Symkyn, Chaucer punishes 'laboreris' who take 'knystrood' upon themselves" (13). And again: "Through [na.tivi]" 'Rustici quidem fuistis et estis; in bondagio pennanebitis' (Rustics indeed you were and
XVII.4.3 For Middleton,
Smiles
the responses ofPetrarch's two readers in
22June with envoys from the Essex rehels, after the turning poiut of the rising of 1381:
XVI1.2, and a discussion of the tale's genre and
Seniles
of the writer" in
28 (1994): 393-404, at 399; Murray Wright Bundy,
Clerk's Tale
(Chaucer, & Legal Fiction: Reading the Records [Teaneck, N.J.], 2001), 38-39.
63. Again, Kolbe: "The last line is mysterious and terrible, for Holy Church resides ultima­
ately in the souls of the faithful. It is the faithful he's willing to devour" (Chaucer, 34).
66. John P. Plummer offers this comment on Malyne: "While we see the miller's pride
and thievery and his wife's pride and scornfulness in their actions, we see Malyne's com­
plicity in her family's knavery only in her physiology. She has all the physical sign of her
bending, but her act of restitution, returning rather than Boarding something stolen, sees
her apart from her kin ("Hooly Chiches Blood: Simony and Patrimony in Chaucer's Rene's Tale," Chaucer Review 18 [1983]: 49-60), at 57. As Plummer points out, Malyne's appearance (plainly, she is Symkyn's daughter) conceal an honest heart, while as we have
seen, beneath Symkyn's accidental clerkliness lies the unredeemed miller.
67. Barden, editor of the Summa Thologica (see note 45 above), quotes M.T. Penelo, L'esse de l'antologique en theologie dogmatique [Paris, 1931], 457, who thought that this word
just quoted are "the most profound... ever said on the possibility and nature of the
Enchiridic conversion" (78).
68. One of the most interesting treatments of this well-known theme is Britton
Harwood's "Psychosomatic Politics" (see note 53), where he rightly places Chaucer with
those who aligned themselves with Richard II during the Peasants' Revolt: "The trans­
gressive pretension (of Symkyn) and brutality (of his punishment) repeat, in Chaucer's
own fashion, the message that Walsingham attributed to Richard when the King met on
22 June with envoys from the Essex rebels, after the turning point of the rising of 1381.
'Ristico quidem fosset et estat in bondage penitentissimo' (Kustics indeed you were and
are you will remain in bondage). That is, you will continue to be serfs, Chaucer's class
attributed the violence in 1381 peculiarly to serfs (noteb) (12). And again: "Through
Symkyn, Chaucer punishes 'laboren' who take 'knystrood' upon themselves" (13).
pleasures of the text, according to Petrarch's idea of the literate man's 'pley.' While she argued that the moral sentence was indeed important to Petrarch, she insisted that his real interest lay in the tale's pathos or "affective powers" and in the challenge of adapting Boccaccio's vernacular story for the recreation of elite Latin readers whose more sober values contrast with those of Boccaccio's audience.  

Middleton's essay has had a curious afterlife. Her main and compelling argument—that Petrarch took up the translation as a pleasurable activity, and that his attention in *Smiles VII* to the act of composition and to his own version's effect on readers indicated that the tale's didactic value was just one aspect of its attractiveness—has not altered in a significant way subsequent approaches to Petrarch's *Griselda* story. Charlotte Morse's "The Exemplary Griselda" (1986) offered a substantial counterargument. Reasserting the tale's status as a moral exemplum, Morse cited evidence of Petrarch's lifelong commitment to exemplary narratives as expressed both in his letters and his treatises *De viris illustribus* and *De remediis utriusque fortune*. Though both essays are widely cited, often together as if they were complementary rather than contradictory, Morse exposed the weaknesses of Middleton's argument: a focus on Petrarch's stated aims and a failure to compare Boccaccio's and Petrarch's renderings to determine their differences and through them the implied values of their audiences. Many of the changes Petrarch made within the narrative actually augmented the tale's didactic content; thus Middleton's main thesis contradicted Petrarch's painstaking elaboration of political and remedial virtues within the tale. Most critics since Morse have continued to insist, justifiably, on Petrarch's interest in the tale's exemplary values.

