children. Three founding hospitals of S. Gallo, S. Maria della Scalla, and the Ospedale degli Innocenti accepted sick and abandoned children, their populations growing in numbers through the fifteenth century. By the middle of the fifteenth century, the three hospitals collectively cared for around a thousand children (Henderson, *The Renaissance Hospital* 46).

¹¹ Florence As It Was (FLAW) is an ongoing digital humanities project led by Professor George Bent of Washington and Lee University that seeks to digitally reconstruct the city of Florence as it appeared in medieval centuries. The site includes interactive maps of the city; models of reconstructed buildings; information about the people, culture, places, and artworks that made Florence what it was; and translations of important texts and documents. It has been immensely helpful in my project for allowing me to see artworks in their original settings and providing a spatial understanding of the city, with the added cultural context necessary to interpret the artworks.

frescoes.¹² In 1386, Niccoló Gerini and Ambrogio di Baldese would paint a fresco on the façade of the building illustrating one of the services of the confraternity: caring for orphans. The image acts as the equivalent of a modern-day billboard, advertising the confraternity along one of the main city streets (Levin 221).

The clear references within the painting to nearby landmarks outside it ensures that passers-by understand the advertisement by providing a self-referential frame. Niccoló Gerini and Ambrogio di Baldese use the actual wall on which they paint the fresco as a backdrop to the action within the fresco. The sculpture of the Virgin and Child within the lunette above the entrance references an actual sculpture completed by Alberto Arnoldi for the confraternity in 1361 (FLAW). The self-referential allusion immediately identifies the space of the action within the image as the space of the viewer outside it. The clue also encourages further identification of the structures in the painting with the Bigallo itself and nearby buildings. The two archways to the left of the entrance in which members of the Misericordia carry out their duties represent the two archways of the open-air loggia attached to the building. The separate structures to the left of the Bigallo, then, stand in for the newly built cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore still lacking its signature dome and the adjacent Campanile. The sculpted man and woman in the niches represent by synecdoche the vast program of images that appear on the exterior of Giotto's bell tower because the details would be impossible to realistically recreate at this scale. The architectural features do not seek to create an accurate or realistic backdrop of the city so much as contextualize the space in which the action occurs and locate the viewer. Nevertheless, the

¹² The decorative program of this building as it appears today is not accurate to how it originally appeared. In 1425, under the auspices of Cosimo de' Medici, the struggling Compagnia Maggiore di Santa Maria del Bigallo merged with the Misericordia and eventually subsumed them (Saalman 6). Known today as simply the Bigallo, the structure now includes statues of St. Peter Martyr, St. Lucy, and a Madonna and Child relocated from the previous Bigallo's headquarters (FLAW).

resulting images speaks to everyday Florentines, who know the spaces intimately. The confraternity grounds their charity in the needs of the city and seems to say that they are a natural extension of the commune (Levin 219). It explains that here children may be raised in the heart of the city's rich culture.

The fresco's location on the façade of the Bigallo also made for a highly visible piece of public art, which guaranteed a wide audience. As a piece of public art, this fresco cannot be understood outside of its audience. Its meaning speaks to a particular group of people, dictated by its spatial presence. The Bigallo sits just next to the Baptistery of San Giovanni, where baptisms were performed for the entire city. By the time of the Bigallo's construction, baptisms had grown from a semiannual to daily event, resulting in consistent traffic beside the Bigallo. Baptisms had also evolved into a public event, an infant's simultaneous introduction to spirituality and Florentine society. This ritual included a procession through the city streets to the south portal of the Baptistery, where the beginning of the rites took place before a select group moved inside the building for the actual baptism. For those waiting outside the south doors, whether friends and family of the infant or other Florentine spectators, the *Abandonment and Restitution* fresco stared back at them from the façade wall of the Bigallo directly across from the entrance (Bent 95). Besides its usefulness as an advertisement for the Misericordia's services, the fresco confronted new parents with a complex narrative about parenthood. It suggests the probability of circumstances that might undercut a parent's ability to care for their children while also comforting them in advance of that situation. Should it occur, the confraternity can provide for the children. Even better, if a parent negotiates the resolution of the challenging circumstances that forced them to give up their children, they may reclaim them, as evidenced by the reunion scene on the right side of the fresco. The image hints at the parents' worst nightmare,

but immediately applies salve to the wound by recommending a solution and an eventual happy ending. Whether or not reality matched the ideal with any frequency does not mitigate the allure of the idea and the hope still allowed by the orphanage. The fresco neither sugarcoats nor deprives its audience of a happy ending, promoting a balanced view of the confraternity's role in the city.

