FIVE GENRES IN THE *CLERK'S TALE*

by Francis Lee Utley

Ich bin der Tag, ich bin der Tau,
du aber bist der Baum. . . .
So kam ich und vollendete
dir tausendeinen Traum.
Gott sah mich an: er blendete . . .
Du aber bist der Baum.
Rilke, *Verkündigung*

Adam lay I-bowndyn, bowndyn in a bond,
fowre thowsand wynter thowt he not to long;
And al was for an appil, an appil that he tok,
As clerkis fyndyn wretyn in here book.

Ne hadde the appil take ben, the appil taken ben,
ne hadde neuer our lady a ben heuene qwen;
Blyssid be the tyme that appil take was,
Ther-for we mown syngyn, 'deo gracias!'
MS. Sloane 2593

Despite its avowed simplicity, no modern man or woman responds with unmixed feelings to the *Clerk's Tale* or to its predecessors. At first glance the tale seems too narrowly exemplary for us, and almost every commentator has been in some measure apologetic. Yet the tale of Griselda has engaged the matured artistry of the three greatest writers of the fourteenth century, and retained its popularity until the nineteenth or even the twentieth centuries, in verse, oral tale, written prose, drama and opera.[1] The account of Petrarch's first two readers in Padua, one of whom wept at the tale while the other sternly controlled his feelings, is unique testimony to medieval audience response.[2] It protects us against the cruder charges of those who abhor the affective fallacy (though perhaps not against the

1. See the bibliography in an article by William Bettridge and Francis Utley, "New Light on the Origin of the Griselda Story," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language,* 13 (1971), 153-208.
2. The major study is by A. S. Cook, "The Two Readers of Petrarch's Tale of Griselda," *MP,* 15 (1917-18), 633-43. See Ernest H. Wilkins, *Petrarch's Later Years* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), p. 244.

more subtle ones),[3] and it assures us that at least one reader was without the cynicism and libertinage of Dioneo, who is Boccaccio's surprising teller of this idealistic tale. No modern man, whatever his feelings, can brush the story under the rug, for its appearance within the works of the fourteenth century *terna* was in no case by chance. Boccaccio allowed it to crown his *Decameron* as the tenth novel of the tenth day, a day when magnanimity is exalted; Petrarch selected it from that triumphal setting, though he had misgivings about the morality of the *Decameron* and even more about its use of the vernacular, and turned it into the language of humanism and moral example; Chaucer gave it a place in the Marriage Group of his Human Comedy or, if you prefer, his Ideal Society or his Spiritual Pilgrimage, his City of Man and City of God.

This will not be the first essay to claim that understanding the *Clerk's Tale* helps to qualify one as a modern who has some grasp of that elusive object, the medieval mind or, since history is a fundamental part of modernity, as one who knows his own time better through diachronic depth. Though written in deceptively simple language, the tale has a quite complex set of appeals and meanings. Its genres may be described as twofold and as threefold. Two are functional: it acts as an important scene in the Canterbury drama, and it acts as an exemplum of patience, wifely, human, and cosmic —as a part of morality and as a part of theodicy. Three define levels of meaning: the fairy tale, the real world or novella, and the symbolic world or anagogic figura. In my view, which in some measure differs from Robert Jordan's intriguing new case for the non-organic nature of medieval narrative,[4] Chaucer conceived these functions and levels with conscious purpose, and if the unconscious amply aided him it was because it is the basic drive which furthers man's ultimately rational intentions. We cannot probe the iceberg beyond a few frozen meters, though we ignore its subaqueous immensity at our peril, but the signs of conscious art we can assess—here more than ever because of the splendid evidence we have of source and accurate text, from Boccaccio through Petrarch's Latin and its anonymous French translation to Chaucer's own dramatic poem.[5] I view

3. Bernard I. Duffey, "The Intention and the Art of the Man of Law's Tale," *ELH*, 14 (1947), 181-93.
4. Robert M. Jordan, *Chaucer and the Shape of Creation* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967); Arthur K. Moore, "Medieval English Literature and the Question of Unity," *MP*, 65 (1968), 285-300. See my review of Jordan, *MLQ*, 30 (1969), 284-91.
5. J. Burke Severs, *The Literary Relationships of Chaucer's Clerkes Tale* (New Haven and New York, 1942).

the functions as encapsulating, linking and reinforcing the levels of meaning: drama provides the broader matrix for the individual tale with its meanings and exemplary point, exemplum pushes us beyond the underworld and middle-earth to heaven. No meaning is complete without the other: the subjective and wishful reality of the fairy tale; the objective and "bumpable" reality of the feudal and domestic world, the then and the now; the ultimate reality of God's universe and His Paradise.

To George Lyman Kittredge we owe the major form of the dramatic theory.[6] His brilliant insight, which I with temerity venture to call "new critical," gained widespread acceptance from his formidable philological reputation. Its orthodoxy is assured, if orthodoxy means ubiquity and pedagogical appearance. It has suffered onslaughts, most notably from Clifford Lyons,[7] who thought it overplayed the hypothetical character of the actors and accepted the illusion of reality for reality (How many children had Lady Macbeth?), and from James Sledd, who claimed it ignored the monsters and monstrosities of the tale.[8] Its major sequelae, however, were merely confirmatory, one-up-manlike; they came from scholars who were so taken by the idea of the Marriage Group that they tried to extend it beyond the boundaries of Robinson's well-attested manuscript trio, Fragments DEF,[9] and to amplify the completeness of the "complete and highly finished act in the Human Comedy" which Kittredge affirmed. Had one time, one might show hundreds of echoic links beyond those advanced by Kittredge to bind together his tales about marital sovereignty; one could play the sedulous ape, the epigone to his inspired selection. Or, haunted by those embarrassing "interludes," the Friar's, Summoner's, and Squire's Tales, one might consider linking themes beyond the sovereignty: order, rhetoric, and gentilesse. One might accept extension of the basic theme beyond the borders of the DEF fragments, to the Second Nun's Tale,

6. George Lyman Kittredge, "Chaucer's Discussion of Marriage," *MP*, 9 (1912), 1-33; see also his *Chaucer and His Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass., 1927). For recent assertions of the dramatic principle see Thomas H. Jameson, "One Up for Clerks," *Arts and Sciences—New York University Bulletin*, 65 (1965), 10-13; Richard A. Lanham, "Chaucer's Clerk's Tale, The Poem, Not the Myth," *Literature and Psychology*, 16 (1966), 157-65.
7. "The Marriage Debate in the Canterbury Tales," *ELH*, 32 (1935), 252-62.
8. "The Monsters and the Critics," *MP*, 51 (1953-54), 173-82.
9. Henry B. Hinckley, "The Debate on Marriage in the Canterbury Tales," *PMLA*, 32 (1917), 292-305; William W. Lawrence, "The Marriage Group in the Canterbury Tales," *MP*, 11 (1913), 247-58; Donald R. Howard, "The Conclusion of the Marriage Group: Chaucer and the Human Condition," *MP*, 57 (1960), 223-32.

or to the Nun's Priest's Tale which would, if we accept the Bradshaw shift, precede the authoritative and experienced Wife of Bath.[10] One might note, as I have in *The Crooked Rib,* that "Chaucer assigns his most bitter attacks on women to the exponents of experience, Wife of Bath, Host, and Merchant, and his defense to the bookish and idealistic Clerk and the sanguine Franklin."[11] Or one might note the ironic distancing of all the tales of the group: the Wife's by the blend of ferly and reality in its opening lines and by its mock-Arthurian setting, the Clerk's by the paradoxical moral at the end ("Grisilde is deed, and eek hire pacience") and the Italian provenience; the Merchant's by the same and by the very medieval gods Pluto and Proserpine in the garden, Venus and Hymen at the wedding; and the Franklin's by its many ways of covering reality with appearance, by its sweet and delusive "Epicurean" blindness, and by its pretense of being a "Breton lay." But all of this is merely to gild the Kittredgean lily.

Our real problem is the dramatic function of the *Clerk's Tale.* Long before the Marriage Group Boccaccio had used it to unify his own answer to mortality, his lesson of "sapere vivere." The present view that Chaucer never saw the *Decameron* needs, I think, to be reexamined,[12] but whether we can or cannot make the case for an actual knowledge of the Italian work, the two collections and their intent and unity both can shed much more light on one another than present views allow.[13] For some time it has been orthodox to say

10. For Pratt see "The Order of the Canterbury Tales," *PMLA,* 66 (1951), 1141-67; for a confrontation see Lee Sheridan Cox, "A Question of Order in the *Canterbury Tales," Chaucer Review,* 1 (1967), 228-52.
11. (Columbus, 1944), nos. 303, 58, 261, 339.
12. F. L. Utley, "Some Implications of Chaucer's Folktales," *Laographia,* 22 (1965), 596-97; for the temporary disposal of the old view that Chaucer did use the *Decameron* see Willard E. Farnham's "England's Discovery of the Decameron," *PMLA,* 39 (1924), 123-39; he leans towards the old view himself in "Chaucer's Clerk's Tale," *MLN,* 33 (1918), 193-203.
13. For Chaucer see Ralph Baldwin, *The Unity of the Canterbury Tales* (Copenhagen, 1955). The search for unity and central meaning in the *Decameron* has an extensive recent bibliography. See, for instance, A. Lipari, "The Structure and Real Significance of the *Decameron," Essays in Honor of Albert Feuillerat* (New Haven, 1943), pp. 43-83; Charles Singleton, "On Meaning in the *Decameron," Italica,* 21 (1944), 117-24; Lipari, "On Meaning in the *Decameron," Italica,* 22 (1945), 101-08; Giovanni Getto, *Vita di forme e forme de vita nel Decameron,* 2nd ed. (Torino: Petrini, 1966), ("sapere vivere"); Aldo D. Scaglione, *Nature and Love in the Late Middle Ages* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1963); Charles S. Singleton, "The Uses of the Decameron," *MLN,* 79 (1964), 71-76; Joan M. Ferrante, "The Frame Character of the *Decameron;* A Progression of Virtues," *Romance Philology,* 19 (1965), 212-26.