Middleton's secondary argument linking Petrarch's Latin adaptation with the culture of Latin readers has had wider influence but has also been challenged. David Wallace has characterized Petrarch's audience as "a small, consciously exclusive, masculine group of elites dedicated to the pursuit of Latin culture: just such a group, in fact, as Petrarch describes in framing his *Griselda* story." Like Middleton's, Wallace's insights into Petrarch's rendering of the tale derive in part from an examination of how Chaucer appears to have read it, as indicated by the kinds of changes he made in the *Clown's Tale*. But the two essays could not be more different. Where Middleton focused on the letters of *Smiles VII*, Wallace argued that the letters are relatively unimportant for establishing the context of the *Griselda* story. Where Middleton defined the "Petrarchan Academy" in terms of its constituents' notion of literary culture, for Wallace this group of readers, carefully selected by Petrarch, functioned to control the transmission and reception of Petrarchian texts. Wallace's broad aim is to put Petrarch's service to tyrants in exchange for their patronage, his misogyny, and his "willingness to view certain human beings as nonsubjects." He cites chilling passages from Petrarch's works to give examples of Petrarch's elitism and ruthless exclusivity. With respect to the *Griselda* story, Wallace's aim is to distinguish Petrarch's ideological commitments from those of Boccaccio and Chaucer. He argues, "The *fin*, or final effect, of Petrarchian humanism and of Petrarchian poetry ... is to announce and embellish the will of the state as embodied in the person of a single masculine ruler." Discounting Petrarch's attempt in the moral conclusion to differentiate Walter from God, Wallace contends that the "implied analogy between Walter and God can be taken seriously in Petrarch's text because Walter's tyrannical proclivities are played down or passed over without comment." Through Wallace does not examine Petrarch's treatment of Walter or cite lines from Petrarch's *Griselda* story, subsequent critics have used the term "Petrarchan Academy" to distinguish what have seemed like Petrarch's conservative aims from those of Chaucer and Boccaccio, who were writing for a mixed audience whose concern over Walter's appalling behavior might overshadow their admiration for Griselda's virtuous example.

Middleton's and Wallace's arguments differ strikingly in part because of the different contexts that they find crucial for understanding Petrarch's *Griselda* story, and both are persuasive in bringing to bear on the *Griselda* story important facets of Petrarch's complexity. Yet for both, Chaucer's reading of Petrarch's intentions—though they read the *Clown's Tale* differently—provides support for their own arguments. This approach, I think, ignores what should be the starting point for understanding Petrarch's *Griselda* story, that is, the relationship between Boccaccio's narrative and Petrarch's translation. The transmission of Petrarch's *Griselda* story in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Europe treated it as a fairly autonomous text, its translators and adapters broadening its audience and moral application. But Petrarch's *Griselda* story was first of all a response to Boccaccio, and it is the complexity of his tale as a response that this essay will explore. I argue that the letters of *Smiles VII* not only introduce and comment on Petrarch's translation, but also set up issues Boccaccio raises in his own version's effect on readers indicated that the tale's didactic value as a moral exemplum, Morse cited evidence