Continuing to read the fresco as an advertisement yields a representation of the confraternity's expected clients within the image, revealing the primary audience. Even within the audience provided by the spectators of baptismal ceremonies, the image calls out to a narrower section of the Florentine population. Though the services were available to any who needed them, the women in the painting represent the expected clients, implying the circumstances that bring each one to the Misericordia's doors. The woman in black signifies a mourner, her clothing allowing the viewer to fill in the gaps. She represents a recent widow, without the resources to continue caring for her child or children.¹³ The woman in white seems to also need assistance in caring for her children but shows more reluctance when the moment actually comes. She lingers in the periphery, holding on to both children, who do not seem to understand their impending fate. Their faces show pleasant expressions, and the older child seems eager to trek further into the scene, his outstretched hand raised to the nearby quartet of women. The piece of fruit in the child's hand, paired with his innocent nonunderstanding, takes

¹³ A widow occupied a precarious position in 1300s Florence. In theory, a widow could choose between staying with her late husband's family and therefore her children whom the father's family had priority over, living independently and perhaps being able to hover near her children, or remarrying (Klapisch-Zuber 120). In reality, however, a woman's age and wealth (existing as a dowry) often narrowed her options. Based on her youthful appearance, the widow in the painting is probably preparing to remarry. In this case, the restitution of her dowry would take away those resources from her children to travel with her into her new marriage, leaving the paternal family to care for them. Perhaps without her dowry to provide for them, the children's new guardians were forced to hand them over to the Misericordia. Is the widow, then, here to visit her children? Or, unable to bring them into her new household and the father's family lacking the ability to care for them, dropping them off?

on iconographical significance. The cluster of seeds showing from within the fruit suggests it may be a pomegranate, believed to be the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge Eve consumes in the original sin. Despite the charity of the confraternity's message, a reminder of the spiritual condemnation that awaits women for sexual transgressions, and not caring for the children that result from them, sits just below the surface.

Another figure, the woman with her back turned to the viewer, literalizes the warning. Her uncovered hair marks her as an unmarried woman, a potential demographic in need of the confraternity's services (Bent 94). Her position makes it difficult to assess the reason for her presence, concealing any potential signs of pregnancy that would indicate her impending need for the orphanage or the presence of a child in her arms or at her feet. Her anonymity and pose facing the action of the painting allows for any woman to insert herself into the image, imagining some stage of motherhood. Explicitly picturing the mothers and using one to invite the viewer into the image, the fresco asks its audience to read like a mother.

The fresco balances the heartbreaking scenes of abandonment with heartwarming scenes of reunion on the other side. While the confraternity brother scoops up the child – who becomes in this moment an orphan – on the left half of the composition, the trio of brothers on the right half releases children back to the mother who joyously rushes to embrace them. The stripped-down narrative of abandonment and restitution represents the two acts of the motherhood plot, now familiar from the *Griselda* tale. Both image and tale become more striking for their newfound link to reality through the *Misericordia*. The identification of the motherhood plot further encourages reading the image like a mother.

The abandonment moment, both for *Griselda* and the *Misericordia* mothers, depends on the parent's realization of lack in the child's born environment and the discovery of a possible

alternative with advantages, no matter how slight. Here, we see another parallel with the Griselda tale. Griselda's children would have been raised in a rich, palatial environment without their removal from Walter's court, but Walter's decision to send them to his sister in Bologna forms an interesting parallel to the parents dropping their children at the Misericordia's door. In Boccaccio's version of the tale, the closest to contemporary Florentine society culturally and temporally, the children go to Bologna both to keep them within the influence of the family and to gain a proper rearing and education. While Griselda watches the sergeant take the child away to certain death, Walter actually "lui con essa ne mandò a Bologna a una sua parente, pregandola che, senza mai dire cui figliuola si fosse, diligentemente allevasse e costumasse" ("sent him with the child to Bologna, to one of his kinswomen, whom he besought to rear and educate the child with all care, but never to let it be known whose child she was"; Boccaccio X.10.33; Rigg 33).¹⁴ When, a few years later, Walter has their son removed, it occurs in a similar manner: "Dopo non molti dì Gualtieri, in quella medesima maniera che mandato aveva per la figliuola, mandò per lo figliuolo: e similmente dimostrato d'averlo fatto uccidere, a nutricar nel mandò a Bologna, come la fanciulla aveva mandata" ("Not many days after, Gualtieri, in like manner as he had sent for