that Chaucer took the five or six tales he shares with the *Decameron* (Reeve, Merchant, Franklin, Clerk, Shipman, possibly Pardoner) from other sources, oral and written, and that Boccaccio's rejection of his most famous work in the 1360's means that it would not have been available to an Italian visitor like Chaucer in the 1370's. Yet Boccaccio copied the book with his own hand in that very decade,[14] and the book was certainly available to Chaucer—whether or not he saw it is a matter for another study. The physical fact of direct sight and borrowing is not half so important as the remarkable parallels between these two artists, both deeply rooted in the Middle Ages but flowering meaningfully into the Renaissance. Both secure the tale of Griselda firmly within their divergent dramas. If Chaucer's *Tales* are a spiritual pilgrimage, overarched like life in its infinite variety by the celestial Jerusalem, they are more comic and more human than the pilgrimages of Deguilleville, less homely and singly purposed than that of Bunyan. So too, if Boccaccio's major theme is that of nature and of love, his hundred tales with all their anti-clericalism and questioning of the singleness of God's chosen people have more ambivalent spirituality than is often recognized. Despite its fictive teller's cynicism, the climactic tenth novel of the tenth day contributes to the morality and spirituality of the collection.[15]

But if the *Clerk's Tale* recalls the drama of the *Decameron,* it also recalls the exemplary Latin version of Petrarch, from which it, with some help from the French, is taken. Boccaccio knew plenty of exempla, and perhaps his major stance towards them is that of the mock-didactic moral. In his so-called "hundred and first tale," inserted by the intrusive narrator into the Proem of the Fourth Book,[16] he borrows a well-known exemplum of the boy raised without sight of

14. Vittore Branca and Pier Giorgio Ricci, *Un autografo del Decameron* (Padova, 1962). See the reviews by Roberto Weiss, *Times Literary Supplement,* Nov. 2, 1962, p. 847 and by Vincenzo Pernicone, *Belfagor,* 18 (1963), 583-94. The MS. in question is the long-known Berlin Codex Hamilton 90. Weiss rejects any assumption that this could have been a MS copied for Petrarch by Boccaccio; for a contrary argument see Michael R. Campo, *TLS,* January 18, 1963, p. 47.

15. Scaglione, p. 71, calls it a *tour de force.*

16. Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron,* ed. Vittore Branca (Firenze, 1965), pp. 452-55; *The Decameron of Giovanni Boccaccio,* tr. Richard Aldington (New York, 1962), pp. 247-99. In future notes these will be cited as Branca and Aldington. On the antecedents of the story and its sequels see A. C. Lee, *The Decameron: Its Sources and Analogues* (London, 1909), pp. 110-16. See *The Exempla of Jacques de Vitry,* ed. T. F. Crane (London, 1890), pp. 37-38, no. 82; *An Alphabet of Tales,* ed. Mrs. Mary M. Banks, EETS, OS 126 (London, 1904), I, 119, no. 120.

woman. When the inevitable happens, and he sees his first one, his spiritual father tells him she is a goose. The boy just loves geese, of course. In the exemplum, which has a sober moral, the geese are less humorously devils. Told by Jacques de Vitry, John of Damascus, John Herolt, Odo of Ceriton and the *Scala Celi,* the exemplum is preacher's evidence of the fallen nature of man—of concupiscence. For Boccaccio it is evidence of the all-powerful nature which he is asserting against his detractors. "If you (ladies) were above everything else pleasing to a young hermit, a youth without feelings, a sort of wild animal, will my critics blame me if I, whose body was by Heaven made most apt to love you and whose soul has been disposed thereto since my childhood, should feel the power of the light of your eyes, the sweetness of honied words and the flame lighted by piteous sighs. Will they blame me if you are pleasing to me, and if I strive to please you? The moral is mock-didactic, or at least unorthodox, like the sardonic mock-moral Dioneo adds to *Griselda:* "What more is to be said, save that divine souls are sometimes rained down from Heaven into poor houses, while in royal palaces are born those who are better fitted to herd swine than to rule over men? Who but Griselda could have endured with a face not only tearless but cheerful, the stern and unheard-of tests imposed on her by Gualteri? It would perhaps not have been such a bad thing if he had chosen one of those women who, if she had been driven out of her home in a shift, would have let another man so shake her fur that a new dress would have come of it."[17]

No doubt this Dionysian part of the drama was one of the levities the ladies blamed, and Petrarch disliked, in the *Decameron.* Boccaccio's sober friend did everything he could to turn it back to a true exemplum. By extracting it from the drama, and giving it some such title as "De Insigni Obedientia et Fide Uxoris," Petrarch moved the tale towards morality and sobriety.[18] Those like Griffith who have argued for a fairy-tale origin for the story have rejected the exemplary label,[19] and as far as origins are concerned the rejection is correct, for it does not appear in any of the exemplum collections before Boccaccio. Yet I submit that Petrarch and Chaucer after him made the tale exemplary in spite of the Märchen and Boccaccian

17. Aldington, pp. 631-32.
18. The title is from Severs, p. 254. For a translation of the text (pre-Severs) see Robert D. French, *A Chaucer Handbook* (New York, 1929), pp. 291-313.
19. Dudley D. Griffith, *The Origin of the Griselda Story* (Seattle, 1931), pp. 14-15. Griffith says it never appeared as an exemplum, but compare Elfriede Moser-Rath, ed., *Predigtmärlein der Barockzeit* (Berlin, 1964), pp. 69, 74.

models. Such views as that of Heninger that the *Clerk's Tale* reflects the hierarchical concepts of order prevalent in the Middle Ages are essentially a combination of the genres of drama and exemplum: the lusty Wife, outrageous in her defiance of authority both in the interpretation of Scripture and in the practicum of marriage, set against the shy Clerk, obedient to Harry Bailly's "yard," upholder of academic and scholastic discipline for himself as well as for others, and praiser of constancy or patience for woman and for mankind. By this account "The Clerk's Tale . . . has overtones which make it more than just another point of view in a Marriage Group."[20] Order, in short, is both human and cosmic in meaning, and this squares with our view, to be later discussed, that the exemplary nature of the story of Walter and Griselda forms the bridge between human reality, human ideality, and God's purpose.

To some extent these two genres of drama and exemplum are a part of the story's outer frame; hence it is time to turn to the levels of meaning within the story, to levels both genetically created and hierarchically proper. The first of these is the fairy tale. The orthodox view is that of Dudley Griffith, who picked up earlier hints by Kittredge and Manly and presented an able argument for the notion that Boccaccio's apparently sourceless tale was derived from a subgroup of the Cupid and Psyche tales (Aarne-Thompson Tale Type 425) in which "as a test under the tabu, children are taken away from the mortal" spouse.[21] Wirt Armistead Cate and J. Burke Severs[22] accepted the view with little change. Perhaps the final orthodoxy is attested to by Norman Lavers, who joins it with another orthodoxy, Freudianism: "In fact, I believe the key to Walter's treatment of Griselda (as with Cupid's treatment of Psyche) can be found in (1) Walter's tendency to sadism, (2) the conflict between his desire and dread of incest, and (3) one last element which I think can be demonstrated, his morbid fear of death."[23] Perhaps

20. S. K. Heninger, Jr., "The Concept of Order in Chaucer's *Clerkes Tale*," *JEGP*, 66 (1957), 393-95; Donald C. Baker, "Chaucer's Clerk and the Wife of Bath on the Subject of Gentilesse," *SP*, 59 (1962), 631-40; R. M. Lumiansky, *The Dramatic Principle in the Canterbury Tales* (Austin, Texas, 1955), pp. 141-51; D. W. Robertson, Jr., *A Preface to Chaucer* (Princeton, 1962), pp. 375-76.
21. Griffith, p. 23.
22. "The Problem of the Origin of the Griselda Story," *SP*, 29 (1932), 389-405; Severs, pp. 4-7.
23. "Freud, The Clerkes Tale, and Literary Criticism," *College English*, 26 (1964), 180-87. See note 6 above for Lanham's answer. Though Lavers casually mentions Otto Rank along with other Freudians, and includes incest among his charges against Walter, he is apparently unaware of Rank's

this is the inevitable end of the folklorist's attempt to elucidate the "monsters" of the tale by an origin study, though as a devotee of that method I would hope otherwise.

