ence of those mentioned in the lines cited from the Gawain group serves simply to frame, and thus provide a periphery for, the action or event in question. In the passage in Piers, the spectators are part of the continuing story: “some” are convinced that Jesus is “leche of life and lord of heigh hevene” (118), whereas Jewish judges among them accuse him of practicing witchcraft with the aid of the cevil (120).

I have also found a similar line in Wars of Alexander 611: “His [Alexander’s] stevyn (“voice”) stiffe (“loud”) was and steryn (“stern”), that stony by (“astonished”) mony.” But there is a crucial difference between this detail and those cited from the Gawain-group. The latter refer to reactions confined to a moment or limited period of narrative time. The line from Wars of Alexander states a fact that is part of a description. The relative clause refers to the way people always reacted to the king’s voice, rather than their reaction to it on a particular occasion; its verb is thus definitional. “The Knyght of the Grene Chapel men knownen me mony” (Gawain 454) is similarly ineligible for my list; here, too, the clause states a fact rather than describing an event.

Poure Griselda and the All-Consuming Archeyvys

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The late medieval fascination with naked Griselda and her changes of clothing is at its heart, according to modern critical discussion, a fascination with translation. Most influential in this respect have been the studies of Chaucer’s Clerk’s Tale by Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace, which have deepened our comprehension of Griselda’s sartorial symbolism through an understanding of her figure in relation to masculine hermeneutics, her role as a text undressed and dressed, or read and “translated” by educated men, often for sociopolitical purposes. As these and other studies have shown, each new translation of the Griselda tale—from Boccaccio’s original through Petrarch, Philippe de Mézières and the anonymous French translations, Christine de Pizan, Chaucer, and forward to the early modern renditions—revised not only the interpretative adornment of the challenging tale but also the descriptions.

My heartfelt thanks to Frank Grady and the anonymous readers of SAC for their helpful comments on this essay.

1 Carolyn Dinshaw’s influential chapter “Griselda Translated” examines the tale through Jerome’s image of the allegorical text as veiled captive women, focusing primarily on the double valence of the Clerk’s translation to both eliminate and restore the feminine. Dinshaw, Chaucer: Sexual Poetics (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), pp. 32–55. David Wallace, in his chapter “‘Whan She Translated Was’: Humanism, Tyranny, and the Petrarchan Academy,” explores the tale from a similar perspective of masculine rhetorical control over the female body, but his greater objective concerns the uses of this rhetoric to further the interests of tyrannical “Lumbardy.” Wallace, Chaucerian Policy (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 261–98. Although both of these studies, and especially Dinshaw’s, address The Clerk’s Tale’s emphasis on clothing, their interest lies primarily in the symbolism of the clothing as veiled allegorical woman (esp. Dinshaw, 144–48) and/or as masculine adornment and insight (esp. Wallace, pp. 284–85).
of Griselda's clothes themselves. The readings of Griselda's sartorial "translations" have varied over the years: while earlier studies tended to concentrate on Griselda's allegorical and spiritual translations, more recent readings have focused on ritualized investitures, the social performances involved in marriage, divorce, and (in the early modern period) guild membership. Yet, as I will argue in this essay, Griselda is not merely translated; rather, as Chaucer's text states, she is translated "in swich richesse" (Clerk's Tale, 385). This often-overlooked adverbial phrase is a vital and underdiscussed element of Griselda's figuration, whose linguistic purpose can serve as a momentary metaphor for the critical shift this study follows. I would like to extend our attention outward from the actions performed on Griselda's body—the verbal translating, strapping, and testing—to include the objects modifying these actions: the riches, gems, clothes, and rags that materialize the changing world and changing perceptions around her.

In a basic sense this essay will attempt to take Griselda's clothes at face value, to understand the text's obsession with changing clothes as just that—an obsession with changing clothes. But, why obsession? Griselda's own lack of attachment to the goods that adorn her body, her stability in the face of extreme misfortune and fortune—literal rags and riches—seems to dismiss the possibility that the tale holds a lesson about material desires. Yet Griselda's sartorial stoicism implicitly evokes a desiring audience; her own indeterminate or utterly absent reactions to her clothes serve to emphasize the overt reactions of the people around her. This heightened audience reception and perception of Griselda's alternately rich and rude clothes in Chaucer's work reveals the type of classifying of consumption and objectification that Pierre Bourdieu defines as the "distinction" of cultural tastes, or the social relations objectified in familiar objects, in their luxury or poverty, their 'distinction' or 'vulgarity,' their 'beauty' or 'ugliness.' Further, the consumer categories associated with clothing are manipulated and appropriated in Chaucer's tale. Whereas garments hold the power to transform peasant...
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social status and sway bourgeois public perception, for example, they hold no apparent appeal for the "serious" and "insightful" aristocratic eye of Walter. As I will discuss, while the Clerk may condemn Walter's tyrannical testing of Griselda, 8 he celebrates his prudential ability to see through rude material surfaces to inner beauty and virtue. In contrast, he identifies and targets those who are seduced by aesthetic beauty and the cultural capital behind it, ultimately aligning superficiality, frivolity, and love of novelty with not only the common "peple" of his tale but also the **nouveaux riches** merchant class and its spencifter: "arch" wives.

Reading against the grain of the poem, I will explore how this rhetorical offensive against conspicuous consumers grows out of the potential of sartorial consumption as a new form of cultural resistance, an example of what Michel de Certeau calls the "tactics" that consumers use to get around the "strategies" of disciplinary forces. 9 In a world in which the problem of status-blurring garments and ever-changing, ever-more exorbitant fashions was fast becoming one of the most prominent social concerns, the **Clerk's Tale** situates itself at the very crux of the debate: the sartorial basis of social change and public perception. 10 By underscoring the disparity between a woman who remains exactly the same whether in rags or riches and the public's constantly changing perception of her, the tale not only invokes what Lee Patterson calls the "quintessentially bourgeois" appropriation and dislocation of social values (here aristocratic gentillesse), 11 but also comments on that process, putting into question the very apparatus of that dislocation (here clothing) in the medieval imaginary. Griselda's lack of material appetite is thus inseparable from the importance Walter and his subjects (and we the readers) give to array and appearance, and ultimately from the moral judgment the Clerk renders on this mistaken importance.

It is within this latter textual presence—that is, the nuanced style, terminology, and object(s) of the Clerk's moralizing rhetoric—that I have found the strongest evidence for this materialist reading. While much of the sumptuary detail in The Clerk's Tale and Envoy is undoubtedly generated by the repressed sociohistorical materials that Paul Strohm calls the "textual unconscious," 12 the Clerk's Tale's profound interest in comparing spiritual and material interpretation, and the placement of these concerns in the mouth of the logicians Clerk, leads to a significant amount of what appears to be aesthetic (or anti-aesthetic) "intent" on the Clerk's part. As I will argue, it is specifically through the Clerk's self-conscious insistence on rhetorical and material frugality, coupled with his open address to the sumptuous material world of the Wife of Bath and "al hire secte" (1171), that this tale links larger gendered and hegemonic formulations of marriage, authority, and feudal subjectivity to the more immediate problem of the influence of material goods on the medieval worldview. In its attempt to shape audience interpretation according to class and gender, the text grapples intently with the different lenses through which Griselda might be seen, aligning the seemingly divergent but equally illogical forces of tyranny, temptation, and fashion, for example, and it does this through a figure, I will argue, whose own frugality betrays an excessiveness equal to the superficialities that he shuns.

**Griselda's Richesse**

Stylistically, The Clerk's Tale, like the Clerk himself, is stripped of almost all ornament and color, pared down well beyond the simple to the plain. 13 Yet, despite—or as I will suggest, because of—its divestiture of

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8 See, for example, lines 456–62 and 621–23.
11 Patterson, Chaucer and the Subject of History, p. 324.
the type of sumptuous detail found in, say, the clothing descriptions of the Wife of Bath or Prioreess in the General Prologue, or the delectably decorated Alisoun of The Miller’s Tale, The Clerk’s Tale is more profoundly invested in the implications of material ornament than perhaps any of the other Tales. The first pivotal moment for this reading is the scene of Griselda’s translation into richesse (IV.372–85):

And for that no thyng of hir olde geere
She sholde byrge into his hous, he bad
That wommen sholde dispo-silen hire right theere;
Of which thse lades were nat right glad
To handle hire clothes, wherinne she was clad.
But nathelkes, this mayde bright of hewe
Pro foot to heed they clothed han al neve.