¹⁴ Though different authors expand on this detail in various ways, the nobility of Walter's relative always comes through. In Petrarch's translation, "Iussitque satelliti obvolutam pannis, ciste iniectam, ac iumento impositam, quieto omni quanta posset diligencia Bononiam deferret ad sororem suam, que illic Comiti de Panico nupta erat. Eamque sibi traderet alendam materno studio, et caris moribus instruendam, tanta preterea occultandam cura, ut cuius filia esset a nemine posse agnosci" ("He commanded the retainer to carry the child with all possible secrecy to Bologna, wrapped in cloths, hidden in a basket, and carried on the back of a mule. There Walter's sister, the wife of the Count of Panago, would give maternal attention to her nourishment and moral development while taking utmost care that no one should know whose child she was"; Petrarch 227-31; Farrell 120). In *Le Ménagier*, the husband-narrator writes "sans nulle demeure la portast secrètement à Boulongne la Grasse à sa seur germaine qui estoit femme du conte de Péruse, et dist à sa dicte seur que, sur l'amour qu'elle avoit à luy, elle la feist nourrir et endoctriner en toutes bonnes meurs, et que si secrètement fust nourrie que son mary le conte ne personne vivant ne le peust jamais savoir" ("Without delay she was to be secretly transported to Bologna la Grasse, to his sister, the wife of the count of Perugia. The sergeant was bade to inform his sister that, in the name of her love for her brother the marquis, she have the child raised and instructed in good morals and do it so secretly that neither her husband the count nor any living person could ever discover it"; Project Gutenberg 221; Greco and Rose 111). And in *The Clerk's Tale*, Chaucer expands greatly that "But at Boloigne to his suster deere, / That thilke tyme of Panik was countesse, / He sholde it take and shewe hire this mateere, / Bisekyng hire to doon hire bisynesse / This child to fostre in alle gentillesse; / And whos child that it was he bad hire hyde / From every wight, for oght that may bityde" (Chaucer IV.589-95).

the daughter, sent for the son, and having made a shew of putting him to death, provided for his, as for the girl's, nurture at Bologna"; X.10.37). The second time the emphasis is not on the ministrations of his sister, but on their removal to Bologna and "nutricar," that he be nurtured, tagged with a reminder that the sister is experiencing the same fate. To be properly raised, educated, and prepared for an eventual return to court, Griselda's children must be completely removed from her side, literally taken from her lap. Though many authors of the tale credit Griselda's steadfastness – one of the traits that supposedly make her so desirable to Walter – as a direct result of her growing up in poverty, Walter has their children raised not only in a noble estate but specifically away from the mother born and bred in poverty. The text implies that, at least in Walter's mind, having his children raised by a person of noble lineage is preferable to being raised by their biological mother and her impoverished bloodline. The Misericordia in no way takes the place of an aristocratic estate, but it similarly provides an alternative to complete destitution and the possible negative influences such a state could have on youths. The confraternity at least provides a hope for stability and security. Reading text and image in parallel reveals the possible advantage of abandonment, providing one possible reason for Walter's cruelty, though by no means excusing it.

More obviously, the movement of Griselda's children from Saluzzo to Bologna mirrors the movement of children in and out of the Misericordia, at least in theory and in the depiction offered by the fresco. The abandonment and restitution motif unite the text and image, but with somewhat reversed consequences. While in the Griselda tale, the mother believes that the abandonment of her children means certain death and yet is eventually reunited with them safe and sound, for Florentine parents, the abandonment of their children was their only chance of survival, and reunion was more hopeful fantasy than certain reality. The abandonment and

restitution narrative becomes not just literary phenomenon but lived reality, with texts like the Griselda tale providing the hopeful second act that not all mothers could experience personally.

Though the Griselda story does not perfectly map onto the experiences of Florentine parents, the *Abandonment and Restitution of Children* fresco represents a real-life analogue to Griselda's experience. As fantastical a tale as it is, the Griselda story strikes a chord with everyday Florentine mothers who at any point might be knocking on the Misericordia's door. Though the image is still focused through the men of the confraternity, it makes an effort to speak to mothers and connect with them where they are. In this way, the fresco allows for the same sort of reading that the Clerk performs in his telling of the Griselda tale. We can read the fresco, meant to be seen and interpreted by mothers, like a mother, which in turn reinforces the value of the Clerk's mode of reading.

Visually Resisting Motherhood

The contemporary visual and realistic resonances of the Griselda tale do not end, however, with abstract connections and everyday mothers. Part of the genius of the Griselda tale is her polyvalence, her flexibility within the rigid obedience. Both peasant and marquess, she addresses women of all classes, the poorest and richest mothers alike. While nearly anyone who lived in or traveled through Florence could gaze upon the *Abandonment and Restitution* fresco, other images were made for a narrow, private audience. The remainder of this chapter will focus on one such artwork, a set of three *spalliera* panels from Siena that depict the Griselda tale for a newlywed couple. I argue that this visualization of the Griselda story, much like the text of *Le Ménagier de Paris*, attempts to instruct the wifely viewer while denying association between Walter and textual creator. In the case of the panels, I argue that the patron rather than the artist parallels Walter as husband. As a result, it pushes Griselda's motherhood to the edges, but it does

not successfully remove motherhood from the story, which ultimately betrays the importance of Griselda's maternal identity.

The panels make only a semi-chronological distinction between scenes. The left panel centers on the marriage between Griselda and Walter, the middle panel on Walter divorcing Griselda, and the right panel on the feast upon the reunion of the family, with other essential details scattered in the peripheral space throughout (figs. 3-5). Walter and Griselda are immediately recognizable in the center of the first two panels and on either end of the final panel.