Actually Griffith and Cate offer many insights into the tales of Boccaccio and of Chaucer, but their theory of genesis needs modification. In research soon to be published, William Bettridge and I have sought to use the products of an intervening thirty-five years in folklore scholarship to clarify the issue of origins. We agree that the source was some sort of oral tale, rather than an incest myth, a solar myth, a true history, a bit of autobiography, an Indo-European survival, or a mystic Franciscan exemplum. Griffith's conclusion was that it was a "rationalization" of the Cupid and Psyche or Monster Bridegroom tale (Tale Type 425), in which the episodes or motifs of tabu or promise, abduction of the children, vanishing of the enchanted bridegroom, tasks of the searching wife and her three nights in bed purchased from the second wife, and reunion with husband and children are transformed by the elimination of the supernatural. Thus they become in order the rigorous Marquis's demand of and Griselda's promise of obedience without murmur, the Marquis's supposed sending away of their two children to their deaths, the divorce, the request that Griselda attend the second wife, and the discovery that the wife is really her daughter and reunion all round. Such an hypothesis provides at least fairy-tale sanction for the Marquis's monstrosities and for Griselda's unmaternal submission. It clarifies the argument beyond Schofield's muddled thinking, which made Griselda into a folktale *fée*, as though *fées* were at the mercy of a mortal man,[24] and it provides a set of unconscious reinforcements for the real life tale, of which we shall speak later.

Today we are fortunate in having a vastly more cohesive body of data than was possible for Griffith or Cate with their serendipitous and casual methods of gathering evidence. Cupid is a poor equation for Marquis Walter, for he (like the Monster Bridegroom) is in no sense cruel, but as much the victim of cruel Venus's immortal snobbery as Psyche is. Boccaccio's motives for the supposed transforma-

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earlier study, "Der Sinn der Griselda-Fabel," in *Der Kunstler und andere Beiträge zur Psychoanalyse des dichterischen Schaffens* (Zurich, 1925), pp. 85-104. See the answer to this essay by Kate Laserstein, *Der Griseldisstoff in der Weltliteratur* (Weimar, 1926), pp. 1-5. Rank has an earlier version in *Psychoanalytische Beitrage zur Mythenforschung* (Leipzig and Wien, 1919).

24. H. B. Hinckley, *Notes on Chaucer* (Northampton, Mass., 1907), pp. 184-85; William H. Schofield, *English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer* (New York, 1906), p. 193.

tion are hard to square with the results or with his narrator Dioneo's cynical treatment of the tale. When one says an author borrowed a story from an oral source one usually assumes that it is a source from his own country, one which he learned either at his grandmother's or nurse's knee or heard from some countryman. Certainly this is not the case with Tale Type 425, of which Jan-Öyvind Swahn has collected over 1100 versions.[25] The crucial element of the abduction of the children, of which both Cate and Griffith make so much, is wholly absent from Spain, France, or Boccaccio's own Italy. In Monster Bridegroom tales it mostly appears in Northern Europe, especially in Scandinavia, and though one could posit a visiting Dane who conversed in Latin with our Florentine humanist, or a lost literary link to Scandinavia, our whole conception of Boccaccio's transforming an unrationalized Mediterranean folktale flies out of the window, hypothesis uncontrolled by fact.

Much closer to Griselda is a Greek and Turkish tale, The Patience of a Princess, in which a prince or padishah, desiring a wife who has great patience, marries a poor girl who lives up to his specifications.[26] One by one he takes away their children on the pretext that he will eat them, announces he will marry another wife, and sets all right when the wedding turns out to be that of his eldest son. Here we have the testing, the spiriting away of the children, the divorce, second wife, and happy solution—all of the elements of the western Griselda story. Whether this tale, usually classified with Tale Type 887 (Griselda), which Bettridge has shown to be derivative from Boccaccio or Petrarch through chapbook intermediaries, is a source or derivative is not certain; it is certainly a striking parallel which diverges from the other 60 versions of the Type.[27] There can be no doubt, however, of *Griselda's* folktale credentials, which might include a much larger group of analogues: the Ogre Schoolmaster, the Three Golden Sons, Our Lady's Child, Eustace-Placidas, Marie de France's *Lai del Fraisne* and its ballad cousin *Fair Annie*, the Substitute Bride, the Maiden Without Hands, Crescentia and Genevieve, the Clever Peasant Girl, King Thrushbeard, the Taming of the Shrew, as well as Griffith's Monster Bridegroom.

The literary *Griselda* corresponds well to the general "epic laws

25. *The Tale of Cupid and Psyche (Aarne-Thompson 425 & 428)* (Lund, 1955).
26. Wolfram Eberhard and Pertev Naili Boratav, *Typen Turkischer Volksmärchen* (Wiesbaden, 1953), no. 306.
27. His study, *Griselda: Aarne-Thompson Tale Type 887: Analogues of Chaucer's "Clerk's Tale"* (Ohio State University diss., 1966) is being revised for publication, and he has generously allowed me to use many of his results.

of folk narrative" which Axel Olrik drew up in 1909—the slow opening and controlled ending, the repetition by threes (two children abducted and a second wedding), the confining of major scenes to two actors, the polarization (Walter and Griselda), the single-stranded narrative, the fairy tale logic and the concentration on a single central character (Griselda).[28] Add to this the simplicity of style, especially notable in Chaucer's version, and one has a fairy tale without exterior but with plenty of interior mystery. The results are something like that of the very sophisticated *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* to which, as another test-story, *Griselda* is often compared.[29]

Strict comparative folktale study is one realm of truth; the assessment of a fairy tale's obscure influence on a literary derivative is another. In such an assessment Griffith, unbound by the antecedent data but liberated by the Boccaccian text, is able to speak of "survivals"[30] which are clues to the chthonic and otherworldly level of our tale. Griselda dwells near a wood, which is often the portal to another world; she is espoused near a fountain, another bridge to Fairyland; much is made of her clothes, the abandonment of her old rags and the acceptance of rich new robes on her wedding and the "magical return to her old clothes" and her indigent (mortal) father;[31] she participates in a "folk wedding ceremony"; she is miraculously transformed into a noblewoman and leader of men; she shows inordinate patience at her children's loss, of the kind owed by a mortal spouse to an immortal; her children are miraculously returned; and she resumes her royal robes. But above all, Griffith believes Cupid and Psyche explains Walter's sternness or even cruelty, which

28. Alan Dundes, *The Story of Folklore* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1965), pp. 129-91, with a translation.

29. J. A. Burrow, *A Reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (New York, 1966), pp. 164-66; John Gardner, tr., *The Complete Works of the Gawain-Poet* (Chicago, 1965), pp. 71, 345: "The poet plays the milieu of the fairy tale against the conditions of life and thus comically contrasts life as it ought to be and life as it is."

30. Griffith, pp. 111-13.

31. Compare a similar use of clothes in Gower's *Florent* (an analogue of the *Wife of Bath's Tale);* here there is the ironic remark that the Loathly Lady looked no better after she was reclothed by the fastidious ladies; see W. F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster, *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales* (Chicago, 1941), p. 233. Clothes have many roles—as a sign of pride, see Sister Mary Raynelda Makarewicz, *The Patristic Influence on Chaucer* (Washington, D.C., 1953), pp. 198, 201; as a sign of the initiation of a nun, see Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago, 1960), p. 99; as signs of the old and the new life, see Morton Bloomfield, *Piers Plowman: A Fourteenth-Century Apocalypse* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1961), pp. 48, 107-08, 209.

has been the stumbling block on which modern readers have usually come to grief. To Griffith, Walter is simply a capricious immortal lover, and whether his cruelty is his own or that of an Oedipal witch like Venus, his actions are unaccountable on the purely mortal level. Though I myself find pleasure in genetic reconstruction, which is only temporarily out of fashion, perhaps it is not fairytale genesis which counts, but the capacity of the medieval and the modern audience to abandon for a moment the moral criteria of real life—the demonstration of a world of wish and projection in which our mortal ethics is completely displaced.

That Walter, and in turn the too patient Griselda, are stumbling blocks to modern critics is clear enough. Nevill Coghill,[32] for instance, likes the folklorist R. M. Dawkins' suggestion that the tale of Griselda is in some fashion tied to the Ogre Schoolmaster story with its cruel hero, and that Boccaccio, Petrarch, and Chaucer tried to humanize the tale in their various ways. Muscatine thinks the poem a connoisseur's piece, "very little apprehended, much condemned, and almost never analyzed."[33] To Lounsbury, Griselda is an unrealistic mother, weak-spirited and despicable.[34] Firm and righteous nineteenth-century standards, indeed! Root finds the Marquis "essentially selfish, a spoiled child. . . . Even when all is over, he feels no particle of remorse; he has restored to her her children and the incomparable blessing of his own love."[35] Perhaps Leigh Hunt caught our (and Chaucer's) ambivalence better by speaking of "this divine, cruel story."[36]

Valuable as the fairy tale level is to explain Walter's cruelty and the simple contrasts of the story, a defender must in some measure reckon with a second level of reality, of earth as opposed to middle-earth in our fairy tale lives. Once more, the modern reader, less willing to accept the canons of submissiveness for women current in the Middle Ages, needs to recreate the medieval milieu. Despite the claims, broadly humorous and ironically conceived, of the Wife of Bath, there is nothing impossible about this marriage. We need not make it a true history as some have sought to do, or even a relic of Indo-European custom. We must simply conceive the tale in its setting of medieval society, dominated religiously and civilly by hier-

32. *The Poet Chaucer* (London, 1949), pp. 139-40.
33. *Chaucer and the French Tradition* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1957), p. 191.
34. *Studies in Chaucer* (London, 1892), III, 340.
35. *The Poetry of Chaucer* (Boston, 1922), pp. 261-62.
36. "The Seer," quoted in Percy V. D. Shelly, *The Living Chaucer* (Philadelphia, 1940), p. 11.