Middleton's and Wallace's arguments differ strikingly in part because of the different contexts that they find crucial for understanding Petrarch's *Griselda* story, and both are persuasive in bringing to bear on the *Griselda* story important facets of Petrarch's complexity. Yet for both, Chaucer's reading of Petrarch's intentions—though they read the *Clown's Tale* differently—provides support for their own arguments. This approach, I think, ignores what should be the starting point for understanding Petrarch's *Griselda* story, that is, the relationship between Boccaccio's narrative and Petrarch's translation. The transmission of Petrarch's *Griselda* story in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Europe treated it as a fairly autonomous text, its translators and adapters broadening its audience and moral application. But Petrarch's *Griselda* story was first of all a response to Boccaccio, and it is the complexity of his tale as a response that this essay will explore. I argue that the letters of *Smiles VII* not only introduce and comment on Petrarch's translation, but also set up issues Boccaccio raises in his own version's effect on readers indicated that the tale's didactic value as a moral exemplum, Morse cited evidence
the narrative strategies each uses within his tale. Examining the ways in which Petrarch restages the interpretive problems that Boccaccio valued in his own tale, I try to show Petrarch's accomplishment on its own terms, providing a reading of Petrarch that may or may not conform to the way in which his Griselda story is represented in Chaucer's "Clerk's Tale."

Petrarch's Audiences

Petrarch's discussion of the Griselda story in Seniles XVII.3 and XVII.4 gives it an existence independent of the letters, for he recounts having readied Boccaccio's Italian tale to his friends; claims to have decided to translate it for readers who do not know Italian; reports that some have advised his Latin translation and requested it; and, in the final letter, relays and comments on the responses of two readers. These different kinds of oral and written performance imply different audiences, although in some cases their memberships may overlap. And these audiences differ from the one Petrarch inscribes within Seniles XVII.3, which must know Italian, and has Boccaccio as its chief member. While it is true that Petrarch often wrote his letters for an audience broader than the individual he addresses, his audience here is extremely important. In dedicating the tale to Boccaccio, Petrarch links the two Griselda stories together, insisting that his own version is accountable only to Boccaccio and urging him and all others to treat the two narratives as companion pieces:

Whether I have deformed it or, perhaps, beautified it by changing its garment, you be the judge—for it all began there, and it goes back there; it knows the judge, the house, the way—so that you and whoever reads this may be clear on one point: that you, not I, must render an account of your works. Whosoever asks me whether it is true, that is, whether I have written a history or just a tale, I shall reply with the words of Crispus, "Let the responsibility fall on the author"... namely my Giovanni.13

The humor in these lines may fly in different directions. In his conclusion to the Decameron, Boccaccio had simultaneously abjured and accepted responsibility for the work's effects on readers, and here Petrarch takes another leaf from Boccaccio's book. Yet in sending Boccaccio and all others to the Griselda story in the Decameron, Petrarch suggests that it is the translation as well as the tale itself that he commands to Boccaccio.

Just before the passage above, Petrarch claims to have followed Horace's advice to translators not to follow an exemplar word for word. Translation is a form of imitation, and Horace links them together in his Art of Poetry.14 Petrarch discussed imitation in three earlier letters, Familiares I.8, XXII.2, and XXIII.19, the latter two to Boccaccio. For Petrarch the duty of the imitator is not to reproduce the exemplar, but like bees who create honey and wax from nectar, the imitator should transform the original into something new and valuable. In Familiares XXIII.19, to explain the relationship between an original and its imitation, he compared it to that between a father and son, who are not exact replicas:

[They have a certain something our painters call an "air," especially noticeable about the face and eyes, that produces a resemblance; seeing the son's face, we are reminded of the father's, although if it came to measurement, the features would all be different, but there is something subtle that creates this effect. We must thus see to it that if there is something similar, there is also a great deal that is dissimilar, and that the similar be elusive and unable to be extricated except in silent meditation, for the resemblance is to be felt rather than expressed.]