In the *Marriage* panel, a group of men ride horseback with a pack of hounds hunting on a hill that rises from the left side of the panel and leads the eye to the middle of the composition. A similar group spills out in front of the hill, a richly dressed Walter atop a white steed out in front. Two men – both wearing red, blue, and silver hose with a band of gold – speak to Walter from their positions on either side of the horse. Griselda, dressed in simple, dark, drab clothing stands balancing a jar of water on her head from the square well in the foreground. Several figures clutter the center of the panel: a cluster of rearing horses and elaborately dressed men blend into the pair in the middle, with a slightly smaller group of men gathering on the right. At the center, Walter and Griselda wear matching clothes of rich red and gold brocade with twin red draperies. They both wear their shining golden hair long, Walter covering his head with a red cap and Griselda bare headed. The man gazes at the woman's one outstretched hand as he places a ring on her thin finger, and she in turn inclines her head with downcast eyes. Behind them stands a triumvirate arch decorated in relief, finished with gilded horses leaping out of the entablature and topped with masculine statues.

To the right, Griselda stands naked, one hand crossed over her torso and the other stretching down to cover her genitals, eyes again downcast, her blue-gray dress and simple

smock laid out on the ground in front of her along with her shoes. An attendant behind her holds a new outfit, another smock and dress of red and gold brocade. Walter, still dressed in red and gold, leans forward to talk to the attendant, gesturing at the outfit in his arms. A few more men gather to their right, along with a couple of now-abandoned and bored-looking hunting dogs. Behind the people on the righthand side, Walter watches as a man descends the stairs of a pink house with a parcel tucked under his arm, Griselda watching from the top of the stairs. A final representation of Walter and Griselda, the former in his expected red and gold and the latter in a blue-gray dress, appears in the middle ground on the far right. A background of sparse trees, lush grass, and bulbous clouds unites the panel, and a couple of tiny cityscapes appear at the deepest layer of background.

The scattering of narrative moments continues in the middle panel, *Exile*, which focuses on a crowd of various people that stretches through the center of the composition, inside of another architectonic structure. The crowd centers around a trio: a gesticulating Walter wearing gold with red cap, Griselda attired similarly in gold with a veiled head and holding a ring in her right hand, and a figure in red in between these two, unfurling a document. Under the arch on the left, a group of male spectators stands in various degrees of contrapposto. Under the right arch, another narrative scene unfolds; Walter stands with his hands on his hips, watching Griselda undress, emerging from her outer gown like a butterfly from its chrysalis. Two barefoot men have a discussion in the immediate foreground, commentating as they watch Griselda's public humiliation.

On the far left of the panel, taking up so little space as to nearly escape the eyes of the viewer, Griselda hands a swaddled infant off to a man in a red turban. The same man, still holding the bundle, appears again halfway between the edge of the panel and the beginning of

the arches, creeping away on his tiptoes. Another pair of men, the ever-present commentators, have a conversation in the foreground. Walter also stands with his back to the viewer immediately beside the arches, talking to a man draped in green and blue. To the right of the arches, a final pair of men engage in conversation. At the edge, Griselda – now barefoot, bare headed, and dressed in a semi-diaphanous gown – moves away from the pair of men, head bowed to look at where she is going. Behind her, the same pink house from the left panel sits on a slight hill. Several animals are scattered throughout the foreground, including dogs, a peacock, and some sort of monkey tethered to a supporting column of one of the archways.

Finally, in *Reunion*, a larger version of the previous gold and green loggia structure appears. Inside the frame of the arches, a long banquet table stretches to accommodate a visible eighteen diners. The same quartet of people appear at either end of the table, reflected into new poses and positions: Griselda in blue, her head draped in white; Walter in red and gold with a red feathered cap; a younger girl adorned in jewelry, wearing a similar gold and red fabric with a pink dress over the top; and a younger boy in red and gold with a blue feathered cap. Griselda sits on the left side of the table, awkwardly embracing Walter, who stretches one arm over her but leaves the other free to point at the children next to them. Their mouths begin to touch, implying the moment before or after a kiss. On the other end of the table, Griselda stands with her back turned to the viewer, as if waiting on Walter, who remains seated. On the far left, Griselda, still wearing an impoverished blue, sweeps a doorstep. She also appears in the background on the right-hand side, welcoming the girl dressed in pink, and once more speaking to Walter at the edge of the composition. A procession of men and various pack animals stretches across the length of the background, in line with the banquet table. Some of the donkeys have birds or other animals perched on their own backs. As in the previous panel, a

smattering of animals cover the foreground, including again dogs, a peacock, and a different species of monkey. Finally, a sliver of the pink house just sneaks in at the very edge of the composition. An impressive project, the trio of panels condenses the tale into a more easily digestible though still chaotic non-chronological sequence that attempts to center the tale on marriage and marginalize motherhood as much as possible.