archy on every side, by the principle of order present in many a secular poem from *Beowulf* through *Gawain* to the *Knight's Tale.*[37] From the Wife of Bath we have heard St. Paul's admonitions to the Corinthians (I Corinthians 7:4) that husband and wife owe each other the marriage debt. But she has carefully suppressed the other assertion, apropos of a woman veiling herself in prayer: "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God" (11:3). Despite St. Paul's benevolent qualifications warning a husband against indifference or cruelty, and the celibate's goal of perfection which rules marriage out entirely ("he that giveth her in marriage doeth well; but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better"—7:38), it is clear to Paul that in a stable world the husband must be the master. If we surmise for a moment that St. Paul was too stern or too remote to dominate a fourteenth-century story, we may call upon one of Boccaccio's own *donne,* Emilia, as she begins tale nine of the ninth day of the *Decameron.* "Merrily, she says, 'Amiable ladies, if the nature of things is sanely examined, we may easily perceive that the whole mass of women are subjected to man by nature, by custom and by the laws, and that they are bound to submit to the discretion of men. Therefore, every woman who desires peace, rest and comfort, ought to be humble, patient and obedient to the man to whom she belongs, as well as being chaste, which is the chief and special treasure of every wise woman.'" Thus Boccaccio has reaffirmed the point through one of the sweetest of his characters, the lovely and "flatterable" Emilia; he has established the marital hierarchy among his exponents of triumphant nature, a conception as powerful to him as concupiscence and the imperfections of normal human nature were to St. Paul and most medieval men.[38]

Obedience runs like a thread throughout Chaucer's version of the tale and its dramatic setting: the Clerk's obedience to the Host; the Marquis, headstrong and making conditions but ultimately obedient to his people; the formal and proper request to Janicula for his daughter's hand by the wilful and haughty Marquis; Janicula's own feudal emotions ("That reed he wax; abayst and all quakynge / He stood" [E 317-18]); Griselda's speedy acceptance of the test promise and her rigorous carrying out of the conditions. All of these mirror the ideal feudal pattern, set in religious sanction:

37. F. L. Utley, "Folklore, Myth, and Ritual," in *Critical Approaches to Medieval Literature,* ed. Dorothy Bethurum (New York, 1960), pp. 92-94.
38. *Decameron,* tr. Aldington, p. 554.

For, sith a womman was so pacient
Unto a mortal man, wel moore us oghte
Receyvn al in gree that God us sent. . . .
(1149-51)

The ironic Envoy admits that there are few Griseldas, but it in no manner denies that there should be many, in all stages of imperfection.

Chaucer's tale is an endpoint, and the realism which surrounds the feudal ideal began in Boccaccio and continued in Petrarch. It is most notable in the manipulation of the character of Walter, which grows in depth before the eyes of the comparing reader.[39] Realistic touches abound: Walter's obsession with hawking and hunting (81) is the very essence of a courtly youth. Psychologically real also is his dignified statement that he and not the people will choose his bride (148-64)—in very contemporary terms he has "found his identity." Both of these touches are found as well in Boccaccio and Petrarch. Chaucer does sharpen the point with dramatic dialogue when he describes the "universal bewilderment" of the people waiting for news of his choice:

Wol nat oure lord yet leve his vanytee?
Wol he nat wedde? allas; allas, the while!
Why wole he thus hymself and us bigile?"
(250-52)

The visually arresting touch of Griselda spinning as she guards the sheep (223) is also in Petrarch; the other homely touch of her performing her chores and drawing water from the well appears in all three authorities, and functions, as we shall see, on all three levels of fairy tale, real world, and anagogic figure. But only Chaucer catches the full reality of the peasant girl, full of eager innocence and the desire to see the new bride, to watch the parade—an eagerness which proves to be dramatically ironic:

Grisilde of this, God woot, ful innocent,
That for hire shapen was al this array,
To fecchen water at a welle is went,
And cometh hoom as soone as ever she may;
For wel she hadde herd seyd that thilke day

39. Laserstein, pp. 12-22; Reinhold Köhler, *Kleinere Shcriften zur erzählenden Dichtung des Mittelalters* (Berlin, 1900), II, 534.

The markys sholde wedde, and if she myghte,
She wolde fayn han seyn som of that sighte.

She thoghte, "I wole with othere maydens stonde,
That been my felawes, in oure dore and se
The markysesse, and therfore wol I fonde
To doon at hoom, as soone as it may be,
The labour which that longeth unto me;
And thanne I may at leyser hire biholde,
If she this wey unto the castel holde."

(274-87)

Petrarch slips in one small phrase (not in Boccaccio) to describe the Marquis, "cogitabundus," which Chaucer preserves as "thoughtful." Since he follows order and custom by asking to see the girl's father, he is not acting impetuously but following a reasoned plan; that we must admit, whether we like the plan or not. In Boccaccio he is still the abrupt (not the ideal) feudal lord, who asserts to the father that he will marry Griselda; in Petrarch and Chaucer he preserves the courtesies:

If that thou vouche sauf, what so bityde,
Thy doghter wol I take, er that I wende,
As for my wyf, unto hir lyves ende.

(306-08)

And he stresses the feudal ties. With dramatic irony the "lyves ende" foreshadows the pretended divorce and tells us in advance it is a mere ruse, for if we have been astute we know the marriage will last.

In Boccaccio, Walter is courteous as well to Griselda, but he asks no test question. Petrarch, one stage removed from the Märchen matrix, has him ask: "will you be prepared, with consenting mind, to agree with me in all things; so that you dispute my wish in nothing, and permit me, with mind consenting, and without remonstrance of word or look, to do whatever I will with you?"[40] Once more the Marquis's character is protected from the charge of impetuosity; we are in the presence of a well-thought-out experiment. Chaucer preserves Petrarch's note and reinforces it with a "collacion" between Janicula, Griselda and himself as a social sign of his acceptance of these inferiors before the law:

40. French, *Chaucer Handbook*, pp. 296-97; Severs, p. 264.

I seye this, be ye redy with good herte
To al my lust, and that I frely may,
As me best thynketh, do yow laughe or smerte. . . .
(351-53)

Readers or hearers catch the echoes of the marriage ceremony: "for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness, and in health, to love, cherish, and to obeye, tyl death us depart, according to goddes holy ordynaunce. And thereto I geue thee my troth."[41] Griselda responds with the proper "right so wol I."

There are many other realistic touches, to outweigh the monstrosities which critics have so often, from their modern observation point, cited. To the cruel Marquis of abstraction and the unmaternal Griselda we may oppose the emphasis on her cooking for her father (a Chaucerian addition, 227); the careful measurement of her wedding clothes in advance by "a mayde lyk to hire stature" (257, from Petrarch); her pale face (340, a Chaucerian addition) when the Marquis makes his unexpected request; the disgust of the highborn ladies as they touch her clothes (375, again in Chaucer only). We righteously say today no proper mother would have let her children go, even when the test-pattern was so solemnly set up, but her kissing them and lulling them and "crouching" them all ring true (547-74), as does her request that they be buried as protection against ravenous bird or beast (571-72). Another detail, selected at random: when she returns home after the supposed divorce Janicula covers her with "hire olde coote," and it fits no longer (911-17).

We have observed the Marquis's thoughtfulness and courtesy and care of custom. Throughout the tale Chaucer, with help from Petrarch and the French anonymous translation, moves us away from the Boccaccian roughness of character. Walter's gravity, the mildness of his bachelor levity, his knowledge of the noble art of hunting, his delicacy, his prudence (427), his "routhe" as he carries out the conditions of the test and takes the daughter (579), his "drery contenance" (671) when the second child is taken, his suffering as the people call him cruel (722-35)—all of this is evidence that he moves by compulsion rather than by impetuosity:

But nathelees, for ernest ne for game,
He of his crueel purpos nolde stente;
To tempte his wyf was set al his entente.
(733-35)

41. *The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward VI* (London, 1949), p. 412.

Petrarch had spoken of his constant testing of Griselda as "mirabilis quedam quam laudabilis (dictiores iudicent) cupiditas," a difficult remark, perhaps to be translated "a desire more strange than laudable—so the experienced may decide."[42] When the sergeant hands over the daughter to the Marquis, "paternal pity touched the marquis to the heart" ("vehementer paterna animam pietas movit").[43] Or, as Chaucer has it: "Somwhat this lord hadde routhe in his manere." Yet, driven by the thrust of the experiment, he continues in his rigorous purpose. Again, when the son is about to be taken, Walter, on Griselda's obedient words "caste adoun / His eyen two . . ./And forth he goth with drery contenance" (668-71); yet within he joys at the evidence of his wife's constancy. Thus he is no demon who wants the test to turn out for evil. Neither Chaucer nor Petrarch can remove the compulsion, yet they both seek sympathy for him. We may disapprove the experiment, but it ill behooves an age which is tested every year or so by the psychologists *ex cathedra* to speak too harshly of an age which saw some good in moral testing. All three writers allow the Marquis to be surprised at Griselda's patience, and to question her love for her children—unkindest cut of all (687-700). Walter's cavil is surely ironically intended to banish any assumption that she is not a loving mother, and we should heed the implication of the three poets.[44] His compulsion and her patience are both richly associated with dramatic reason, with the realism of complexity of motive; the acts are simple but the motives are complex.[45]

Both Petrarch and Chaucer add to the compulsion (691-721) even as ugly rumors spread among the people, whom the Marquis had somewhat speciously invoked as enemies to the peasant strain in Griselda and her children. Yet he must continue with his third test, the divorce, the threat of a new bride, and demand her service at the wedding. Now all begins to press towards a happy ending, with Petrarch and Chaucer tightening Boccaccio's narrative so that there