His point in using this metaphor differs wholly from that of the bee simile. The act of perceiving similarities and differences is itself pleasurable. By offering his own Griselda story as a translation, Petrarch encourages readers to study his art of imitation. His juxtaposing the two tales certainly implies that he did not think that his own version eliminated the complexity of Boccaccio's: an imitation that simplified would be no achievement. Instead, Petrarch's dedication of the tale suggests that he vaunts his version as a rival. Yet it is very difficult to detect whether Petrarch thinks that he has one-upped Boccaccio or, if he does, the kind of one-upmanship that has occurred; thus Middleton argued that Petrarch's translation is less of a "rival creation" than "a commentary," and in some respects a "critical quiting."15 If Petrarch competes with Boccaccio with his Latin translation, he has chosen a tale he admires tremendously, not one that he necessarily thinks is defective. Through his dedication the vernacular tale becomes the subtext of his own Latin rendering.16

Seniles XVII.3 begins with something like a cursory commentary on the Decameron, which Petrarch admits he has not read completely. He notes the appropriate match among the style, the idiom, the light-minded audience, and the author's own youth.17 His own mature values temper his assessment of the whole Decameron, shaping his interests as a reader and distancing him from Boccaccio's audience, which Boccaccio identifies facetiously in the introduction as women unhappy in love. Although Petrarch deprecates Boccaccio's readers as the "common herd" (655), where the work's concerns coincide with Petrarch's own—in Boccaccio's
description of the plague, his treatment of detractors, and his Griselda story—his praise is lavish; the distance between Boccaccio’s readers and Petrarca’s becomes imaterial; and the distinction between Boccaccio’s youthful concerns as an artist and Petrarca’s more mature ones vanishes entirely.29 He writes that the final tale of Griselda nearly made him forget himself. What Petrarca means is equivocal, but that he felt himself to enter perfectly into Boccaccio’s audience for the Griselda story and that he tried to repeat that experience for his friends is surely important. And it is especially important that Petrarca’s first telling of the Griselda story, like Boccaccio’s own tale, was in Italian.

Petrarca’s views with respect to Italian are complicated. Kenelm Foster argues that Petrarca found Italian to be an excellent language to express sentiment, but that he abhorred in the audience of Italian readers those who were unmedicated and unlettered.23 The last twenty years of his life, he was working on his vernacular poems the Canzoniere and the Triumphi. It is neither Italian nor Italian readers per se that Petrarca objected to but to the broad democratic reach of Italian.24 His report in Sensili XVII. 4 of two readers of his Latin Griselda story describes their contrasting responses. Petrarca’s Latin readers are not a homogeneous group although they are an exclusive one. The audience Petrarca inscribes within the letters of the Griselda story narrows the reach of Boccaccio’s audience to those who know both Italian and Latin.

Narrative Frames

The Decameron builds many complex relationships among tales and tellers, some of which Chaucer will later use in his Canterbury Tales. My focus here is on Boccaccio’s final tale’s immediate frame, which Robert Edwards has divided into three principal parts: the day’s theme of generosity or magnificence, Dioneo’s commentary introducing and concluding the tale, and the debate the tale provokes among the brigata. As Millicent Joy Marcus has argued, the frame interfaces with readers’ attempts to take from the tale a univocal exemplary meaning by offering perspectives on the tale that thwart an unthoughtful acceptance either of Griselda’s virtuous example or of Gualtieri’s role in demonstrating her virtue. Boccaccio underscores the tale’s open-endedness with the brigata’s final discussion, which describes not one particular view but rather general disagreement about the tale’s meaning. The female members of the brigata debate the story at great length, some criticizing one aspect and some praising another. They do not resolve the argument or even conclude their discussion, for Panfilio, noting the setting sun, interrupts the conversation to recall the brigata to the business of returning to Florence. Thus the final word on Boccaccio’s Griselda story seems to be that there is no final word.25