Hir heris han they kembld, that lay unstressed
Ful rucely, and with hir fyngres smale
A corone on hire heed they han ydressed,
And sette hire ful of nowches gret and smale.
Of hir array what sholde I make a tale?
Unnethe the peple hir knew for hire fairenesse
When she translated was in swich richesse.

The question directed in the Clerk’s own voice toward the listener or reader in line 385 represents Chaucer’s most dramatic addition to this scene, parts of which he borrows from both Petrarch’s version of the tale and the anonymous French Le Livre Gremiello. 14 While this type of editorial comment is far from unusual for Chaucer or his sources, its unique

14 Many of the details in Chaucer’s clothing descriptions are taken from Le Livre Gremiello, the French translation of Petrarch’s version, known for its realism in comparison to Petrarch’s allegory. These details include the discussion of the unwearability of Griselda’s old robe and the revision of the ladies to touching Griselda’s old clothing when they are instructed by Walter to strip her and dress her in finery. Chaucer himself added the details of the cloth of gold and the jeweled crown in which Griselda is clothed at the end of the tale. Chaucer takes the greater plot explanations—such as Walter’s wanting her to bring “no thyng of hir olde geere” into his house—from Petrarch. See Severs, The Literary Relationships of Chaucer’s Clerk’s Tale, pp. 3–57, 135–80, 190–211; and Severs, “The Clerk’s Tale,” in Sources and Analagies of Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales, ed. W. F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941), pp. 288–331. See also Dindaw, Chaucer’s Social Politics, p. 144; Gilmartin Wallace, "Array as Motif in the Clerk’s Tale," pp. 100–101; and Cooper, Oxford Guides to Chaucer, pp. 189–90.

placement here introduces and even publicizes the Clerk’s complicated interest in the subject of clothing. For one, the contradiction that lies at the heart of the occupatio form itself—a device that purports to draw the reader away from a specific subject and toward a larger narrative purpose, even as it effectively highlights that subject with its rhetorical intercession—also lies at the heart: of the Clerk’s rhetorical question: How can one simultaneously address and refute the subject of “array”?

Ascetic simplicity in both speech and clothing were expected characteristics of young scholars in Chaucer’s time, 15 and for this reason the Clerk’s pronounced position on vestimentary goods at first appears merely to be consistent with his overall soberness and place in life. On the surface his indifference to all and any ornamentation, what: Charles Muscantine calls his spurning of poetry’s “ordinary riches” and readers’ corresponding “extravagant taste” 16 also seems in keeping with the “pleyn” tale that the Host requests of him so that he and the other pilgrims “may understande what ye seye” (Cl erk’s Prologue, 19, 20). I would argue, however, that through implied comparisons to the secular, worldly, commercial members of his audience, the Clerk’s careful sartorial and rhetorical austerity speaks about the untutored masses as much as for them. 17 For instance, while on the one hand his portrait in the General Prologue appears to present an “ideal” and ascetic Clerk, 18 this idealization is primarily presented in terms of its contrasting relation to consumption and exchange. To begin, while his garment is “full thebar,” it is also a “courtrey,” or a short, secular tunic that would have been considered part of the “new” fashion of the period. 19
shabby yet once fashionable garment is but one example among manifold other: consumer analogies in the Clerk’s description, which together reveal a surprisingly consistent economics of self-mortification: leanness discussed in terms of being “nat right fat” (288), philosophy in terms of “littel gold in cofre” (298), education in terms of borrowed money “spente” (300), desire for purchasing books in terms of shunning “robes riche” (296), and poverty in terms of his refusal of secular or “worldly” employment (292). Just as this subtext of his General Prologue portrait suggests the interface between Chaucer the narrator’s (and other pilgrims’) worldly, commercial perspective and the Clerk’s own performed (and possibly exaggerated) asceticism, so the Clerk’s meta-textual dismissal of “array” in Griselda’s first clothing scene speaks to the greater interaction between the moral lesson embedded in his rhetorical performance and the reception of his audience. The Host demands, for the pleasure of the listening audience, not only a plain tale but also a cheerful, or “myrie tale” (9) that does not cause the pilgrims to lament about their vices (12–13); technically the Clerk delivers this, but solely on the surface: his is a deceptively simple tale whose comedic cheer lies only in its basic premise (it is about a peasant girl who becomes marchioness, after all), and in which, as I will discuss, he encodes not only moral lessons, but moral lessons shrewdly directed back at his pilgrim audience. Like his hero Walter, the Clerk gives all the appearance of complying with the wishes of the people (or in this case, their secular representative, the Host), but in fact acts on his own terms and even at their expense.

Indeed, the Clerk’s question about array not only inherently brings to the forefront the presence of his audience, but also invites the reader to contemplate the audience’s own desires—for the “riches” of literary-cultural entertainment, for protracted descriptions of attire, and, arguably, for luxurious attire itself. Despite the fact that it is a rhetorical question and thus not meant to be answered, for instance, there are some ostensibly obvious answers to the question of why an educated narrator like the Clerk would “make a tale” of array, most of which have
to do with medieval literary theories on audience reception of fictional material: Macrobius’s influential concept of narratio fabulosa, for example, describes fiction as the veil or dress necessary to express the most serious of philosophical or sacred truths (a device one would think especially pertinent to the Clerk’s own ultimate allegorical leanings). Geoffrey of Vinsauf’s popular Poetria nova also encourages lengthy passages describing women’s attire as part of “the food and ample refreshment of the mind” that is descriptio. Chaucer of course knew both of these texts, and his most popular work creates its own type of sartorial presence; as Laura F. Hodges has pointed out, the Canterbury Tales provides readers with “the widest range (quality and value) of contemporary fabric names in a single English literary work in the Middle Ages.”

Importantly, however, within this larger sartorial inventory in the Tales, Chaucer seems to associate clothing descriptio at least in part with lower-class or bourgeois (versus aristocratic) tastes; for it is only in the Miller’s “nyce” or silly tale (Reeve’s Prologue, 3855), heartily enjoyed by all but the Reeve, that we find the type of lavish head-to-toe clothing description suggested in Vinsauf. If, therefore, Chaucer’s Clerk refuses to divulge sartorial details, perhaps it is in part to distinguish his tale and its heroine from the type of conspicuously ornamented object of desire such as Alisoun, whose trappings proclaim, for all to see, the newfound wealth of her carpenter husband’s (and Miller narrator’s) social class. Moreover, if we consider that the Host’s opening comment to the Clerk—that he appears like a new bride at a feast, or “sitryne at the bord” (Clown’s Prologue, 2–3)—works not merely as a slight about the properly modest demeanor of a clerk, but also as a reminder of the highly charged culture of consumption that makes up the tale-telling competition, in which both tales and tale-tellers, and both men and women, are continually evaluated and assessed by the other pilgrims, as


24I borrow this latter point from Benson, who suggests that Chaucer thought this type of descriptio was old-fashioned, which is why he used it in The Miller’s Tale. “Rhetorical Descriptions of Beautiful People: Poetria Nova, Romance of the Rose, and Guy of Warwick,” The Harvard Chaucer Website, May 12, 2000, <http://www.courses fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/special/litusox/style/sins-de s.htm> (September 3, 2003).

metaphorical "feasts" offered up by the Host, then we can also see the Clerk's tale as a repudiation of and comment on that culture. Further underscoring this reading is the way the Clerk's question marks a thematic shift in the passage from describing how the "ladies" dress Griselda to how "the peple" see her, from the courtly "dressing" of her crown and "setting" of her jewels to the public's "knowing" of her: "Of hire array what shoold I make a tale? / Unnethe the peple hir knew for hire faireness" (383–84). The question behind the question is perhaps not whether or why array belongs in tale-telling, but how it belongs.26

In the rest of the passage dealing with Griselda's first sartorial transformation, the Clerk maintains this uneasy balance between seeming to avoid sartorial detail and seeming to emphasize, through culturally charged terms, the public's use, abuse, and perception of her sartorial goods. Although we are clearly made to focus on the fact that Griselda is re-clothed "fro foot to heed" (378), for example, we hear nothing about the color, material, style, or embroidery of her attire. This dearth of detail goes against not only literary tradition but also the long tradition of elaborate clothing symbolism and ritual in royal marriages, which used investiture as a way of performing, through careful color, embroidery, and lavish symbols, the social, political, and economic import of the new alliance.27 It also distinguishes itself from the extensive detail of contemporary homiletic and legislative discourses, which, as Claire Sponsler has pointed out, often "acted unwittingly as shopping lists for would-be consumers, laying out all the wares available for (forbidden) consumption."28 Instead, the Clerk gives his audience a list of base generalities devoid of color, ornament, or detail: "olde geere" and "clothes" for her former peasant attire, and "corone" and "nowches" for her new courtly clothes.