42. French, p. 229; Severs, p. 268.
43. French, p. 301; Severs, p. 272.
44. Root, p. 259, insists her first duty was to her children. This may not square, even today, with Italian views of a wife's duty.
45. J. M. Morse, "The Philosophy of the Clerk of Oxford," *MLQ*, 19 (1956), 3-20, would judge the Marquis and Griselda's acts in the light of *philosophical* realism, which is being attacked by the Clerk, a moderate nominalist. According to Donald H. Reiman, "The Real Clerk's Tale; or, Patient Griselda Exposed," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 5 (1963), 356-73, Griselda and her patience are both being satirized. These both seem to me to be *tours de force.*

will be no doubt of the outcome. This is most manifest in the displacement of the arrival of the Count of Panik with the children (939-52). There are exemplary touches in Boccaccio: "Griselda, it is now time that you should reap the reward of your long patience, and that those who have thought me cruel and wicked and brutal should know that what I have done was directed towards a predetermined end, which was to teach you to be a wife, then how to choose and keep a wife, and procure me perpetual peace so long as I live with you."[46] A modern man would not say it exactly that way, but we must in some sense recognize the Marquis's realistic concern over the interpretation of his motives. Petrarch intensifies the touch of humanity: "Let all know, who thought the contrary, that I am curious and given to experiments, but am not impious: I have tested my wife, not condemned her; I have hidden my children, not destroyed them," and once more he mentions the "experiment" as an excuse for neglecting Janicula.[47] Chaucer mellows all this exemplary talk, and drops the "experiment" no matter how useful it might have been for him in his Clerk's war with the Wife of Bath. Only a remnant remains:

> I have doon this deede
> For no malice, ne for no crueltee,
> But for t'assaye in thee thy wommanheede,
> And nat to sleen my children—God forbeede!
> (1073-76)

In all three writers there is natural rejoicing, but Chaucer with his usual appeal to the affections, bestows on Griselda a swoon and a lengthy speech. There follows reunion and the comment on the story. To Boccaccio's Dioneo the story contrasts the Marquis's cruelty with Griselda's heavenly patience, and Griselda's virtue in a shift with the ladies who trade lust for a new dress. Petrarch raises the moral tone by urging the lesson not merely of steadfastness in marriage but also of steadfastness before God, who tempts us not but proves our virtue. Chaucer adopts Petrarch's moral, but adds that the son married happily and did not put his wife "in greet assay," for the world is no longer so strong. And finally we have the dramatic surprise as the Clerk enters upon his ironic defense of women, his now open assault upon the Wife of Bath.

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46. *Decameron,* tr. Aldington, p. 632.
47. French, p. 310; Severs, p. 286; and Laserstein, pp. 12-22.

Despite the momentary charge against Griselda made by the Marquis, that she showed more patience than a mother should, critics abuse her less for this than for being too ideal a portrait, and thus unrealistic. Yet Chaucer follows his sources and intensifies them in stressing her reality: her strong character before marriage as she cares for her old father, her dignified acceptance of the proposal of marriage as contrasted to Janicula's confusion, her skill as peacemaker and furtherer of the common profit, her strong control over tears at her various trials, her silence in adversity, with the authenticating occasional sharpening of retort:

> I have noght had no part of children tweyne
> But first siknesse, and after, wo and peyne.
> (650-51)

Though the Marquis thinks her unmaternal, we know the appearance is not the reality. At the act of divorce and the greeting of the new bride her dignity increases. Only with the reversal and recognition, the happy ending, does the floodgate of her emotions open; we see the powerful control which had held them closed in adversity.

As all three authors admit, there may not be many Griseldas today —she is exemplary rather than real, with not merely patience but with all the virtues.[48] Yet Chaucer, with some help from his models, does everything he can to make her "real" and "probable." Such reality and probability, we must remember, are literary devices and not states of actual being. Lady Macbeth has only as many children as the author says she has, no more and no less. The most striking touch of all, which Chaucer sharpens from his predecessors, is the famous oblique rebuke to the Marquis when he asks her opinion of the new bride. Since we know the truth about that bride, there is much dramatic irony in the statement, the more so since the Marquis has too often appealed to the blemish on his children from the low-born mother:

> O thyng biseke I yow, and warne also,
> That ye ne prikke with no tormentynge
> This tendre mayden, as ye han doon mo. . . .
> She koude nat adversitee endure
> As koude a povre fostred creature.
> (1037-43)

48. Makarewicz, p. 197; Eugene E. Slaughter, *Virtue According to Love in Chaucer* (New York, 1957), pp. 206-07, 232.

The excluding moral fits the concept of gentilesse which the Clerk in his special way shares with the Wife of Bath; it reduces our intolerable annoyance with her unbelievable patience; thus it can be viewed both as realistic and as exemplary. Griselda's Parthian shot to the Marquis would have been realistic and resolving to a medieval man; though to us perhaps it is pathetic and empathetic.

Perhaps with some help from the French crib, Chaucer has both medievalized Walter and Griselda and deepened their pathos and realism; he has been less the partisan for Griselda than he had been for Criseyde, who had suffered from Boccaccio's autobiographical concerns. The pathos has been questioned by Bertrand Bronson, who believes that Chaucer's "moral judgement is suborned by the pathos of her lot" and that the ironic envoy "serves as a genuine, though unconscious, repudiation of the false morality that the poet was forced by the story to espouse."[49] Perhaps, but it should be noted that the story was ironic already in Boccaccio, less so in Petrarch, and that Chaucer returns in this final note to his ultimate original, Boccaccio.[50] Boccaccio indeed is a strange mixture of pathos, realism and cynicism; one presumes our modern enthusiasts for the narrative *persona* might assign the pathos to the author and the cynicism to Dioneo.[51] The pathos as well as the cruelty of the tester is implicit in the story; it cannot be removed, though it can be intensified. But Chaucer, though addicted here and in the *Man of Law's Tale* to increasing the pathetic potential,[52] is no culprit of distortion. The "real" world contains both cruelty and pity.

The Clerk's Tale is no longer a "simple form" such as the folklorists speak of;[53] it is a drama, an exemplum, a fairy tale, and a novella with elements of realism to balance the heritage from these other forms; it combines folk imagination with the most powerful

49. *In Search of Chaucer* (Toronto, 1963), pp. 104-05, 112.
50. Severs, pp. 125-34, has argued against the use of the *Decameron* by Chaucer even as a secondary source.
51. For pathos see Aldington, pp. 627 ("intolerable things"), 628 (his subjects think he has killed his children and blame him severely), 630 ("These words were a dagger in Griselda's heart"), 631 (the ladies beg Walter to give Griselda a dress); for cynicism pp. 624 ("his silly brutality, although good came of it"; "He was wifeless and childless. . . . wherein he was probably very wise"), 625 (dangers in marriage), 633 (the cynical conclusion).
52. See note 3.
53. Kurt Ranke, "Einfache Formen," in Internationaler Kongress der Volkerzählungsforscher in Kiel und Kopenhagen: *Vorträge und Referäte* (Berlin, 1961), pp. 1-11; for a discussion of this essay and the work of Jolles and Bausinger see F. L. Utley, "Oral Genres as Bridge to Written Literature," *Genre,* 2 (1969), 91-103.

artistic thought of the fourteenth century. Chaucer retains the drama and the realism of Boccaccio and the exemplum of Petrarch; he adds to the pathos but does not distort his originals in so doing. But he had one more dimension to add to the story, and this is the symbolic level. Essentially it is his alone, though it calls upon the iconographical traditions of the time in full measure.

Twenty years ago, when I first argued this symbolic level,[54] the search for allegory in a poem so well-known and commented upon seemed dangerous subjectivism, but today allegory is with us more often than some of us may wish it to be. A number of scholars and critics have seen, dimly or clearly, how Chaucer recognized the parallel between Griselda and the Blessed Virgin and reinforced it. The first of these, too often forgotten, was Sister Rose Marie,[55] who cites the "oxes stalle" as allusion both to the Nativity[56] and to the "ecce ancilla" of the Annunciation, reflected in the scene at the well. She was thus the first really to catch the symbolic lights of religion that play about this moral poem. Speirs, whose insights are usually pagan and "anthropological," finds that the poem is built not on "the rational mediaeval world of dogmatic intellectual belief, but the world of mediaeval Christianized folk-belief; the folk, in credulous innocence and naive wonder, confront a miracle." He saw the significance of ox-stall and well; the Marquis is "God calling the soul." "The religious aura is not generated by the facts of the tale; the mediaeval religious atmosphere has worked its way in."[57] From 1952 to 1968 a roster of scholars touch in one manner or another upon such a view: Preston, Makarewicz, Muscatine, Salter, Robertson, Huppé, McCall, and Miller.[58] Perhaps the most quotable of these is Elizabeth Salter:

54. At the Modern Language Association, English Section I, in 1948.
55. "Chaucer and His Mayde Bright," *Commonweal,* 43 (1940-41), 225-27.
56. Hinckley, *Notes on Chaucer,* p. 193, notes the allusion but carries it no farther. Severs, p. 245, notes Chaucer's originality in introducing the three references to the *oxes stalle,* but does not draw the obvious conclusion.
57. John Speirs, *Chaucer the Maker* (London, 1951), pp. 154, 179.
58. Raymond Preston, *Chaucer* (London, 1952), p. 252; Makarewicz, pp. 197-98; Muscatine, pp. 195-97, 268; Elizabeth Salter, *Chaucer: The Knight's Tale and The Clerk's Tale* (Great Neck, N.Y., 1962), pp. 45-46; Robertson, pp. 82-83 (cites William of Newburgh and Augustine on the Blessed Virgin apropos of Griselda's "vertuous beautee"); Bernard F. Huppé, *A Reading of the Canterbury Tales* (Albany, N.Y., 1964), pp. 143-46, 260-69 (Abraham, Job and Mary); Robert P. Miller, "Allegory in *The Canterbury Tales,*" in *Companion to Chaucer Studies,* ed. Beryl Rowland (Toronto, 1968), pp. 280-81 (Rebecca and Mary). Robertson's student Graham G. Landrum, in his unpublished Princeton dissertation of 1954, *An Interpretation of the Clerk's Tale,* derives Griselda's name from "battle-maid" and compares her to the good woman of Proverbs and to the Church Militant. He also compares

> Each detail—the threshold, the waterpot, the oxstall—has been added by Chaucer, and has much more than visual importance. The religious symbolism of the whole passage is strong. Griselda steps over the "threshold" into a new and hazardous existence; she sets aside the emblem of her peasant life, so full of hard necessity, rigorous simplicity, to enter into a more sumptuous and more taxing world. The ox-stall, which is the immediate background to her momentous act of submission to the Marquis's offer of marriage, shows us the qualities she brings to the approaching trial—charity, humility, a capacity for suffering. The effect is similar to that of many mediaeval Nativity pictures, in which the Holy Family forms a visual and symbolic link between the rough stable with its innocent animals, and the elaborate obeisance of earthly monarchs. But if mediaeval artists let their imaginations run riot in painting the wealth which confronted Mary and the child, Chaucer here keeps his in check.

Faced by such a party of supporters for the identification of Griselda with the Virgin, it may seem supererogatory to provide some of the documentation I have collected over the years to forestall the charge of subjectivism. Yet, since the quarrel of some of us with current use of patristics and iconography has concerned its casual use of evidence,[59] it seems wise to show that in some cases there can be absolutely no question of the exegesis available to the *homme moyen exégètique* of Chaucer's time. Our use of the material will not be as "irony" but as open symbol, and the veils to be rent will not be opaque but translucent. The Bible had its obscurities, which Augustine sought to clarify; but Chaucer needed nothing beyond the plain and obvious typology of the fourteenth century to give strength and power to Griselda, the patient wife, the obedient Christian soul, the obedient and patient handmaiden, the imitation of the Blessed Virgin.

Griselda's father was

> povrest of hem alle;
> But hye God somtyme senden kan
> His grace into a litel oxes stalle.
> (205-07)

Walter to Christ and the second bride to the Church Triumphant, but the Blessed Virgin gets no mention. Robert O. Payne, *The Key of Remembrance* (New Haven, 1963), pp. 162-66, describes the story as a "saint's legend"; Bertrand Bronson, *In Search of Chaucer*, p. 108, stresses biblical echoes and biblical simplicity; but both of them, consciously or unconsciously, avoid the equation with the Blessed Virgin.

59. See F. L. Utley, "Robertsonianism Redivivus," *Romance Philology*, 19 (1965), 250-60.

Griselda, when she went to see the Marquis's new bride, set down her waterpot, "Biside the thresshfold, in an oxes stalle" (291). The scene collapses the Annunciation and the Nativity into the eternal present; the technique is that of "simultaneous narration" common to Gothic art and to its sequels. Moderns may recall how T. S. Eliot's *Journey of the Magi* collapses by images like "three trees on the low sky" and "six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver" three massive events—the Nativity, the Betrayal, and the Crucifixion. Finally, Chaucer uses the image, consistently absent in his originals, for the third time:

> I seye that to this newe markysesse
> God hath swich favour sent hire of his grace,
> That it ne semed nat by liklynesse
> That she was born and fed in rudenesse,
> As in a cote or in an oxe-stalle,
> But norissed in an emperoures halle.
> (394-99)

Thus Chaucer's Clerk, who "noght o word spak he moore than was neede," added a significant detail to his Italian authorities. Rich with meaning, the ox and the ass link Old Testament and New: Luke's "laid him in a manger" with Isaiah's "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider" (Luke 2:7-16; Isaiah 1:3). Actually the animals themselves do not appear in the New Testament or in the Fathers (I have not checked fully all the latter). The famous inference from the manger turns up first in the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, which James dates eighth- or ninth-century A.D:[60] "the most blessed Mary went forth out of the cave, and entering a stable, placed the child in the stall, and the ox and the ass adored Him." By the later Middle Ages the equation which seems so inevitable to

60. M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford, 1924), p. 74; *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (Buffalo, 1886), VIII, 375, with references to Isaiah and to Habbakuk 3:2. For the bridge between Old and New Testaments see H. L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (München, 1922-61), IV. 2, 786; *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, ed. J. Skinner (Cambridge, 1951), p. 4; *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah*, ed. Arthur S. Peake (New York, 1912), I, 10. For other Christian legendary versions see *The Golden Legend*, tr. William Caxton (London, 1900-1931), I, 25; Durandus in J. B. Ross and M. M. McLaughlin, *The Portable Medieval Reader* (New York, 1949), p. 533; St. Justin Martyr, *The First Apology*, ed. Thomas J. Falls (New York, 1948), pp. 13, 102 (does not specifically link Isaiah to the Nativity); St. Jerome, *Epistola* 108, *PL*, XXII, 884-85.

all of us finds its place in carols,[61] novelle,[62] drama,[63] art,[64] and folklore.[65] The story is the essence of simple faith, as in Hardy's cry for faith in his Christmas poem *The Oxen.* Perhaps this is why so clear an icon is treated by Barbara Bartholomew as a "realistic" touch;[66] both then and now the real and the figural are perfectly blended.

Commentators have often noticed the unusual syntax of line 223: "A fewe sheep, spynnynge, on feeld she kepte." Since sheep could not spin except in grammarians' minds, Chaucer or his hearers would not have minded the dangling modifier. For the exemplum the crucial point is that "She wolde noght been ydel til she slepte," even if she had to do two jobs at once. Once more a realistic detail, this time present in both Boccaccio and Petrarch, becomes pregnant with special meaning in Chaucer's context: it reinforces both exemplary and symbolic levels. For the Blessed Virgin was likewise both a shepherdess and a spinster; she was also the paragon of industry, enemy of idleness. In many Annunciation pictures from the sixth century on she is shown spinning or weaving.[67] Here too the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* provides us with seminal texts. Joachim

61. Arthur Quiller-Couch, *The Oxford Book of Ballads* (Oxford, 1920), p. 458; Ray M. Lawless, *Folksingers and Folksongs in America* (New York, 1960), p. 600; Richard L. Greene, ed., *The Early English Carols* (Oxford, 1935), nos. 24, 19, 32, 34, 44, 46, 60, 71, 72, 78.
62. D. P. Rotunda, *Motif-Index of the Italian Novella in Prose* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1942), p. 61 (cites Bandello).
63. *Ludus Coventriae,* ed. K. S. Block, EETS, ES 120 (London, 1922), p. 328; *Chester Plays,* ed. H. Deimling, EETS, ES 62 (London, 1926), p. 178.
64. Wilhelm Molsdorf, *Christliche Symbolik der Mittelalterlichen Kunst,* 2nd ed. (Graz, 1968), no. 967; F. R. Webber, *Church Symbolism* (Cleveland, 1938), p. 72; George Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art* (New York, 1954), pp. 3-4, 22; John Ruskin, *Modern Painters* (London, 1929), III, 46-47; Charles R. Morey, *Early Christian Art* (Princeton, 1953), p. 116.
65. Maria Leach, *Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore Mythology and Legend* (New York, 1950), II, 839; Zanko, *La tradition de Tsiganes* (Paris, 1949), p. 37; Oskar Dahnhardt, *Natursagen* (Leipzig, 1909-12), II, 8, 12-16, 23-25, 35, 64, 88-95, 209, 277.
66. *Fortuna and Natura: A Reading of Three Chaucerian Narratives* (The Hague, 1966), p. 67.
67. F. Cabrol and H. Leclercq, *Dictionnaire de l'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie* (Paris, 1924), I, 2259-62; Morey, p. 116 (sixth century A.D.); Emile Mâle *L'Art réligieuse du xii^e siècle en France,* 4th ed. (Paris, 1940), pp. 46, 57-58 (catacombs, fifth century sarcophagus, Byzantine textile of Lateran), p. 286 (Clermont legend); Louis Réau, *Iconographie de l'art chrétien* (Paris, 1958), II.2, 179; III, 563-569; Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects* (London, 1927), I, 21, 96; Charles B. Lewis, "The Origins of the Weaving Songs," *PMLA,* 37 (1922), 148-49, 168; D'Hubert du Menoir, *Maria* (Paris, 1949), VI, 77, 103.

kept sheep; Mary was mature at a very early age. "She was so constant in prayer, and her appearance was so beautiful and glorious, that scarcely any one could look into her face. And she occupied herself constantly with her wool-work, so that she in her tender years could do all that old women were not able to do." She was appointed to weave the purple for the veil of the temple by the high priest: "Again, on the third day, while she was working at the purple with her fingers, there entered a young man of ineffable beauty. . . . And he said to her; Hail, Mary, full of grace. . . ."[68] In Germanic and other folklores Mary is equated with Freia as a spinner, and the classical Greek story of Arachne and Pallas Athena in the Middle Ages becomes that of a spider and the Blessed Virgin.[69] The parallel with the Norns is not forgotten; indeed, if we are to accept a Jungian interpretation, most Great Mothers are such spinners of fate.[70] Though the Marquis is the usurping male, feminine fortitude survives, and the victory is not merely patriarchal. Chaucer was not the only fourteenth-century author to see the importance of the pastoral touch; it is a major element in the French dramatic *Estoire de Griseldis* of 1395, a method of distancing the realistic and exemplary story akin to Chaucer's use of the Virgin.[71]

As we stress the humility of the Virgin and Griselda we must also recognize the analogy between the Virgin's Coronation and Griselda's

68. Roberts and Donaldson, VIII, 369-73; see also the *Protevangelium* on p. 363 (which takes the iconography back to the second century A.D.).