Though the scenes immediately identify themselves as a recreation of the Griselda tale, the hand that painted them remains elusive. Very little is known about the painter responsible for the panels, and much of what is known is still up to debate. The hand is known as The Master of the Story of Griselda, named after these panels, and many would like to identify his work as that of a named and established painter during a juvenile phase. I am not interested in challenging the identity of the painter or seeking to connect him with another painter, or even to identify other of his works for the sake of comparison. However, it is worth noting that these panels give the artist his name, and the artist's motivations remain completely out of reach, unlike the case of the multiple texts I have evoked in this project, the authors of which have well-established biographies for the most part. Of much more interest is the potential people and events for which the paintings were commissioned. The obscurity of the artist overlaps with a general cloud of mystery around the panels, but the available data at least leads to a recognizable patron.

The panel paintings, along with a second set of *spalliere* with a shared provenance, tenuously link to the double wedding of Spannocchi brothers Antonio and Giulio in January 1494. Children of Ambrogio Spannocchi, the banker of Pope Pius II Piccolomini, brothers Antonio and Giulio hosted an incredible ceremony and celebration (Nevola 142-3). The extravagance more than covered the pressures of two weddings, Antonio marrying a Sieneese woman Alessandra Placidi and Giulio a Roman woman Giovanna Mellini (Dunkerton et al. 6).

Vilmos Tátrai first connected the Griselda panels to the wedding, though with little evidence to support the theory, in 1979.¹⁵ It seems he bases the connection on two details from records of the wedding: one, that another story of Boccaccio's, IX.3 from the *Decameron*, was performed as part of the entertainment, and two, that a triumphal arch mimicking the one in the *Marriage* panel was erected as part of the decoration (Dunkerton et al. 6). Tátrai places the panels as a Spannocchi commission, a gift for one set of newlyweds, by drawing on features of the painting that recreate details of the wedding.

Though Tátrai's argument lacks a strength of evidence, more information about the objects' history has come to light in the years since that supports his intuitions. The Griselda panels may be linked to the Spannocchi family through a second set of *spalliere* that more explicitly connect to the wedding and to the panels. *The Magnanimity of Alexander the Great* and *Julius Caesar and the Crossing of the Rubicon* do not directly connect to the wedding in subject matter, but the presence of coats of arms identify the Spannocchi family as the patrons (figs. 6-7). Alexander the Great's tent sports the Spannocchi coat of arms with the addition of the Piccolomini *stemma*, which the Spannocchi family had incorporated into their own coat of arms with the Piccolominis' permission (Dunkerton et al. 7). A passage from Giorgio Vasari's 1568 biography of Domenico Ghirlandaio, which describes a series of paintings completed by Ghirlandaio and Bastiano Mainardi for the palazzo degli Spannocchi, points to the two panels as coming from their workshop (Dunkerton et al. 7). The attribution also makes it possible to cautiously date the two works to 1493 or 1494, when all hands active in the painting were alive

¹⁵ See V. Tátrai. "Il Maestro della Storia di Griselda e una famiglia senese di mece- nati dimenticata," *Acta historiae artium Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, vol. 25, 1979, pp. 27-66.

and still working together, a date that coincides with the creation of the Griselda panels (Dunkerton et al. 7).

The pictorial evidence that affirms the Spannocchi family as patrons of the two panels around the time of the 1494 wedding also applies to the three Griselda panels, which in turn bolsters Tátrai's argument. The liveries of the servants in two of the Griselda panels match the Spannocchi colors, as well as match the garments of the servants in the *Alexander* painting, linking the trio not only to the Spannocchi family, but also to the panels confirmed as a 1494 commission of the same family (Dunkerton et al. 7). In the *Marriage* panel, two servants on either side of the horseback Walter wear multicolored hose, one leg in red for the Spannocchi family and the other split between silver-white and blue with a band of gold to represent the Piccolomini. The hose also appears on the servant who attends the newly reunited family on the left side of the table in the *Reunion* panel. Throughout, Walter, and at times Griselda, also wear red and gold, repeating the colors of the Spannocchi clan. The shared provenance of all five panels forges the last link of connection between them (Dunkerton et al. 6). At least for now, the Spannocchi family represents the best candidate for patronage, the wedding of 1494 a catalyst for the commission.