These apparently generic accounts are thus easily (and I would suggest deliberately) overshadowed by the reactions they invoke. In addition to the Clerk's own reaction to the scene in the form of his occupatio, and the aforementioned reaction of "the peple" who "hardly" recognize her, for example, we also have Chaucer's enhancement of the response to her peasant garments by the court ladies, who are "nat right glad / To hancle hir clothes" (375–76). In contrast to this threefold response, Griselda's own reaction is duly absent; this scene is rather about the perception of the people around her to the clothes that she wears. Griselda merely forms the backdrop: she is never specifically named or even made physically visible in the passage. Instead, she becomes the blank material to be adorned with the jewels of human artifice, literally "sette ... ful of nowches gret and smale" (382), and the passage's running references to hir, she, and this mayde become the general field against which the "wommen," "the peple," and the narrative "I" gauge their own prejudices and ideas about the garments. The Clerk effectively strips the marriage ritual down to its basic structural purpose—the control of audience perception by ceremonial material goods—without appearing to indulge in those material goods himself. In the end the combination of the colorless clothing descriptions and the dramatic reactions of the people to them powerfully enlists the reader's own imagination to fill in the narrative and aesthetic gaps regarding Griselda's clothing—one reason, perhaps, for the heightened critical interest in hermeneutics and the word translated in this passage. Yet I would argue that it is in the last words of the passage—that she was translated "in swich richesse" (385)—that much of the interpretive weight of the description lies.

Chaucer uses the word richesse, meaning primarily "riches," "wealth," or "abundance," sparingly yet purposefully in his Tales, almost always invoking "temporel richesse," or the Boethian sense of false riches of Fortune's material goods.29 The Parson describes "richesses" as the first of three main categories of earthly pleasures (along with "honours" and "delices" [185]) that require penance, and states that those who enjoy such wealth while alive will suffer a painful fourfold poverty in hell: poverty of treasure, of meat and drink, of clothing, and of friends (191–99). Richesse represents a fantasy that embodies the uncertainty and changeability of both life and its trappings; as the Parson states, "alle the / Richesses in this world ben in aventure, / and Pasen as a shadwe on the wal" (1068–70). In Chaucer's Tale of Malibe, Prudence likewise

26Lyan Strailey makes a similar point in a different context: "How can her clothes mean? If Griselda's new clothes signify her translation from commoner to queen, her marriage to the husband of all souls, why are we not distressed when she puts them on?" In David Aers and Lyan Strailey, The Power of the Holy: Religion, Politics, and Gender in Late Medieval English Culture (Univ. Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), p. 238.

27See, for example, Crane, The Performance of Self, pp. 21–29.

28Sponsler, Drama and Resistance, p. 23.

29Here Griselda seems to echo the gems "set" in gold that Walter had made for her prior to meeting her (line 254) MED, s.v. "richesse."

30MED, s.v. "swich." Adj. 3a.
condemns the "sweete temporel: richeses, and delices and honours of this world" (1410) that have skewed Melibee's perception away from God. That examples of worldly riches as materialistic, corrupting, and ungodly are expressed by the Parson as well as Prudence in the Melibee, the two most morally upright (and excessively didactic) of Chaucer's characters in The Tale, is especially enlightening, for they seem to correspond quite accurately to the Clerk's own abstemious performance and moralizing perspective. Indeed, even in his strict economy the Clerk is careful to emphasize that the garments clothing Griselda are extreme: she is not simply translated into riches, but into "swich richesse" (385, italics mine).31

By far the most thorough discussion of richesse in Chaucer's work and the clear source of much of the rhetoric of richesse in the Tale is his translation of Boethius's Consolation of Philosophy. The word richeses dominates Philosophie's discussion of "the yites of Fortune" (4–5) in Book II Prosa 5 of the Boece. Here richeses concern not only questions of false "beautie" and "bountee" (40) but also the excesses of "superfluyte" (78), "covertyse" (123), and the "anguysschous love of naynyge" (Metrum 530). Like most of her teachings, Philosophie's discussion of richesse quickly becomes a question about mortal self-knowledge: "Richesses ben they precieus by the nature of hemsel, or elles by the nature of the?" (8–10), she asks Boethius. She interrogates the poet's and reader's understanding of richesse by revealing the buried foundations of human investments in material goods: the false sense of importance, value, and beauty they bestow, the hunger for power they induce. To Philosophie, richesse represents only misunderstanding and transgression—the "errorre" and "folie" (158) of humans, whose desire for "diverse clothynge" (86) and "straunge appareamentzu" (160–61) condemns them to brutal ignorance about themselves and the world. Moreover, lastly and ironically, richesse also brings destitution. When in the form of money, richesse gains its true worth only in exchange: when it is "transferred fro o man to an othir" (18–19), and more important, in the context of Griselda, "whan it is translated" (20–21). Because it cannot be shared without its value diminishing, and because the richesse of one brings poverty to so many others, Philosophie depicts wealth itself as abject: "O streyte and nedy clepe I this richesse" (33).

31Griselda, however, is also named three times in the Envoy, which brings her entire total to thirty-one. Walter, by comparison, is named ten times throughout the tale.

In light of Chaucer's uses of the concept, Griselda's sartorial transformation into richesse has intriguing moral implications specifically linked to her new rich clothing. Like the description of richesse in the Boece, Griselda's transformation into "swich richesse" could test her own potential for pride and greed; as in the Boece, it could test her self-knowledge and possible artifice; as in the Boece, it could test her value as a possession transferred and "translated"; and finally, as in the Boece, her transformation could be seen to test the very notion of good fortune, illustrating through Walter's sadistic tests the abject side of richesse. Its consistent use by the moral figures of the Parson, Prudence, and Philosophy further suggests that the word's placement at such a crucial moment in The Clerk's Tale could be meant to trigger personal meditation on the dangers of material goods and the beauty and power they bestow. Griselda's story certainly depicts the cyclical nature of temporal richesse: the arbitrary gaining and losing of material goods at the whim of Fortune, with whom Walter is repeatedly associated throughout the tale (69, 756, 812).

But importantly, although she acts as the didactic vessel, Griselda is not the recipient of the lesson of richesse. Like so much about Griselda, her clothing symbolism gains the necessary clarity only through comparison. The moral targets another vital character in the tale: "the peple" who gaze at her "fairness / When she translated was in swich richesse" (384–85), and who are mentioned no less than twenty-eight times throughout the tale (the exact number, incidentally, that Griselda herself is named).32 The "peple" of The Clerk's Tale represent a significant elaboration on Chaucer's part that subtly transforms the tale's social framework; as Lynn Staley has pointed out, Chaucer's creation of "a single force, point of view, and voice that he designates as 'the people'" diverges substantially from the representative mix of lesser nobles and courtiers in Petrarch's tale.33 Susan Yager also argues that the distinction between the terms "peple" and "folk" in this tale forms part of Chaucer's larger exploration of intellectual, behavioral, and class differences between the ignorant many and the refined and knowledgeable few.34

Unlike Griselda, the Clerk's "peple" are ripe for a lesson on the dangers of temporal riches. For one, their collective desire maintains a formidable presence throughout this poem, from their initial request of Walter that he "hastily to wyve" (140), which spurs the central action of the poem, to Walter's own repeated assertions to Griselda that his (monstrous) actions toward her are not his, but his people's wishes—"Nat as I wolde, but as my peple leste" (450). Yet even more palpable than the people's desire, or "poeplish appetit" as Yager calls it, is their observing and watching of Griselda: they witness nearly every narrated action between Walter and Griselda, beginning with the moment Walter enters Janicula's house to ask for her hand, and even those things that they do not literally witness, such as Walter's "murdering" of his children, eventually come "to the peuples eyre" (727). Essential to the related themes of desire and surveillance is the people's collective gaze at Griselda's array, which first emerges in this scene of her translation into richesse and grows increasingly significant with each subsequent scene of sartorial consequence. As we ultimately find out, while Walter does not marry Griselda for her richesse (795), it seems that "the peple" do.