Dioneo’s opening and closing commentary broadens the tale’s thematic scope to include, besides the virtue of magnificence, an inquiry into a range of virtues and blameworthy behavior. Dioneo associates Gualtieri’s behavior with “matta bestialita” (bestiality, or senseless brutality) and Griselda’s with “divini spiriti” (celestial spirits).26 These labels, like the theme of magnificence, refer us to Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics, but now to a later section, Book 7, on conditions associated with virtue and vice.27 We might see them loosely as two ends of a spectrum running from the subhuman to the superhuman: bestiality, vice, incontinence, continence, virtue, the celestial. Aristotle includes bestiality with vice and incontinence as three states to be avoided. During the last twenty years of his life, he was working on his vernacular poems the Canzoniere and the Triumphi. It is neither Italian nor Italian readers per se that Petrarca objected to but to the broad democratic reach of Italian.24 His report in Sensili XVII. 4 of two readers of his Latin Griselda story describes their contrasting responses. Petrarca’s Latin readers are not a homogeneous group although they are an exclusive one. The audience Petrarca inscribes within the letters of the Griselda story narrows the reach of Boccaccio’s audience to those who know both Italian and Latin.

Modern critics have given Dioneo’s labels a negligible role because Dioneo is, in Edward’s words, “a licensed figure of dissentance” and, in Tania Ilana Rutter’s, “a foil for others’ virtues.”28 Rutter finds the labels ambivalent, particularly in Dioneo’s concluding comment:

Che si potrà dir qui, se non che anche nelle povere case piovono dal cielo de’ divini spiriti, come nelle reali di quegli che sarien più digni di guardar porci che d’aver sopra uomini signoria? (318)

What more needs to be said, except that celestial spirits may sometimes descend even into the houses of the poor, while there are those in royal palaces who would be better employed as swineherds than as rulers of men? (794–95)

Rutter cautions us that we must not designate Gualtieri as the one more suited to tending swine or Griselda as the one most approaching a celestial spirit, and suggests instead—that both could fit into either category.29 For Edwards, Dioneo has “misapplied” the label of bestiality because it designates such a rare human behavior, and Gualtieri’s behavior “fails the test of subhuman extremity,” but the charge nonetheless serves “to register, by his partial and defective analogy, the alarm that Gualtieri’s actions provoke.”30 The main problem with both Edwards’s and Rutter’s readings is that they effectively do away with Dioneo’s comments rather than make use of the allusions to the Nicomachean Ethics to
deepen our understanding of the tale. If Gualtieri's actions are not bestial, then what are they? The tale does not answer the question definitively because Gualtieri is somewhat intractable morally and theoretically. The difficulty of choosing one interpretation of Gualtieri and/or other aspects of this tale is affirmed by Boccaccio's representation of general debate among the *begrada*.

Although Edwards has some justification for saying that Dioneo has misapplied the term, the error is merely a technical one, and Dioneo offers, perhaps, a correction at the tale's conclusion when he compares Gualtieri not so a beast but to a swineherd, one who tends beasts. Swineherd's rule being lacking reason, and Dioneo's new analogy suggests Gualtieri's unsuitableness as a ruler and a husband. His opening reference, however, is not entirely wrong: Dioneo does use the term to condemn Gualtieri's behavior. Although to suit his purposes Aristotle narrows the meaning of bestiality to the most extreme acts of cruelty, such as cannibalism, he also recognizes the word’s broader usages. It is a term of reproach: "we also call by this evil name those men who go beyond all ordinary standards by reason of vice" (*Ethics* 1145a30). Later he applies the term to a very different condition, "every excessive state" and gives these examples, "the man who is by nature apt to fear everything, even the squeak of a mouse, is cowardly with a brutish cowardice [and] ... a fool: those who by nature are thoughtless and live by their senses alone are brutish." Certain diseased states and forms of insanity resemble bestiality: "those who are so as a result of disease (e.g. of epilepsy) or of madness are morbid. Of these characteristics it is possible to have some only at times, and not to be mastered by them ... but it is also possible to be mastered, not merely to have the feelings" (*Ethics* 1149a5-15). While not a cannibal, in his cruelty and his excessive, insatiable longing of Griselda, Gualtieri is bestial accordingly, which Aristotle grants this term. Moreover, the purpose of Aristotle’s discussion in Book 7 is less to insist on the most extreme form of bestiality than to establish the nature of the more common condition of incontinence and the role of reason in virtuous and blameworthy actions. What is common to the three conditions of bestiality (in all its forms), vice, and incontinence is the subordinate role reason plays with respect to appetites and feelings. In virtue, reason predominates; by contrast, feelings and appetites dominate these other behaviors. At the end of the tale, once Gualtieri has taken back Griselda and restored her children to her, the people, while decrying his harsh tests, attribute to Gualtieri wisdom, but they attribute to Griselda greater wisdom. Gualtieri’s reason has certainly aided him in devising his plots and examining Griselda’s responses, but his reason has been in the service of his appetites and feelings; it has not ruled them. Dioneo’s comments in the conclusion prompt readers to discriminate between the role reason plays in Griselda’s and Gualtieri’s behaviors.