The formal qualities of the panels also hint at possible locations within the Spannocchi home. There is not enough evidence to say exactly which room of the palazzo degli Spannocchi the paintings might have been installed, but it is reasonable to identify all five of the *spalliere* with Vasari's description and with the 1494 double wedding. At least for now, we can guess that the Griselda panels, with the obvious theme of marriage, were meant for one or the other newlywed couples and would have hung in their bedroom. Centering the first panel on the marriage reinforces the occasion for the commission and focuses the story through the

relationship of the married couple. Though the exact room remains unknown, the panels likely hung in a bedroom, based on their size and shape (Dunkerton et al. 4). Their presence in a bedroom also indicates a narrow, private audience. Like the several textual authors of the *Griselda* tale, The Master manipulates the essential details of the plot to massage the meaning into something meant for a new bride. In centralizing the double marriage plot – marriage, divorce, and reunion – the panels sideline the more troubling parts of the narrative, especially *Griselda*'s forced abandonment of her children. With its future viewer in mind, The Master carefully balances the picture of marriage towards a favorable view. The result is a messy, mixed-up version of the *Griselda* tale that follows no clear chronological structure, which shifts the focus of the overall work to making thematic comparisons. The composition willingly and obviously throws off the stricture of time, despite the importance of time in the text, in order to remake it.

The atemporal attitude comes through most obviously in the first panel, which then sets the example for the next two. The panel first nudges the viewer to read the total composition from left to right, but the first panel immediately disrupts this possibility. Reading the *Marriage* panel from left to right, one encounters *Griselda* in her poor, smock-like blue dress balancing a water jar on her head when she and Walter first meet face-to-face. Continuing to the middle of the composition takes the eye to the marriage scene between *Griselda* and Walter, where she already appears in her new rich garments provided by her husband as a sort of reversed dowry. At this point, it seems possible that the stripping/reclathing scene could simply not be depicted at all and left to the imagination as unnecessary to this presentation of the tale. This option is quickly dismissed however when the eye wanders to the right side of the panel, in which *Griselda* stands naked, her blue dress and rough smock discarded on the ground in front of her

and her new clothes, which match her dress in the intervening marriage scene, draped over the arm of a nearby attendant.

Though the sequence appears from left to right as meeting, marriage, stripping/reclotting, the narrative sequence must occur as meeting, stripping/reclotting, and marriage. The painter actively chooses to center the panel on the marriage vows rather than the reclotting, the first sign of reorganization. Suddenly, the first phase of the story centers on a happy scene of marriage, the poor girl enriched with the gilded clothes of her new master, rather than the public act of humiliation Walter institutes by having Griselda undressed in full view – not even by her own hands, but by ladies of his court, another detail not included in this illustration. By recontextualizing the stripping scene especially and generally moving the story outside of a timeframe, the Master disrupts the tale's logical unfolding in favor of privileging the celebratory marriage scenes.

The Master also employs repetition as a technique of revision. To cover the wide breadth of narrative scenes, the same figures often appear multiple times within one panel engaged in different parts of the narrative but not separated by any structures other than blank, intervening space. Griselda especially, who progresses through a series of distinct costume changes, seems to splinter into multiple versions of herself as she assumes and reassumes different identities across the same continuous spaces. Hauntingly, her naked body coexists with the body dressed in Walter's signature red and gold. The different versions of each figure grapple for the viewer's attention, claiming primacy mainly through size. The Master makes Griselda's motherhood her least important identity by rendering the abandonment scene in the littlest detail possible within a panel that centers on divorce. The painting does illustrate Griselda giving up her children, but it makes the choice to minimize it and to leave Walter absent from those scenes, showing only

Griselda, the infant, and the sergeant who carries it off. The composition also places these scenes in the background, so small that one art historian actually missed it all together, thinking the children were entirely absent from the painting.¹⁶ The Master of the Griselda Story does not go so far as to entirely excise the children from the story, proving my point that their presence is essential to the plot and meaning of the tale, but he works hard to characterize the marriage as mostly a happy union. On the other hand, the fact of its reluctant inclusion demonstrates that the children are essential to the tale. In the context of the whole, the proliferation of characters allows for husband and wife to be everything at once, carving out room for the double-speak present in the textual tradition.

While he cannot escape the presence of the children, the Master does further minimize their importance to the plot by eliminating another scene that foregrounds their importance. The Master entirely omits the scene in which Walter's subjects approach him and ask that he marry for the sake of providing an heir. The scene exists in every textual version of the story, and it is essential to the plot for initiating Walter's marriage with Griselda as well as essential to the story's significance for justifying Griselda's role as mother. Yet, the Master chooses to show the bachelor Walter hunting in the background in lieu of the entreaty of his subjects. He emphasizes the leisure and enjoyment of bachelorhood to highlight the seriousness of the husband's commitment, but he does so by excluding motherhood. The erasure of the supplication scene indicates a shrinking away from the role of children and motherhood in the story of Walter and Griselda's marriage.

¹⁶ See Ellen Callmann, "Subjects from Boccaccio in Italian Painting, 1375–1525," *Studi sul Boccaccio* vol. 23, 1995, pp. 19–78. In her evaluation of the painting, she mistakenly remarks that both the birth and the removal of the children are missing from the narrative.