Griselda's Rudeness

The problematic material subtext of Griselda's richesse accrues its full weight only when compared to her corresponding aesthetic of rudenesse. The Clerk describes Griselda as born and raised in "rudenesse" (397), an attribute that manifests itself physically first in her "reruly" unkempt hair (380) when Walter first has her transformed into richesse, and later in the old "rude" cloth (916) that her father places on her shoulders after her exile. The latter is a garment so wrought with holes that, again according to Chaucer's elaboration of his sources, it has lost its fundamental purpose of concealing her body (IV 913–17):

And with hire olde coore, as it myghte be
He covered hire, ful sorwelfully wepyng


34 Muscaine, Chaucer and the French Tradition, p. 192.

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But on hire body myghte he it nat breyne,
For rude was the clooth, and moore of age
By dayes fyle then at hire mariage.

This torn garment is arguably the most memorable image in The Clerk's Tale.35 Ostensibly it is a symbol of pared-down simplicity like the Clerk's own threadbare garments, used to counter the richesse in which Walter had clothed her and of which he had stripped. Griselda's stoic bearing of her ragged clothing can thus be said to embody a lesson about the false importance of material goods and clothing in itself. But it is the Clerk's almost obsessive reiteration and visualization of this "rude" attire that seems to encompass a most fascinating moral directive, for Griselda's torn garments are continually and repeatedly mentioned in a way her garments of richesse are not. In fact, between the moment in which she dons the olde coste and the moment she reconciles with Walter, Griselda's decrepit garments are described no less than nine times: her clothing is of "rude . . . cloth" and of great "age" (916); "bade" and "yvel" (963); "rude" and "eek torent" (1012); "povre" (1020); "poverlich" (1055); and once again, "rude" (1116).

The prominent aesthetic of this garment in a tale that goes out of its way to strip itself of imagery, and the tale's blunt insistence that we re-imagine Griselda's rags over and over, work to implicate and then appropriate visual as well as material modes of consumption. For while The Clerk's Tale's exploration of gentilesse endeavors to compare moral and material treasures more broadly, the Clerk's careful handling of Griselda's appearance serves to specifically highlight and categorize the way people perceive and desire material ornament and especially clothing. When he first introduces his heroine, the Clerk takes care to emphasize how others view her low socioeconomic status: her father is not merely poor, he is the person that even the "povre folk" (204) hold to be "the povrest of hem alle" (205); correspondingly, it is upon Griselda as a "povre creature" (232) that Walter first literally and metaphorically "sette his ye" (235). Furthermore, while the Clerk makes an initial gesture toward Griselda's physical attractiveness to others—she is "fair ynoth to sike" (209)—he immediately and somewhat self-consciously

35 According to the MED, the word "likeous" was used to connote both lasciviousness and luxuriousness, with the common theme being excess or self-indulgent desire, pride, or way of living.
channels this into a description of moral rather than physical “beautee” (IV.211–14):

But for to speke of vertuous beautee,
Thanne was she on the faireste under sonne;
For povreliche yfostred up was she,
No likerous lust was thurgh hire herte yronne.

Yet even when he purports to avoid material description here, he includes a significant sumptuary detail: unlike the Miller’s bourgeois Alisoun, who has a “likerous ye” (Miller’s Tale, 3244) to go with her eye-catching clothing, Griselda’s poor upbringing ensures that she carries no greedy desire or “likerous lust” in her heart.38 In the Clerk’s view, Griselda’s own lack of desire is inversely proportionate to her beauty and “fairness”—a “fairnesse,” we remember, that “the peple” can only see after her transformation into richesse.

Indeed, according to the Clerk, to recognize (Griselda’s) true value one must have the ability not only to look through rhetorical artifice (as he makes clear in his allegorical interpretation of Griselda at the end of the tale), but also through artificial trappings, which ultimately Walter can do but his “peple” cannot. The Clerk takes the time to clarify, for instance, that when Walter gazes at peasant Griselda before choosing her as his wife, he does not look at her with lascivious or foolish intentions, but in a serious manner (IV.235–38):

And whan it fil that he myghte hire espye,
He noght wiche wantoun lookynge of folye
His eyen caste on hire, but in sad wyse
Upon hire chiere he wolde hym ofte avysye.

The Clerk further presents Walter’s clear-sightedness in direct contrast with the flawed or absent “insight” of the people (IV.242–45):

For thogh the peple have no greet insight
In vertu, he considered ful right

38 According to the Parson, the first finger of the hand of lechery is “the fool lookynge of the fool woman and of the fool man; that sleekh, right as the baile oppose sleekh folk by the meny of his sighte, for the coeviteis of eyen foloweth the coeviteis of the herte” (The Parson’s Tale, line 852).

POVRE GRISELDA AND THE ALL-CONSUMING ARCHEWYWES

Hir bountee, and disposed that he wolde
Welle hire only, if evere he wedde sholde.

Just as Walter’s “sad,” or serious way of looking corresponds to his keen perception of Griselda’s value despite her rude clothing, so the people’s lack of “insight”—literally, their inability to see in to, or beyond, the surface—corresponds to their ultimate “[un]sated” nature (959) and their superficial attachment to her richesse. The people’s perception thus by default seems to be identified with the “wantoun lookynge of folye” that Walter avoids. This problematic looking evokes what Chaucer’s Parson elsewhere calls people’s “coeviteis of eyen” (852)—namely, the obsessive gazing at the opposite sex that both incites and is incited by conspicuous consumption. The Parson specifically links wasteful consumption and “fool lookynge” (852) under the sin of luxuria, denouncing men and especially women whose lechery causes them to “dispenden . . . hit catel and subsaunce” on the opposite sex (848).39 In The Clerk’s Tale, the people’s impaired (in)sight means they literally cannot understand who or even what Griselda is when she returns to her rudenesse: “they wondren what she myghte bee / That in so povre array was for to see’ (1019–20).

Hence it is the literal sight of copious luxurious clothes that makes the people finally betray Griselda for (what they think is) her younger, richer replacement. When Walter’s “newe markysesse” (942) arrives with her brother, the people interpret her superior worth solely upon her sumptuous appearance, and for the first time they begin to question Griselda’s own merit (IV.983–87):

For whiche the peple ran to seen the sighte
Of hire array, so richely biseye;
And channe at entr amonges hem they seeye
That Walter was no fool, thought that hym leste
To chanappe his wyf, for it was for the beste.

The repeated emphasis on seeing in this passage, the twofold seen the sighte followed by biseye, “splended to look at,” further underscores the people’s voracity for sartorial riches and changes. Griselda, whose rude clothes are correspondingly “yvel biseye” (965), and who even in her

former role as Walter’s wife displayed “[n]o pompe, no semblant of roialte” (928), cannot compare, in the public’s view, to “swich pompe and richesse” (943), an exhibition so grand that, as the Clerk states, “neve was ther seyn with mannes ye / So noble array in al West Lombardye” (944–45). Regardless of her dutiful and beneficial service as their marchness, her promotion of the “commune profit” (431) and her devotion to “[p]eple to saue and every wrong t’amende” (441), like the “olde” rags that she wears, Griselda is cast away by the fickle public in favor of “newe” array and ribesse.

Moreover, just in case his audience missed the moral, the Clerk explicitly emphasizes the people’s fickleness in the following outburst about their changefulness and vulnerability to novelty, which does not exist in Chaucer’s sources (IV.995–98):

O stormy peple! Unsad and evere untrew!
Ay undiscreet and chaungyne as a laye!
Dehyngge evere in rumble that is newe,
For lyk the moone ay were ye and wane!”

It is in this turbulent fickleness that we find the closes correlation between the “peple” of The Clerk’s Tale and the social disruption that John M. Ganim finds associated with the “peple” in Chaucer’s other work.39 Yet here the Clerk provides his statement with extra authority by placing it in the mouths of some of the “folk” themselves, thus dividing the public according to whether they are “unsad” or “sade,” frivolous and serious, unstable or stable (1002–5). While the “[n]sad” people gaze voraciously “up and doun” at the “newe lady,” the “sade folk,” like “sad” Walter earlier (237), have the ability to see more clearly and thus avoid the allure of “novelte” (1004).