In comparing Gualtieri to a swineherd, Dioneo raises the possibility that we should consider Griselda’s behavior to have been bestial. Yet Griselda does not in any way conform to Aristotle’s notion of a bestial human being. I think that Dioneo’s final comments persuade against this analogy by distinguishing Griselda from another kind of wife who might be guided by her appetites once driven out of the palace by her husband. Dioneo’s crude analogy to Griselda’s behavior makes pleasure the end another wife might have sought after being rebuffed by Gualtieri:

Chi avrebbe altri che Griselda potuto col viso non solamente ascoltato ma lieto sofferir le rigide e mai più onusti provare da Gualtieri fatto? Al quale non sarebbe forse stato male investito d’esser abbastanza ad una che, quando fuor di casa l’avesse in camissa cacciata, s’avesse si ad uno altro fatto scotere il pilibicione, che riuscisse ne fosse una bella roba. (518)

Who else but Griselda could have endured so cheerfully the cruel and unheard of trials that Gualtieri imposed upon her without shedding a tear? For perhaps it would have served him right if he had chanced upon a wife, who, being driven from the house in her shift, had found some other man to shake her skincoat for her, earning herself a fine new dress in the process. (518)

Dioneo’s final comments about Griselda point out her rarity and question her efficacy as a model subject for a tyrant, but they also clarify her virtue. He posits an alternative scarcely imaginable for Griselda because her behavior has never had honor, riches, or sensual pleasure as its end, but has been motivated by the happiness that follows from virtuous activity, which Aristotle, the highest good. Boccaccio’s Griselda story demonstrates the self-sufficiency of virtuous activity by bestowing riches, honor, and children on Griselda and then depriving her of these goods without deterring her from acting virtuously. Dioneo’s strategy in the frame is to use irony to subject the protagonists’ actions to further ethical and political scrutiny, yet not to undercut the tale’s treatment of moral virtue.

Even about Dioneo’s allusions to Aristotle’s *Nichomachean Ethics* in the frame, the tale itself raises questions about how Gualtieri’s and Griselda’s behaviors should be understood. Boccaccio’s frame does not, therefore, raise new issues about the Griselda story, but it does provide crucial perspectives for assessing both Gualtieri and Griselda. Petrarch forgoes using the *Nichomachean Ethics* as the tale’s ethical framework. In *On His Own Ignorance and That of Many Others*, Petrarch has acknowledged Aristotle’s "penetrating insight" into the nature of both virtue and vice, but he nonetheless faults the work:
by no means was the promise fulfilled which the philosopher makes at the beginning of the first book of his Ethics, namely that "we learn this part of philosophy not with the purpose of gaining knowledge but of becoming better."

For Petrarch, Aristotle's text lacks the power to move its readers; it increases their knowledge but it does not affect their will. His choice to drop Boccaccio's framing allusions to Aristotle is strategic and ambitious. He does not eliminate from his own narrative Dioneo's thoughtful concerns, but, indeed, as we shall see in the next section, he includes them within his translation, the moral conclusion, and the final letter, Seniles XVII.4.