The positive parts of the story, in which the wife is treated kindly or rewarded, are always foregrounded at the expense of the darker scenes of Griselda's sacrifices, which get pushed to the margins and background across the panels. Therefore, the forced stripping is moved from the chronological center of the *Marriage* panel to the right side, the removal of the children is condensed into a single removal scene and placed in the back corner of the *Exile* panel, the second stripping scene is also pushed to the side in the same panel, and Griselda's challenge of cleaning the palace in preparation for the new bride appears in the margin of the *Reunion* panel. Indeed, if one were to look at only the central image in each panel, the story focuses almost entirely on marriage, showing the initial marriage between Walter and Griselda, their divorce, and the marriage banquet that reunites them and affirms their relationship. The middle scene, the focus of the *Exile* panel, may be a negative moment of the story, Walter's cruel test of feigned divorce, but the pose of the couple mirrors their grouping in the initial marriage scene, only now a figure comes between them bearing the divorce papers. The trio of panels rewrites the story to celebrate the strength of their marriage, slightly recasting the tests Walter implements to prove its strength. The edit still just fails however, because the painter can only minimize, but not fully omit, the forced separation of mother and child. Walter's cruelty still comes through, a terrifying warning to the new bride who wakes every morning to see these images on her bedroom walls.

In rewriting the story to focus on the marriage plot, The Master encourages identification of Walter with the groom and Griselda with the bride. While in most textual versions, the author/translator mirrors Walter, in the case of the panels, the patron, not the artist, takes on the posturing of Walter. While the livery of the servants in the painting helps identify a patron for the image, it also clearly positions Walter as the Spannocchi bridegroom. While the groom becomes Walter, the wife becomes Griselda, initiated into the noble family by the rites of

marriage. The third panel returns to the theme of marriage by centering on a wedding feast, as if the reunion of the family constitutes a repetition of the marriage ritual, not to mention a mirroring of the banquet that takes place at the actual Spannocchi wedding. While in some ways the Griselda story, a tale of a tried-and-true marriage, makes perfect sense as an image celebrating and commemorating marriage, the choice of subject is also disturbing, especially considering its place in the bedchamber for everyday viewing by husband and wife. In its comfortable contradictory position, the visual representation of the Griselda tale both blesses the marriage and bridal chamber with the exemplum of perfection and threateningly implies the husband's all-encompassing power over the woman's body and identity, so even her expected future motherhood falls under threat. The panels visually replicate and make obvious a trend difficult to see within the textual tradition of the Griselda tale.

Despite their overwhelming differences, the panels fall into conversation with the fresco, and they talk to each other much like the texts of the previous chapters do. They come from two different artistic traditions, one from Florence and one from Siena, one from the fourteenth century and one from the fifteenth, one a public fresco and one private *spalliere*. Together, they show the dangers of putting the Griselda tale into visual mediums, some of the themes being even more difficult to confront in image than in word. However, the dark material does not prevent an attention to the pleasant parts of the tale, nor the identification of the themes with real-life obstacles and everyday threats. The focus shifts between motherhood and wifedom as the artist anticipates either a maternal audience or a wifely one. Much like the dichotomy formed between Chaucer's text and his source material, a split approach to the tale governs the visual tradition.

To link the images back to the textual traditions of the previous two chapters, the visual traditions of the Griselda tale can be read in the same ways as the texts. The fresco, centered on the motherhood plot of abandonment and restitution, asks the viewer to read like a mother. Every woman who viewed the fresco could sympathize with the mothers in the image as mothers themselves, whether past, present, or future. Any mother who had not already found themselves in need of the confraternity's services might need to turn to them in the future. Though not the Griselda tale, the image brings to life a Griselda tale, one more legible to everyday mothers by visualizing the motherhood plot. On the other hand, the Griselda panels attempt to conceal Griselda's motherhood as much as possible without excising it completely. As the groom identifies with Walter, Griselda's motherhood carries little value in comparison to her wifedom, which the panels visually reflect. The pair of artworks finally uphold the viability of the reading traditions established through the textual versions of the tale, demonstrating another form of reading like a mother.

Conclusion

I have traced the evolution of the Griselda tale throughout four texts and two images, arguing throughout that motherhood lies at its center, no matter how desperate her translators are to sideline it. By no means does the collection of works under discussion here constitute the complete Griselda corpus of either text or image. I have omitted, for example, an in-depth discussion of one of Chaucer's most significant source materials, Philippe de Mezieres' French *Le Miroir des dames mariées*. He too falls into the trap of emphasizing marriage to the point of nearly excluding motherhood, and I maintain that Chaucer's Clerk represents an original reading of the Griselda text.

Nor does the popular fascination with the Griselda tale stop within the time period on which I focus. Early modern minds continued to play with the figure of Griselda, in many ways continuing to work within the traditions I recognize in medieval versions of her story. Most famously, Griselda appears in William Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*. As Petruchio embarks on his mission to tame Kate and turn her into a proper wife, he predicts to her father, "For patience she will prove a second Grissel" (Shakespeare II.i.312). In the passage leading up to the Griselda reference, Petruchio positions himself as Walter, seeing something of value in Kate hidden to the outside world and laboring over her so as to reveal it. Though a brief allusion, Griselda, or Grissel, makes an apt comparison of two marital relationships. The puzzle of the Griselda tale continued to draw especially literary minds through the Early Modern period, but her attraction began to fizzle out soon after.