In this focus on the seductive powers of material novelty and its link to changefulness, The Clerk’s Tale suggests a more direct relation to contemporary discourses about clothing and consumption. The fourteenth-century preacher John Bromyard, for example, discusses the restless change of current fashions and the incitement of the public gaze in similar terms:

From day to day the desire and appetite for elegance, singularity and vanity in all outward adornment, whether of hair or clothing, meets the eye. So it behooves that amongst such folk no fashion pleases them for long; because, inasmuch as that piece of singularity or elegance which originally was but rarely seen begins to be used and seen by many, it begins to displease them when the cause of its singularity and vanity ceases along with the admiration of men. . . . Whence it comes about that they devise some new piece of poppery to make men gaze at them in wonderment anew.41

The contemporary denigration of new and changing fashions took many forms; according to a popular satire on manners and costume written in the same decade as The Clerk’s Tale, the “new faction” in this period is not only “now shorte and now longe” but “new is here, new goon.”42 The short/long dialectic was part of a larger discourse that emerged earlier in the century and which articulated courtly fashion as a choice between two aesthetics: that of the new style [de novo modo] and that of the old style [de antiquo modo].43 Thus, like his use of ribesse, the Clerk’s descriptions of Griselda’s clothes as either “al newe” (378) or “olde” (913), and his subsequent condemnation of the “peple” who allow their loyalty to be purchased by “novelte,” work simultaneously as deceptively simple descriptions that correlate to his seemingly “pleyn” style and as phrases that would have carried strong moral and material resonance in Chaucer’s world.

Chaucer’s broader use of the word “newe” in his Tales underscores this ostensible purpose in The Clerk’s Tale and also suggests more specifically which Canterbury pilgrims the Clerk’s facile, materially inclined “peple” most closely resemble. The word most often appears to describe the intersecting arenas of fashion and commerce. Lexically, the “newe world” (GP, 176) that the pleasure-loving Monk admires and the new style, or “newe jet” (GP, 682), that the corrupt Pardoner thinks he performs is that embodied by the liveried guildsmen, with their instruments arrayed “[f]ul fresh and newe” (GP, 365), and by the wealthy, cloth-making Wife of Bath in her “ful mѹste and newe” shoes (GP, 457). Such “newe” purchases resonate not only with English commercial

41From lines 133, 167, 125, respectively, in the 1388 poem “A Satire on Manners and Costume,” in Thomas Wight, Political Poems and Songs (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1859), 1.2.270–78.
42Newton, Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince, pp. 14–18, 38.
enterprise but also with the uniqueness of foreign goods, for in *The Man of Law's Tale*, it is the novelty of "newe" Eastern goods—specifically "clotures of gold, and satyns riche of newe" (137)—that both instills the Western desire for commercial exchange and enriches Eastern merchants (138–40). Such references to the desire for and aesthetic of "newe" things can be found in various forms throughout the Tales; even Griselda, who verbalizes her opinion so rarely, declares when Walter exiles her that "I love notht oold as whan that it is newe" (Clerk's Tale, 857). However, although many types of pilgrims wear fashions that can and should be perceived as novel—the Merchant and the Squire to name a few—Chaucer's specific use of the word "newe" in relation to material goods, like his use of sartorial *descriptio*, appears primarily in connection with the lower classes or the newly-rich bourgeoisie (here the guildsmen and the Wife of Bath). Even peasants obtain cherished "newe" objects; in *The Friar's Tale*, for example, it is out of protection for her "newe panne" (1614) that the old peasant woman finally curses (and thus condemns) the fraudulent summoner to his infernal fate. In this way the "newe" object, with its self-conscious link to purchasing, spending, and exchanging, can be seen to carry with it an oblique class indicator, or "distinction," in Bourdieu's sense, whether it implies a coveted necessity (the old peasant's pan) or conspicuous consumption (the Wife's shoes).

In describing consumer appetite, Grant McCracken identifies goods as "bridges to displaced meaning," or as a way to recover individual and cultural hopes and ideals: coveted goods represent, he says, "not who we are, but who we wish we were." As medieval historians have pointed out, one curious aspect of medieval English merchants is that in this period of burgeoning mercantile growth, they allocated their newfound wealth toward consumption rather than investment, choosing to imitate the aristocracy rather than expanding their commercial businesses. Thus, rather than using their powers of consumption to create a new, mercantile identity, they attempted to purchase social status, to use their goods as a "bridge" to the social performance of the aristocracy. Chaucer's aligning of "newness" with the middling and lower classes reveals a possible cultural reaction to this new type of spending, in that it attempts to shift the meaning of sartorial riches (traditionally associated with aristocracy), re-assigning them as mercantile fodder, and ascribing the hunger for things that medieval moralists found so disturbing to superficial social aspiration. In this context Walter's lavish production of his fictional marriage to a "newe lady" (1005)—which the Clerk points out is "gretter of cosset" than his original marriage (1126–27)—can be understood as a theatrical display of the "emptiness" of such material novelty; a "revelation" about the level of public seduction and deception that money and costume can accomplish. Walter is again the only one who knows the "truth" behind the dazzling surface, behind the material dramatics of "pompe and richesse" into which the frivolous "peple" have bought. Ironically, his last-minute substitution of "povre" Griselda in her "rude" "olde cote" for the "newe lady" whose array is "so richely biseye" enacts the type of false advertising and bait-and-switch mercantile tactics deplored in Chaucer's London. Yet unlike these commercial practices, Walter's manipulation of material goods serves not to fool the people into thinking that what is "olde" is "newe," but rather once again to reevaluate the terms of their (visual) consumption, so that *rudeness* supplants *richesse* as the figurehead of pompe and circumstance, and as the focus of spectacle and celebration. Just as the Clerk links new *richesse* with changeability, deception, and the flickenness of the commons, so he claims old *rudeness* as a marker of the beauty, prosperity, and nobility of virtuous constancy.

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45Hence, while the middling classes actually dress themselves in "newe" garments, Chaucer once again reserves for the educated aristocracy the potential for insight into such material performances. The Knight subtly undercuts the value of novelty, nostalgically claiming that all new fashions simply recycle old ones: "Ther is no newe gyse that it nas old" (KT 125). His son the Squire has a more problematic statement on innovation, first proclaiming humankind's natural love of novelty (line 610), but then, as if to counter any existing claims that are otherwise, later declaring that even noble blood cannot prevent this love of novelty (lines 619–20). Like his father's own stance on novelty and fashion, the Squire's defense of "noveries" simultaneously discloses his own worldview and positions himself in contrast to (and in competition with) the more traditional ways of his father. However, it also reveals the timeliness and complexity of "newenfangelise" as a subject in Chaucer's world: by explicitly arguing that novelty seduces all classes, including the aristocracy, the Squire's statement highlights the ubiquity of the unspoken opposite argument: that change and newness are endemic only to the middle and lower classes.


"The others being the silent Dyer, Weaver, Haberdasher, and Tapestry-Weaver of *The General Prologue*, we know the Merchant deals with trade of wool and cloth because of his reference to "the passage between Middelburg and Orwell, the Netherlands and East Anglia, through which much of the English trade in wool and cloth passed from the 1380's onwards" (Cooper, *Oxford Guide to Chaucer*, p. 42).
themes. The desireless Griselda might be seen as the antitype of the appetitive May and Alison of Bath, and the more general "bourgeois" predication of a husband not prepared for an equal partner who can both assert her own desires and manipulate her reality to satiate them, but she is also a comment on them, and thus cannot be understood in isolation from them. As I will discuss in the next section, this is especially true for the mercantile, domineering Wife of Bath and her "secte" of material women.

All-Consuming Archevys

While throughout his tale the Clerk positions Griselda's fluctuating sartorial symbolism more generally in relation to the shallow gaze of the "peple" and their implied pilgrim contingent, in the final words of his tale and in the subsequent Envoy he explicitly narrows the tale's directive into a practical, material interpretation for a more specific type of practical, material listener: the Wife of Bath "and al hire secte" (1170–71).