All four letters of Seniles XVII frame Petrarch's Griselda story by raising issues about the translator and the translation. The letters themselves tell the history of Petrarch's Griselda story in part because they were not written in the order in which he directs Boccaccio to read them. Charles Trinkaus has noted that Petrarch "contrived" what he sought to present as "spontaneous." It is likely that Petrarch's conception of his project to translate the Griselda story grew after the translation of the narrative was completed, probably some time in early spring of 1373. The letter prefacing the tale, Seniles XVII.3, followed the translation. Seniles XVII.3, dated April 27, came next and elicits at the end to the next letter containing the Griselda story, Seniles XVII.4, a letter explaining the order of the letters and briefly commenting on how they came to be composed. Seniles XVII.4, dated June 8, 1373, by Petrarch, was actually written in the following year, possibly only weeks before his death in July 1374. Although this letter was prompted by Petrarch's learning that the other three letters had failed to reach Boccaccio and were probably stolen, it takes up initially a discussion of the translation, including Petrarch's report on his two readers, and concludes with Petrarch saying farewell to Boccaccio, friends, and letter writing. Read together, the letters do not suggest a consistent view of the Griselda story but rather what may be Petrarch's ambivalence over the value of his translation. Seniles XVII.3 is full of enthusiasm over his own Griselda story, but in Seniles XVII.1 Petrarch speculates that Boccaccio might think he was "addressing pointless things" had he only sent him the letter containing the Griselda story (649). At the end of Seniles XVII.2 he digresses on his translation by contrasting it with his other Greek undertakings: "the next letter to you will be a sign of how far I am from counsels of idleness. You, not content with the huge projects I have begun, for which this brief life does not suffice nor would suffice, were doubled, distanced, distracted."

The most useful thing, which is always being suggested, is to translate Greek into Latin and Latin into Greek. This kind of exercise develops in one a precision and richness of vocabulary, a wide range of metaphor and power of exposition, and moreover, imitation of models. Petrarch himself emphasizes the critical scrutiny translation provides the student:

**AMY W. GOODWIN**

"...and study," and vowing that in future letters "I shall write so as to be understood but not to amuse myself" (671). The Griselda story is not a "worthwhile endeavor to stave off "lazy repose" but rather an idle diversion itself. Petrarch's fascinating estimate of his translation may suggest his uncertainty about its reception, but it is clear that he uses these four letters to present a complex self-portrait. His first three letters are not concerned with the tale's ethical values but rather with the characters of the author and translator, Boccaccio and Petrarch, and with the nature of the Griselda story.

By translating Boccaccio's vernacular tale into Latin, Petrarch pays high tribute to the author and his tale. In the order of composition, the translation came first. The four letters of Seniles XVII, full of autobiographical details and points of artifice, were composed around this signal act as Petrarch attempted to place his rendering of the Griselda story within the context of his own accomplishments, his age, and his relationship with Boccaccio. As Petrarch relates in Seniles XVII.5, responses to his Latin Griselda story were favorable. His task in this letter is not only to link Boccaccio's tale and his translation, but also to present the translation in a clever and gracious way that acknowledges this extraordinary act of literary homage. For although Boccaccio has been Petrarch's disciple and eulogist, with his Griselda story he has inspired Petrarch. Expecting Boccaccio to recognize the irony, Petrarch exaggerates the exemplary text he will translate and adopts the guise of an aspiring student.

In Seniles XVII.3, Petrarch's remarks signal a pedagogical model of translation. He recounts having memorized Boccaccio's Italian tale, recited it to his friends, and translated it into Latin, Crassus, in Cicero's De Oratore, reports having used this same procedure in his youth. Citing Cicero, Quintilian also recommends translation, calling it an "exercise." Pliny the Younger emphasizes the critical scrutiny translation provides the student:

The most useful thing, which is always being suggested, is to translate Greek into Latin and Latin into Greek. This kind of exercise develops in one a precision and richness of vocabulary, a wide range of metaphor and power of exposition, and moreover, imitation of the best models leads to a like aptitude for original composition. At the same time, any point which might have been overlooked by a reader cannot escape the eye of a translator.