Importantly, the next generation of Griselda translators remained stuck in the same box of marriage as their predecessors. The Shakespeare example applies the Griselda allusion to an unmarried woman, still distant from potential motherhood but verging on marriage. It is

understandable that Griselda's motherhood would be neglected considering the ways in which her original authors attempt to minimize it. In this project, I have attempted to rehabilitate Griselda's motherhood by following the example of Chaucer's Clerk in reading like a mother. From this vantage point, we can briefly return to the texts for their representations of motherhood.

In the *Griselda* tale, motherhood stands for three things. First, a mother is selfless. She gives up her own meaning in order to reflect the meaning imposed on her by others, not necessarily as a manifestation of weakness but as an act of sacrifice. Having sacrificed her own needs, the mother carves out space for the careful development of the identities of others. *Griselda* demonstrates selfishness in affirming Walter's identity and mothering him through personal crises. As a text, the *Griselda* tale's flexibility nourishes the various interpretative meanings assigned to it. As an unfortunate side effect, *Griselda*'s own motherhood rarely comes into view, but its ability to come and go only marks the maternal nature of the text more deeply. The maternal body always gives way to the creation of further bodies.

Second, a mother feels deeply. She embodies feeling, always physically experiencing the emotions belonging to herself and those around her. She thus provides a gateway into sympathy, a window into sharing the experience of feeling with others. *Griselda*, I believe, experiences an intense love for her children, but she does not occupy a space in which she can express it. She instead allows the feelings of love, pain, and grief to live on inside her body until the reunion with her children provides a vent for her stored emotions. As the Clerk picks up on feeling like a mother, he gives voice to some of *Griselda*'s pain and appeals to the women in the audience to feel with him in solidarity. Her steadfastness testifies to her selflessness that extends to self-control, not to a lack of emotion.

Finally, a mother never stops being a mother. The death of the child does not signify the end of the mother in the way that divorce signifies the end of the wife. The physical and emotional changes enacted by motherhood stay on the body, a permanent mark. No matter how the Griselda text is manipulated, the mark of motherhood remains visible. With her children gone, Griselda turns the force of her mothering on her husband, but even when he sends her away, she maintains a physical and emotional maturity ingrained by the experience of motherhood. The qualities of a mother remain near invisible within the Griselda text if her translators dodge scrutiny. If, however, we look to the margins, we find Griselda's motherhood patiently waiting in the wings until it is needed in the service of some larger point.

I do not mean to completely undermine the tradition of reading the Griselda tale as a story about marriage, only to critique it for eclipsing and occluding motherhood. A true mother, Griselda allows for the appropriation of her body for meanings not entirely natural to her. I want only to remember where Griselda's story truly starts – with the birth of her daughter – and ends – with an embrace of both her children. Kittredge's argument for including the Griselda tale in the marriage group fails only because it leaves her motherhood behind, instead of allowing it to enrich the character of her wifedom.

I have recovered her motherhood throughout the work of Boccaccio, Petrarch, and the husband-narrator of *Le Ménagier de Paris*, arguing that though the translators push away motherhood, it remains a strong presence in the inherently maternal text. To combat the problematic trend of the translator mirroring Walter, I turn to Chaucer's Clerk, who chooses to occupy a Griselda-like position to understand the text instead. Finally, the text meets the image when fresco and panel paintings reveal a similar dual narrative around motherhood in the visual tradition. Motherhood anchors the Griselda tale across time, space, genre, and medium, a

constant thread of flexibility. Through a practice of reading like a mother, Griselda emerges through abuse, trauma, and grief with her maternal body still intact, still legible to those who wish to see and sympathize with her as mothers themselves.

Appendix: Images



Figure 1. Niccoló Gerini and Ambrogio di Baldese. *The Abandonment and Restitution of Children*. 1386, Museo del Bigallo, Florence.



Figure 2. Copy of *The Abandonment and Restitution of Children*. 1777, Museo del Bigallo, Florence.



Figure 3. Master of the Story of Griselda. *The Story of Patient Griselda, Part I: Marriage*. 1494, National Gallery, London.



Figure 4. Master of the Story of Griselda. *The Story of Patient Griselda, Part II: Exile*. 1494, National Gallery, London.



Figure 5. Master of the Story of Griselda. *The Story of Patient Griselda, Part III: Reunion*. 1494, National Gallery, London.



Figure 6. Domenico Ghirlandaio. *The Magnanimity of Alexander the Great*. 1493-4, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Figure 7. Francesco Granacci and Domenico Ghirlandaio. *Julius Caesar and the Crossing of the Rubicon*. 1493-4, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

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