Whether this "secte" carries its sexual or legal meaning, or whether it refers to the Wife of Bath's maîtresse cause d'élire, it finally makes overt the heretofore veiled gendering of the Clerk's antimaterialism. This gendering is partly, but not wholly, a response to the Wife of Bath and her


42 See, for example, Chaucer's lyric "Against Women Unconstant," which associates a woman's desire for "newfangledness" in lovers with the changing color of her dress (The Riverside Chaucer, p. 657).
particular form of bourgeois materialism and marital economics. In a larger sense it taps into the moralizing sumptuary discourses of Chaucer’s world, in which the category of person most associated with changeability and material desires, and thus that most likely to be the implied target of these themes in The Clerk’s Tale, is the medieval woman or wife.33 Tellingly, as a temptation in the human stages in life, richesse was thought to be especially pernicious for women—women being, in Diane Owen Hughes’s words, “the ultimate symbol of a too transitory material world, corrupted initially by Eve’s sin.”34

The medieval tradition of seeing Griselda as a type of mirror for women underscores the Clerk’s own possible objective in this regard. Roberta L. Krueger has recently outlined the trope of “impossibility” through which Boccaccio and Petrarch compare Griselda to contemporary wives, a theme reformulated into Griselda’s role as a “biau mirror,” or beautiful mirror for wives in the French translations and parodied in the scenes of marriage in the Chaucerian version and in his anonymous French source, Le Livre Griseldis, which states in its preface that it has been created “a l’exemple des femmes mariees et toutes autres” (as an example for married women and all other women).35

When read with an eye toward the Clerk’s acknowledged female audience, and within the larger context of the Griselda tale as a mirror for women, the Clerk’s use of sartorial symbols suggests even stronger comparisons to “real” wives and their sumptuary excesses. In particular, his gendered allusions to attire highlight the substantial sumptuary component of marital conflict in this period. When placed in the context of contemporary women’s marital rights, for example, the “smok” that Griselda requests of Walter at the dissolution of their marriage can be seen as a barred reminder to English wives of their absolute lack of personal property rights. On the one hand, Griselda’s “smock” works as a moral exemplum against women’s attachment to their finery, the literal manifestation of the sartorial humility the Wife of Bath lacks: “‘In habit

33Hughes, “Regulating Women’s Fashions,” p. 144.
35Severs, The Literary Relationships of Chaucer’s Clerk’s Tale, p. 255 (line 2); Crane, The Performance of Self, p. 30.
according to English common law, the husband, who owned outright all of the couple’s personal property, was not legally required to return a woman’s dowry or any other private item, with one exception: according to the law of *paraphernalia* rights, the woman had to be allowed one piece of “necessary” clothing. In stipulating that Griselda, like a “wydwe” (856), leaves the marriage with only the garment on her back, and returns all other personal items to Walter, the Clerk emphasizes women’s own meager legal status regarding the goods and clothes with which they adorn themselves.

Chaucer’s most significant addition to Griselda’s wardrobe, the “clooth of gold that brighte shoon” (1117) in which she is dressed after her third and final stripping, also extends the Clerk’s rhetoric against ostentatious wives. On the surface the garment represents the long-overdue end to Griselda’s suffering; after proving herself worthy, she, like Job, has her fortunes restored and receives her rightful place according to her *gentilisses* and humility. In late medieval Europe, “clooth of gold” was a specific and highly coveted material good; the pinnacle of sumptuous display, it was usually worn and exchanged by nobility and the very elite of the social strata. By the late fourteenth century, however, sumptuary legislation barring such material from lower and middle classes suggests that it had become programmatically accessible. “Clothes of gold,” we remember, top the list of the “newe” vestimentary commodities that the wealthy Syrian merchants of *The Man of Law’s Tale* bring for trading (137). The immorality of such clothing became a favorite topic of sermonizers; the fourteenth-century preacher Thomas Wimbleton, for example, explicitly uses the Job passage referred to in *The Clerk’s Tale* to condemn gold clothes and other riches: “For we bep / nout gete wip riche dopis, neiber bore wip gold ne wip / siluer. Ynakid he bryngep vs in to þe world, nedy of mete, / cloyngle and drynke.”

Moreover, a few stanzae after describing Griselda’s superior garment, the Clerk offers a contrasting image in the impure metaphorical “gold” of contemporary wives, which, he says, would not hold up under testing the way Griselda did: “The gold of hem hath now so badde alayes / With bras, that thogh the coyne be faer at ye, / It wolde rather brese a-two than plye” (1166–69). Griselda’s pure gold clothing works nicely to contrast the flashy but substandard gold of contemporary women, yet it still presents a problem with regard to the Clerk’s larger rhetorical project: that is, how can he reward Griselda’s humility with gold clothing without engaging in and encouraging the very artifice and covetousness that he shuns? Once again, the Clerk seems to find an answer to this dilemma in the material consciousness of his ever-present, ever-watching—and this time, explicitly gendered—fictional audience. Until this moment women have interacted with Griselda’s clothing only as vehicles for Walter’s power: Walter oversees the measurement of Griselda’s first set of clothes on a “mayde yk to hire stature” (257), and, as we have seen, before his first marriage he orders “the women” to strip her of her *ride* clothes and dress her in *robese*. In regard to her gold clothing, however, for the first time Walter does not instigate Griselda’s change of clothes. *The Clerk’s Tale* makes no indication that Walter decrees or even knows in advance about Griselda’s final “clooth of gold”; rather, it is a group of anonymous watchful “ladies” (perhaps the same aforementioned women) who discretely take her away to strip and clothe her when they see the right moment in the festivities: “whan that they hir tyne say” (1114). While, as Susan Crane has pointed out, the women’s actions effectively condone Walter’s treatment of his wife and even “remake” their marriage, the implications of the scene seem more complicated than this. Why would this text, which has gone out of its way to locate the power of women’s clothing symbolism in the hands of recognized patriarchal figures (husband, ruler, father), and thus also to keep true to its source texts, now in its final hour place Griselda’s ultimate sartorial transformation entirely in the hands of anonymous female revelers? Is it really an accident that our first real glimpse at female agency in this tale concerns a socially savvy and upwardly-mobile costume change? Why is this particular moment allocated as women’s “tyne” to step forward and intervene in the presentation of *povre* Griselda?

While the text does not give easy answers to these questions, it does

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60 Goldsmiths were included in the 1363 English sumptuary law, in which they are legally required to have surveyors make an “Assay” of their “Allay.” See SR I.380.

61 Crane, *The Performance of Self*, p. 36.

62 Wife of Bath’s *Prologue*, lines 253–56, 265–70; and *Roman de la rose*, lines 898–92, 8597–600.
seem telling that the Clerk would suddenly leave open the question of exactly who has power over Griselda's sartorial symbolisms—which, despite his opening rhetoric of dismissal, he has repeatedly shown to hold immense social, political, economic, and even spiritual importance. Have these women usurped or been given some control here, and, if so, what does it mean? Could this final and unusual scene of private stripping and public acceptance (versus her heretofore public stripping and private acceptance) mean, for instance, that Griselda in some way finally "wore" the clothes on her body? Although I may be belaboring the point here, these questions gain real currency when we consider the subtext of marital ownership of material goods in this tale and the "Envoy," and the lengths to which the Clerk seems willing to go to conceal any potential for real resistance here from his listeners. As if on cue, for example, the sartorial transformation brought about by these women triggers the beginning of the end of the tale, for the following stanza initiates a temporal and spatial retreat into rhetorical synopsis and completion: "Thus hath this pitous day a blissful ende" (1121), concludes the Clerk, a remark that swiftly unites Griselda's final clothing transformation, the joyful "marthe and revel" (1123) of the people, and the ensuing, two-stanza happy ending of his Griselda narrative. The actions of "these ladies" thus mark an important shift in the tale, for the Clerk's apparent transfer of the sartorial matter from serious Walter to the reveling women, and his related move from "pitious" to "blisful," foreshadow the larger shift the Clerk makes in and around his Envoy a few stanzas later, when he loosens his formal structure and tone and appears to embrace the perspective of the Wife of Bath "and al hire secte": "I wol with lusty herte, fresehe and grene, / Seyn yow a song to glade yow, I wen" (1173–74). Not surprisingly, however, his apparent (and I might add, rather late) appeal to the pleasure of his listeners comes with its own inherent reproach, for in order to present this "glad" song, he says, he must "ystyre of erneest matere" (1175). Thus, as the Clerk constructs it, the Envoy in honor of all that is new, desirous, and entertaining (or "freshe and grene," "lusty," and "glad"), not to mention in honor of the "maistrie" of women, is frivolous and superfluous: an unnecessary, if popular and fashionable, new adornment to his heretofore "ernestful" tale.

As part of his strategy of undercutting the ornamental, the pleasurable, the popular, and the feminine, the Clerk situates his Envoy in the belief that men's and women's modes and materials of interpretation dramatically differ, for his shift from addressing "lordynges" (1163) to addressing "noble wyves" (1183) crucially coincides with his shift from insisting that the tale should be read as allegory for the trials of the Christian soul (1142–48) to his ultimate suggestion that the tale pertains to the material reality of contemporary "archewyves" (1195). This is especially clear at the end of the Envoy, when the Clerk adopts the language of the Wife of Bath (who adopted the language of the Roman de la rose) to advise women on how to manipulate their material performances for social gain:

If thou be fair, ther folk been in presence,
Stewe thou thy visage and thyn apparell;
If thou be foul, be fre of cay dispence;
To gete thee freendes ay do thy travalle;
Be ay of chiere as light as leef on lynde,
And lat hym care, and wepe, and wynge, and waille!