69. Dahnhardt, *Natursagen,* II, xi, 1-2, 253-55; Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1955-58), I, nos. A2231.5 and A2091.1; Jacob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology* (London, 1883), tr. James S. Stallybrass, III, xxxvii; compare the importance of "the spindle, the shuttle, and the needle" in *Grimm's Household Tales,* tr. Margaret Hunt (London, 1892), II, 317. For the Three Maries as spinners and fates see Matti Hako, *Das Wiesel in den europäischen Volksüberlieferungen,* FFC 187 (Helsinki, 1956), p. 90.

70. Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother* (London, 1955), tr. Ralph Manheim, pp. 227-33, plates 96-97 (a twelfth and a fifteenth century Annunciation); see Erich Neumann, *Amor and Psyche* (New York, 1956), pp. 155-56.

71. *L'Estoire de Griseldis,* ed. Mario Roques (Geneva, 1957), pp. 29, 41-47, 86, 98-100, 114. Philippe de Mezières, who is thought to be the author of *L'Estoire,* helped prepare a feast on the Presentation of the Virgin in 1373. See Elie Golenistscheff-Koutouzoff, *L'Histoire de Griselda en France* (Paris, 1933), pp. 45, 50. De Mezières was also engaged (*L'Estoire,* p. ix) with negotiations for the marriage of Richard II and Isabella of France—a possible link with Chaucer. The pastoral touch is also present in a Spanish dramatic version; see Hinckley, *Notes on Chaucer,* p. 194. For an illuminating series of illustrations to *L'Estoire,* including the waterpot and the spinning, see Roger S. Loomis, *A Mirror of Chaucer's World* (Princeton, 1965), pp. 152-60 (MS. Bibl. Nat. 2203).

swift conversion to a Marchioness efficient in political power and the ability to make the peace. It was this transformation which seemed quite improbable to Paull F. Baum, and a blemish on the poem.[72] Griselda after her marriage seems like one "norissed in an emperoures halle," an ironic contrast to her pathetic words about the second bride (1037-43). Thus she is a perfect image of the Queen and Empress of Heaven, Our Lady of Peace, our fountain of mercy:[73]

> Nat oonly this Grisildis thurgh hir wit
> Koude al the feet of wyfly hoomlinesse,
> But eek, whan that the cas required it,
> The commune profit koude she redresse.
> Ther nas discord, rancour, ne hevynesse
> In al that land, that she ne koude apese,
> And wisely brynge hem alle in reste and ese. . . .
>
> So wise and rype wordes hadde she,
> And juggementz of so greet equitee,
> That she from hevene sent was, as men wende,
> Peple to save and every wrong t'amende.
>
> (428-41)

Chaucer and his sources, especially Petrarch, by such passages exalt the peasant maiden and counter the charge of her passivity. And Chaucer sees the perfect analogy in the Crowned Virgin.

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72. *Chaucer: A Critical Appreciation* (Durham, N.C., 1958), p. 121.
73. The imperial upbringing is in Petrarch and in Boccaccio. For Griselda as ruler see A. S. Cook, "Chaucer's Griselda and Homer's Arete," *American Journal of Philology*, 39 (1918), 76-78. For the Blessed Virgin as Empress see John Arthos, *On the Poetry of Spenser and the Form of Romances* (London, 1956), p. 69; *The Bannatyne Manuscript*, ed. W. Tod Ritchie, Scottish Text Society, MS 22 (Edinburgh, 1928), p. 5; *The English Text of the Ancrene Riwle Edited from Cotton MS. Nero A. XIV*, ed. Mabel Day and J. A. Herbert, EETS, OS 225 (London, 1952), p. 177; *L'Estoire de Griseldis*, p. 65; Tauno F. Mustanoja, ed., *Les Neuf Joies Notre Dame: A Poem Attributed to Rutebeuf* (Helsinki, 1952), pp. 48-50; *The Pearl*, ed. E. V. Gordon (Oxford, 1953), line 454; *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* and *Protevangelium* in James, *Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 74; G. G. Coulton, *Five Centuries of Religion* (Cambridge, 1929), I, 140 (citing both Wyclif and an English Franciscan); Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, III, 47; *Golden Legend*, III, 26; Du Manoir, *Maria*, I, 603 ff.; H. A. Guerber, *Legends of the Virgin and Christ* (New York, 1897), pp. 26-27; Salter, p. 42; Mirella Levi d'Ancona, *The Iconography of the Immaculate Conception* (College Art Association, 1957), pp. 28-32. Note that Griselda herself is crowned, like the Virgin, in the *Clerk's Tale* (381), in Petrarch and in the French translation (Severs, pp. 264 ff.), as well as in Boccaccio, p. 626. Thus a lucky borrowed detail reinforces Chaucer's symbolic context.

To fix the typology Old Testament parallels are as important as New, and Chaucer does not leave us without them. Much has been made of the analogy of Abraham's patience before God's order that he sacrifice his only son Isaac,[74] and of the parallels to Job, which Chaucer imported into the tale, perhaps aided by a gloss to the Petrarchan version.[75] Job was an important masculine reinforcement to Griselda's feminine submission, an evidence of universality to counter the Wife's charge that all clerks are biased when they speak of women:

> Men speke of Job, and moost for his humblesse,
> As clerkes, whan hem list, konne wel endite,
> Namely of men, but as in soothfastnesse,
> Though clerkes preise wommen but a lite,
> Ther kan no man in humblesse hym acquite
> As womman kan, ne kan been half so trewe
> As wommen been, but it be falle of newe.
> (932-38)

This climaxes the fifth part of the *Tale,* just before Griselda's last and greatest test of humility and patience; it sideswipes the Wife of Bath; and it pays a proper tribute on a realistic and domestic level to Griselda, as an anticipatory counter to the satirical Envoy and disclaimer at the end of the poem, which Chaucer had found in Petrarch and the French:

> This storie is seyd, nat for that wyves sholde
> Folwen Grisilde as in humylitee,
> For it were inportable, though they wolde;
> But for that every wight, in his degree,
> Sholde be constant in adversitee
> As was Grisilde; therfore Petrak writeth
> This storie, which with heigh stile he enditeth.
> (1142-48)

74. Bronson, *In Search of Chaucer,* p. 108; Luigi Rosso, *Lettere critiche del Decamerone* (Bari, 1956), pp. 305-67; Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition,* p. 193; Francesca De Sanctis, *History of Italian Literature* (New York, 1959), I, 337.

75. J. Burke Severs, "The Job Passage in the *Clerkes Tale,*" *MLN,* 49 (1934), 461-62; Bronson, p. 108; Muscatine, pp. 194, 196; Makarewicz, p. 201. Both Abraham and Job are exempla of patience and poverty in *Piers Plowman;* see W. W. Skeat, ed., *The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman* (London, 1886), I, 352 (C-Text).

Griselda is genuinely good, and women are likewise humble, as Job was, and as men in general ought to be in the sight of God. But hovering over the whole argument is the Blessed Virgin, Handmaid of God, who had likewise suffered the loss of her Child.

Most powerful iconographic allusion of all is what we may now call without blush the Annunciation passage in the *Clerk's Tale*. We have already seen how realistically the scene is set, with the naive peasant girl doing her chores so that she, with other maidens, may look upon the Marquis's new bride:

> And as she wolde over hir thresshfold gon,
> The markys cam, and gan hire for to calle;
> And she set doun hir water pot anon,
> Biside the thresshfold, in an oxes stalle,
> And doun upon hir knes she gan to falle,
> And with sad contenance kneleth stille,
> Til she had herd what was the lordes wille.
> (288-94)

On all levels the passage vibrates with meaning: well and water at the threshold of the fairy world, the realistic chores of the handmaiden, the "Lordes Wille" which responds to Gabriel's "Ecce, ancilla," a scene basic in Scripture and in Advent liturgy.[76]

76. The well appears briefly in Boccaccio and more fully in Petrarch, as a natural peasant touch; but both of them lack the significant resonance of "the Lordes Wille." The iconographic importance of the well is shown likewise in the stories of Rebecca and Rachel (Genesis 24:15-67 and 29:1-12), which become types of the Annunciation. For Rebecca and Eliezer at the well see Réau, *Iconographie*, II.1, 140; Molsdorf, no. 40; Timmers, pp. 223, 449; Charles B. Lewis, "The Origins of the Weaving Songs," *PMLA*, 37 (1922), 143-49, 168; G. G. Coulton, *Art and the Reformation* (Oxford, 1928), p. 261. See Preston, *Chaucer*, p. 202; Bronson, p. 108. For Mary at the well see *Protevangelium* in Roberts and Donaldson, VIII, 363 *(Protevangelium)* and 373 *(Pseudo-Matthew)*. Mustanoja, *Neuf Joies*, pp. 44, 48; Clara E. Clement, *A Handbook of Legendary and Mythological Art* (New York, 1873), pp. 187-88, 195; Réau, II.2, 178-79; Karl Kunstle, *Ikonographie der Christlichen Kunst* (Freiburg i. Breisgau, 1928), I, 166 ff.; Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols*, p. 44; X. Barbier de Montault, *Traité d'iconographie chrétienne* (Paris, 1890), 214, 218 (Milan sixth century and St. Marks twelfth century, described as the oldest icon of the Annunciation); Cabrol and Leclercq, *Dictionnaire*, I, 2242. For Rachel and Jacob at the well see Mrs. Anna Jameson, *The History of Our Lord*, I, 153-55; *A Critical Edition of John Lydgate's Life of Our Lady*, ed. J. A. Laurits et al (Pittsburgh and Louvain, 1961), p. 269. Another link between Rachel, the Blessed Virgin, and Griselda is the tears they shed over the loss of their children; see W. M. Temple, "The Weeping Rachel," *Medium Aevum*, 28 (1959), 81-86.