(1207–10)

This final stanza positions Griselda most clearly as the unstated counterexample to contemporary women's production of self-presentation. While she was "ay oon in herete and in visage" (7.1), for example, here we have the womanly manipulation of both "visage" and "apparail." Visage in particular, with its correlation to falsity and deception, suggests the negative implications of women's control over their appearances. Moreover, while Griselda exhibited no emotion when repeatedly stripped and dressed by her spouse, contemporary women almost inadvertently bring their spouses to dramatic displays of weeping with their consumption and ostentation. And finally, while Griselda worked untiringly with little interest in clothes or richese, here contemporary women's work, or travaille, is their exuberant dressing and spending.}

\[\text{MED, s.v. "visage," esp. 2b. In a related scene in The Merchant's Tale, May's predicament provokes the goddess Proserpine to bestow on all women the gift of cunning doubleness of "visage" (2272–75).} \]

\[\text{On the various types of expenditure that this word expressed in this period, see MED, s.v. "dispence."} \]

\[\text{See de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life, pp. xii–xx, 35–42, esp. 40–41. The Clerk's sarcastic reference to women's sumptuary "work" also invites correlation with a key aspect of what Thorstein Veblen termed "vivacious consumption," that is, the process in which women's association with consumption as a type of "work" coincides with their ultimate exclusion from economically productive, "public" work. See Thorstein Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class (1899; New York: Viking Press, 1967), p. 81. Such a reading has obvious ramifications in this period, in which women's numerous} \]
crucial troping of consumers as workers taps into what de Certeau has described as the active processes of consumption, by which consumption itself becomes not only a type of production but also a practice or method of resistance for the repressed. This type of resistance informs the sum and substance of the Envoi, in which women’s “work” of appareille and dispence determines not only their marital relationships but also women’s roles in the greater community and even their reception of fictional tales like Griselda’s.

The Envoi’s anonymous archwives obviously get much of their general momentum from their explicit association with the rebellious Wife of Bath. One specific and underexamined similarity is that the Wife’s Tale also ends in a fervent state of conflict between husbands’ general niggardliness and wives’ love of dispence. For while she humorously draws her tale to a close by imagining a world in which Christ sends to women “Housbondes meche, yonge, and freshe abedde” (1259) with which to live their long, ever-joyous lives, Alisoun actually ends on a much angrier and arguably more revealing note, in which she curses “olde and angry nygards of dispence,” asking God to cut short: their lives with the “verray pestilence” (1263–64). After the extended talk about sexual, rhetorical, social, and intellectual “sovereignty” throughout her Prologue and Tale, then, the Wife chooses as her ultimate word on the subject consumer sovereignty.66 Despite the Wife of Bath’s jelly resistance to her various husbands’ attempts to curb her sartorial spending and display in her Prologue (“Thou shalt nat bothe, thogh that thou were wood, / Be maister of my body and of my good,” she declares [3:13–14]), it seems she cannot encompass these misers neatly into her fantasy of feminine dominance, and the undisguised resentment they bring out in the normally humorous if histrionic Wife lingers after her own formidable verbal performance has ended.

Considering the Clerk’s larger rhetoric of sartorial richesse and nudumen

and his overt address to the Wife of Bath, it is no coincidence that this theme of dispence reemerges at the end of his Envoi. In fact, from its inception, the Envoi seems to frame its marital concerns as summptuary concerns. The Clerk’s reference to Griselda at the beginning of the Envoi—his last mention of her—asks us to envision her not only “deed” and buried in Italy (1177–78), but as the potential victim of a curiously literal mode of consumption—that is, in the entrails of that fabled ingester of patient wives, Chichaveche:

O noble wyves, ful of heigh prudence,
Lat noon hurlyte yeure tonge naille.
Ne lat no clerk have cause or diligence
To write of yow a storie of swich merveille
As of Grisidis pacient and kynde,
Lest Chichaveche yow swelwe in hire entraille!
(Envoi, 1183–88)

This striking depiction of the public reception of stories as a feminine cow that eats patient wives has one target and one immediate parallel: the “noble wyves” to whom these words are addressed, and who have at this moment received the Clerk’s tale of Griselda.67 Yet this is not merely about a cannibalistic feminine that “consumes” both masculine writing and a favorite subject of masculine writing, feminine patience. Rather, these lines form part of a greater context of consumption in the Envoi that harnesses more traditional misogynist themes of female oral rapaciousness and verbosity to contemporary material modes of consumption, women’s appareille and dispence.

The legend of Chichaveche comes from the French Chichoface, and while it is often translated as dean-cow or lean-face, a more literal interpretation would be “miser-cow.”68 Chichaveche signifies one of the few


A corresponding focus on marital dispence exists in The Shipman’s Tale, which critical tradition surmises probably originated as a tale for the Wife. This tale’s exploration of the themes of marital, sexual, and financial spending, exchanging, and debt echoes the Wife’s own; indeed, as in the Wife’s Prologue, in this tale marital dispence, though technically the responsibility of husbands, is ultimately controlled through manipulation by wives. See esp. lines 1–19.

66 Lydgate’s later poem about Chichaveche offers just such a vision; in it, the emaciated cow mounts Griselda as her “owne” and only meal long gone, and prepares to give up on her life’s search because “Wymmen have made hem selve so strong” with their “crowelte” and “vindicte.” John Lydgate, “Bycorne and Chichaveche,” in The Minor Poems of John Lydgate ii, ed. Henry Noble MacCracken, EETS e.s. 107 (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), pp. 433–38; lines 99, 122, 121, 126.

67 A chich or chince in Middle English means a rich person who is stingy or greedy; it is associated with owtenite, and the hording of richesse (MED, “chinch”). On the names of these bears, see Eleanor Prescott Hammond, English Verse Between Chaucer and Surrey (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1927), pp. 113–15. See also Malcolm Jones, “Monsters of Misogyny: Bigorne and Chichaveche—Suite et Fir?” in Marvels, Monsters, and Miracles: Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Imaginations ed. Timothy S. Jones and
among their own, women's symbolic status as commodities, their traditional role as figures for men's adornment, and their new importance in post-plague market production, all of which played important roles in the cultural inscription of conspicuous consumption on the female body. Indeed, although medieval European sumptuary laws show substantial variation in their targets and objectives, most sumptuary historians agree that the shift in sumptuary laws to focus more on women's dress coincided with the growth of the urban mercantile class. In England in particular, legislation of women's sartorial choices was tied closely to their subordinate cultural status. Following what Claire Sponsler has described as the "imaginary pattern of social relations" constructed by sumptuary laws, for instance, women's attire and consumption privileges were governed almost completely by the socioeconomic status of their father or husband. Related to this is the aforementioned ongoing dispute, starting in the mid-fourteenth century, between the ecclesiastical and secular courts in England about whether a woman's clothing and jewelry—her paraphernalia in medieval legalese—were her own (sua propria) or, like the rest of her land and goods, under the control of her husband. In the words of Pollock and Maitland's eminent History of English Law, "[t]he idea that the ornaments of the wife's person are specially her own seems to struggle for recognition in England" in this period. Control over the resources of a woman's appearance and self-presentation became central to late medieval identity constructions, manifesting itself not only in sumptuary and property laws but also in the performance of gender and marital subject positions. At its heart was a growing recognition among men that women could use the very material of masculine adornment to accrue their own material and symbolic capital; that is, they could transform commodities to be their own and thus maneuver around the strategies of masculine disciplining forces.

On the new status of women in market production challenging "male preserve" and helping to form a new gender identity, see Howell, Women, Production, and Patriarchy in Late Medieval Cities, esp. pp. 182–83.


Sponsler, Drama and Resistance, p. 17.


Boccaccio illuminates this process in his description of women's post-marriage power grab: "Thinking they have climbed to a high station, though they know they were born to be servants, they at once take hope and what their appetite for mastery;
Chaucer's Clerk situates the disparity between his Tale and Envoi precisely in this site of contention. As we remember, Griselda's marriage is based on her abdication of her right to choose: her choice is not to choose, her response is not to respond, and this lack of choice manifests itself in her vacillating sartorial richeste and radenesse. In direct contrast to this, the Clerk positions the archivales as rulers in the act of decision-making: praising, albeit ironically, the women's "heigh prudence" (1183) and offering to "consaille" the women's "governaill" (1200). Underlying these general themes of marital and political control are further examples of a concerted focus on economic control over commodities and consumption. For example, when the Clerk tells the noble wypen that in order to take on themselves the "governaill" (1192), they must "evere answereth at the counttrecaille" (1190), he alludes to wives' general garrulousness, but also to their consumer profissig. Literally the other half of a tally kept by the creditor and presented for payment, a counter-tally was often used as a pun that linked material and sexual debt, as in The Shipman's Tale, in which a wife explains how she will pay her merchant: husband for the debt she accrued with her new clothing ("I am youre wyf," she says, "sore it upon my tailie" [4161]). This pun also invokes a popular conceit that portrays women as serpents or scorpions, who fatten with their heads so they can sting with their sexual and sumptuary "tail," a conceit that Chaucer elsewhere explicitly associates with the dangers of the "monstre" Fortune and her false goods. 

This association of a wife's defiant "reply" to her husband with monstrous or devilish sumptuary resistance was part of the larger moral discourse in which fashionable women were identified as the devil's army, and while pretending to be meek, humble, and obedient, they beg from their wretched husbands the crowns, girdles, cloths of gold, ermines, the wealth of clothes, and the various other ornaments in which they are seen resplendent every day; the husband does not perceive that all these are weapons to combat his mastery and vanquish it. The women, no longer servants but suddenly equals . . . contrive with all their might to seize control." Giovanni Boccaccio, Corbacco, trns. Anthony K. Cassell (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), p. 24. Quoted in Hallissy, Chau Chau, True Wives, Steadfast Widows, p. 127. See also David Wallace, Chaucerian Policy, 19.

See, for example, Benson's gloss on this word, which identifies both meanings (p. 153).


78 Bromyard, "Bellum," Summe Prodictantium [SP], British Library, MS Royal 7 E IV, quoted in Owst, Literature and Pilgrims, p. 393.


81 Newton, Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince, p. 8.
attire or knightly armor. Henry Knighton's *Chronicon*, for example, describes the growing problem of large groups of women attending tournaments dressed in masculine attire, with daggers slung low on their hips. Such stories have led at least one historian to surmise that discourses about women's rebelliousness in attire might be indicative of a greater and recognized "feminist movement" in this period.

**Griselda as Sumptuary Model**

The questions of materialism that develop in *The Clerk's Tale* and *Envoy*, and especially the sartorial particulars of these questions, leave us looking on some level for material interpreters. Chaucer offers two immediate examples in the Host and the Merchant, both of whom relate the tale, against the apparent directive of the Clerk, to their own wives.

Looking beyond the pilgrim audience, however, one can see that while Chaucer's Clerk addresses his own sumptuary reading of Griselda to contemporary "archeweyes," it is another avid clerkly reader who responds. Nearly half a century after Chaucer's death, the monk and poet John Lydgate writes a poem addressed to "Noble pynness," in which he decries women's fashionable headdresses—dubbed "horns" by moralists—and implores women to "cast away" such unnatural attire:

Clerkys recorde, by gret auccoryte,
Hornes wer yve to bestys for dyffeunce—
A thryng contrarie to flamentrye,
To be maad sturdy of resyntence.
But arche wives, ergre in ther vyolence,
Fers as tygre ffor to make ayyfray,
They haue despit, and ageyne concyence,
Lys: nat of pryde, ther hornes cast awa.

As this passage suggests, Lydgate effectively adopts the vocabulary of the Clerk's *Envoy* and the Wife of Bath's *Prologue* to explore the issue of women's sartorial extravagance. In addition to bailing clerkly "auccoryte," for example, Lydgate describes how "expyerence" proves that beauty prevails despite elaborate fashions (7–8), and how nature has "soveranye" over crafted appearance (2–3). As in the Clerk's *Envoy*, Lydgate's true target is not specifically the Wife of Bath, but the greater general population of "arche wives" that she exemplifies; while Chaucer's Clerk states "Ye archewyves, stordeth at defensye, / . . . ergre as is a tygre yond in Ynde" (1195, 1199), Lydgate's likewise declares them "arche wives, ergre in ther vyolence, / Fers as tygre ffor to make ayyfray."

In addition to the overt lexical borrowings from the *Envoy*, Lydgate invokes Griselda as the sartorial counterexample in various subtle ways. While Griselda remains "ay oon in herte and in visage" (711) throughout all of Walter's attempts to "assaye" her "variance" (710), Lydgate derides the "counteriet" aspects of contemporary women's attire (22), focusing on the "foreyn appareynce" of elaborate fashions and the accompanying implications of duplicity in the wearer (2). Like the attractive but impare gold alloy of the Clerk's contemporary women (1167–69), Lydgate declares that in the world of fashion "[c]hynge counteriet wol tayfen at assaye" (14). More specifically like the Clerk, Lydgate uses the metaphor of amalgamated gold to describe women's deceptive appearance, stating that "trewel mettall requeryth noon alayy" (6). Generally speaking, Lydgate addresses the pretenses of high fashion more directly, pushing his sartorial metaphors even further than Chaucer's Clerk, such as when he contrasts "pure" gold with the golden cloth that women wear: "Twen gold and gosomery grete dyffereynce" (5). Within this framework Lydgate formulates a clear sartorial binary construction from the vocabulary of *The Clerk's Tale* and *Envoy*, and specifically from the contrasting attributes of the ostentatious Wife of Bath and naked Griselda: on the one hand are the "arche wives," whose "counterie" fashions them with "Craftf," "richeysse," "dyffereynce," "vyolence," "resyntence," and "chynge contrarie to flamentrye," and on the other are the "wyves trewel," whose "natural" kerchiefs characterize their associations with "Nature," God-given "bewte," "prudence," "humelyte," "chast

As Lydgate often uses the term *gosamer*, a specific type of paury gold material popular for decoration in the Middle Ages, to contrast with simpler material. In his satirical poem "The Order of Fools," for example, he twice compares *gosamer* to wool, in *Minor Poems*, pp. 449–55; lines 63–64, 137–38.
innocence," and of course, "pacience." In the end, Lydgate summons this final and most famous attribute of Griselda to entreat women to strip themselves of their finery: "Vnder support of your pacience," he pleads, "Yeven example hernes to cast away" (47–48).

In addressing women’s horned headaddresses, this poem tackles one of the most common and most dramatic examples of late medieval women’s fashion rebellion, and one that certainly would have informed the sartorial subtext of the Clerk’s Envoy. Fourteenth- and fifteenth-century sermons and poems cite women’s horned headaddresses as the epitome of fashion’s unnaturalness, violent disobedience, and ornamental extremes. The homiletic tradition associates a woman wearing a horned headpiece with the violent ox of Exodus 21.28–29, who kills innocent people when its master fails to restrain it. One early fourteenth-century French poem likewise finds its objections to women’s horns on the fact that women wear such clothes "pouer les hommes," to kill the men. The way to counter this rebellion, the sermonizer Bromyard suggests, is to strip the women bald of their headaddresses and other adornments in an Isaiah-like (and Walter-like) purging of priceful adornment: "The Lord will make bald the crown of the head of the daughters of Sion, and will strip their hair." The biblical passage he cites was a favorite of moralists in this period, and it reveals in the endless possibilities of stripping away women’s finery:

In that day the Lord will take away the ornaments of shoes, and little moons, / And chains and necklaces, and bracelets, and bonnets, / And bodkins, and ornaments of the legs, and tablets, and sweet balls, and earrings, / And rings, and jewels hanging on the forehead, / And changes of appare, and short cloaks, / And fine liners, and crisping pins, / And looking glasses, and lawns, and headbands, and fine veils. (Isaiah 3:18–23)

Povre Griselda and the All-Consuming Archevyves

Considering this larger context, while Lydgate’s incorporation of the Clerk’s Envoy into his own contemporary fashion debates on women’s horned headaddresses may suggest a certain level of effectiveness of Chaucer’s sumptuary discourses, it also attests to the moralized and popularized appeal throughout the last centuries of the Middle Ages for women to "cast away" their finery, and the corresponding attractiveness of the figure of Griselda as a contemporary sartorial model for that appeal. The Clerk’s antimaterialism is steeped in this particular moral discourse about material goods, which targets the disparity between the spiritual abjection such goods expose and the cultural capital they bestow. While the Clerk may dismiss the frivolity of materialistic, untutored “interpreters” in his dress, his rhetoric, and in his final words, his larger sartorial dialectic between riches and redeness, his link between Griselda’s sartorial transformations and the worldly, changing “peple,” and his final address to the consuming archevyves of the world, all suggest that his asceticism hides an unspoken apprehension about, and fascination with, worldly, material aesthetics.

87 Ovst, Literature and Pulpit, pp. 393–96.
90 Bromyard, "Ornatus," SP, quoted in Ovst, Literature and Pulpit, p. 403.