One might almost find a figure for Griselda in the *Ancren Riwle,* with its further romance of Mary. The High God loved a poor lady and tested her as the Marquis tested Griselda. Elsewhere this heroine, the Virgin, is praised for her taciturnity. She spoke in the Bible in all but four speeches: at the Annunciation (Griselda at the well), to John the Baptist in the womb, at the marriage feast in Cana (the two marriages of Walter), and when she had lost her son and found him again (the abduction of the children and their return).[77]

When Griselda responds to the "suspicious" steward who comes to take away her daughter, her tone is stoical, but her words also bear the pathos of Mary at the Cross:

> And thus she seyde in hire benigne voys,
> "Fareweel my child! I shal thee nevere see.
> But sith I thee have marked with the croys
> Of thilke Fader—blessed moote he be!—
> That for us deyde upon a croys of tree,
> The soule, litel child, I hym bitake,
> For this nyght shaltow dyen for my sake."
> (554-60)

Both Petrarch and the French have the "crouching" or sign of the cross, but Chaucer has expanded it and added the explicit allusion to Crucifixion and Atonement. So with the Virgin Mother, Griselda takes on immense stature, that of the Universal Mother, Picasso's patient women.[78] There is no harm in reconciling modernity and medievalism; that was exactly what the medieval figura was supposed to do.

The parallel to Mary is then complete. Perhaps the tentative remarks of earlier scholars may owe something to the embarrassment we have in equating the Marquis with God. Such an equation is not wholly necessary, for the Marquis perhaps "tempts" when God merely "tests." The theodicy is questionable if we push it to extremes; God's seeming cruelty cannot equal the Marquis's human cruelty, even when that is tempered as we have suggested above by our humanizing authors. There is a mystery of enforced suffering in the poem of Griselda which no mere man could engineer and no man

77. *Ancrene Riwle,* ed. Mabel Day and J. A. Herbert, pp. 33-34 (Our Lady's Silence), 97 (her testing), 172 (God's humble bride).
78. Mary casts her roseate light of patience on the *Prioress's Tale,* the *Man of Law's Tale,* the *Second Nun's Tale,* and the *Retractation* as well. See Coghill, pp. 134-35, 219-20.

can explain.[79] Some may cavil at the unsteady symbolism or even suspect blasphemy in the interpretation here so insistently argued. Isaiah, speaking plainly to Israel, has the answer: "For thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is his name. . . . For the Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth" (54:5-6). Or we may call on the Jewish and Christian allegories of the Song of Songs, which saved that *hieros gamos* for medieval poetry and even for the blasphemous parody by January in the *Merchant's Tale.*[80] Indeed, the equations we have been urging make the "olde lewed wordes" of January, "How fairer been thy brestes than is wyn! / The gardyn is enclosed al aboute. . . (E 2141-42), an inspired echo of the sacred bonds of the *Clerk's Tale.*

Thus the extremity of Walter's unlovely actions and Griselda's unmaternal reactions are tempered by the transcendent imitation of Mary. Our concern over the extremes misses the Augustinian assurance: "The law of the gospel is . . . not to recoil from an opportunity which offers itself to the Christian for proving his loyalty to the party of God by a decision forced upon him in a given situation. It is important to notice in this ethical precept the absence of all considerations as to the end or purpose of a moral act."[81] For the act of a Christian of the Middle Ages is set within the divine order, within a Chain of History, within a frame which tempers the extremity by the divine *telos.* "The place of a narrowly limited or defined end of action is taken by an infinite series of historical events, sent and predestined by God in the course of time with the express purpose of offering to his children opportunities to prove their loyalty, i.e. to act morally, or to fail to do so."[82] Griselda's fairytale patience functions surely enough on the realistic levels of medieval marriage, of filial duty, of political talent, but it also functions on the anagogic level.[83] Much of the intellectual force of this functioning is present in Petrarch as well as Chaucer, but his exemplum fails

79. Howard Patch, *On Rereading Chaucer* (Cambridge, Mass., 1939), p. 253; Salter, pp. 39-41; Paul G. Ruggiers, *The Art of the Canterbury Tales* (Madison and Milwaukee, 1965), pp. 240-41.
80. Song of Songs *passim;* Isaiah 54:61-62; Matthew 25. For medieval examples see *Ancrene Riwle,* ed. Day and Herbert, pp. 177-82; the morality to Tale 20 in the *Gesta Romanorum,* ed. Charles Swan (a Märchen moralized, Aarne-Thompson Tale Type 461, The Devil With the Three Golden Hairs); the prose *Wooing of Our Lord* in an Ancrene Riwle MS—see Albert C. Baugh, *A Literary History of England* (New York, 1948), p. 134, note 13.
81. Hans H. Glunz, *History of the Vulgate in England from Alcuin to Roger Bacon* (Cambridge, 1933), p. 7.
82. Glunz, p. 7.
83. Muscatine, p. 194.

to scale Chaucer's cosmic heights. There has been much debate whether Griselda's major virtue was patience or constancy,[84] since modern apologists prefer the stronger sounding virtue, constancy. But the Middle Ages thought differently, and Griselda's patience, enshrined as we have seen in all the other virtues, is both the true meaning of the exemplum and the proper epithet for the lady, as tradition shows.[85] No shameful virtue, it inspires not only the Pearl Poet's *Patience,* but his *Sir Gawain* and Langland's *Piers Plowman* as well. Our fear of it may be a part of our modern malaise.

The philosophical Clerk has transmuted the marriage moral of the Marriage Group to a universal Christian and cosmic moral, and his reserves of humor open us then to his ironic envoy, a defense of women which is the mirror image of the Wife's own confessions. Dioneo's cynicism in Boccaccio, which probably hides ambivalence on the part of his author, who has chosen for the tale the noblest place of all in his hundred tales, is tempered in Chaucer by gentilesse, and the Clerk's irony is a far cry from the sensual charges of the *Decameron.* Though the *Clerk's Tale* is true to its dramatic function in the Marriage Group, it holds consistently to the moral truth of the Griselda story. We need not press the fourfold allegories in the tale, since they have almost from the beginnings of Scriptural interpretation seemed to be the creation more of the epigonal critic than of the author. Yet it would be negligent not to speak of the realism of the domestic and literal level, the tropological exemplum, the allegorical or figural level of Abraham, Job, and the Blessed Virgin, and the anagogy of the Christian soul desiring God and obeying him in perfect charity.

Quite as important is the hierarchy of genres: the remote fairy tale with its deep psychological roots and its spectres of man and woman in monstrous conflict; the novella which imports realism to the story and provides a domestic element to the drama; the exemplum which follows from the reality and which provides new overtones to patience, beyond the marital, the social, and the political to the justification of man to God; the symbolism of the Blessed Virgin and the whole aura of the Bible which provide transcendence

84. E. Talbot Donaldson, *Chaucer's Poetry* (New York, 1958), p. 918.
85. See exempla by Robert Holcot in Beryl Smalley, *English Friars and Antiquity in the Early Fourteenth Century* (Oxford, 1960), p. 175; the Middle English poem *Patience;* Mary M. Banks, ed., *An Alphabet of Tales,* II, 396-401; Mustanoja, *Neuf Joies,* p. 51 (the Virgin is "la roze de paciance"); "Geduldsprüfung" in Lutz Mackensen, *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Märchens* (Berlin, 1934-40), II, 350-52.

to the Christian souls on this dramatic pilgrimage and to their counterparts, the reading and the hearing audience, an audience ripe to the specific but not obtruded icons of the poem; and at last the often touched drama which encircles the tale and makes it appropriate to the shy, keen, oral and humorous Clerk, friend both of Petrarchan humanism and of medieval ethos and religious order. To overstress or omit any one of these would be to reduce the poem's significance. Even these words reduce a great poem. Finally we must assert that the simple language of the poem, a truly "high style" though perhaps not in the Ciceronian or even in the Petrarchan tradition, belies the complex literary structure and purpose. Our Clerk is a philosopher, sober in intention and reverent to his Canterbury master of ceremonies and to the orders of gentilesse and nobility; yet he is not without knowledge of the mortal noble's power both of abuse and of restitution. He is also something I have always held more profound than a philosopher, a humorist who knows how to reinforce his sobriety by the saving touch that makes the chthonic, the real, the dramatic, the moral and the heavenly all part of God's order. If this be organicism, let us make the most of it.

The Ohio State University