But the narrative of his experience of the Griselda story is not the only clue he gives Boccaccio. In Seniles XVII.1, Petrarch coaches him:
When you come to the end, you will be worn out and will say: "Is this my sick friend, that busy old man? Or someone else with the same name, a healthy young man with time to spare?" (643)

Throughout Seniles XVII.2, Petrarch prides his old age: his lifelong experiences confer invaluable benefits. He contends that old age may be "a disease of the body but the health of the mind" (646). Conscious that death approaches, he resolves "to double my pace, especially now, and hasten to the goal at sunset as though I had lost part of the daylight" (647). In fact, Boccaccio will discover a "healthy young" Petrarch in Seniles XVII,3, where he takes up the concerns of Boccaccio when as a young man he wrote the Decameron. At the beginning of Seniles XVII.3, Petrarch names Boccaccio's youth as the efficient cause of the Griselda story. At the beginning of Seniles XVII.4, in what seems like a non sequitur, Petrarch links his age when writing the Griselda story with its genre, both issues he has already raised in the preceding letters:

My love for you has prompted me, old as I am, to write what I would scarcely have written when I was young. Whether the contents are true or fictitious I know not, since they are not longer histories but just tales. (669)

Critics have seen his comments about the tale's genre as bearing on the ethical and emotional force of the tale rather than on Petrarch's adopted persona for telling the Griselda story or the relationship between his and Boccaccio's tales. Petrarch's early years as a writer were much different from Boccaccio's. His blurring of genres may suggest that the individual type of narrative is less important than another category to which both history and fable can belong: narrative composition for students, suitable forms for experimentation. Both Cicero and Quintilian associate the writing of certain kinds of narratives with literary exercises. Cicero singles out "fabula, historia, and argumentum" as three kinds of narratives whose purpose is "amusement" and "valuable training." Quintilian begins his discussion of the kinds of exercises teachers of rhetoric should give students with the composition of narratives. He leaves the writing of "fictitious" (fabulum) and "realistic" narratives (argumentum) to teachers of literature and reserves for rhetoricians the "historical" narrative (historiam), "whose force is in proportion to its truth." Indeed, Quintilian contends that embellishing a narrative properly will exercise a student's imagination, and even purple prose, while a fault of excess, is less blameworthy than a "poverty of wit." Petrarch's arful pose as translator gives him the leeway to present the translation as something of an exercise, although his self-consciousness suggests otherwise, and to ensure that his readers take full measure of his craft.

If Seniles XVII.1, XVII.3, and XVII.4 point with subtle wit to the incongruity of Petrarch translating the Griselda story at his advanced age and suggest that this act of translation was for him something of a flirtation with youth, XVII.2 solemnly recalls Petrarch's many achievements. Although it takes up the question of Petrarch's retirement, this subject, I think, is a pretense: the letter's real function is to provide the next letter containing the Griselda story with a portrait of the multi-talented Petrarch. By implicitly establishing Petrarch's preeminence, Seniles XVII.2 serves to correct in advance the stance he will take as Boccaccio's translator and thus highlights the artificiality of this pose. Petrarch covers three topics in this letter: he begins by addressing the disparate material fortunes of the two, not a new topic to either of them, in part offering the philosophical consolation that inasmuch as Boccaccio has lacked material prosperity he has received far more valuable talents. He then turns to Boccaccio's request that he cease his labors to preserve his health, refuting this argument forcefully, stressing the evils of idleness that would actually bring on his death. He concludes with a retrospective on his life in response to Boccaccio's claim that he should be contented with his accomplishments. The letter's emphasis on the close relationship between these friends veils Petrarch's self-promotion. He insists on their mutual love and their one mind in many matters and cites Boccaccio's praise of his achievements, enabling him, then, in his own voice more modestly to discuss them and in some instances denigrate the importance Boccaccio has attributed to them. With Boccaccio as his interlocutor, this letter offers a portrait of Petrarch that rivals his unfinished "Letter to Posterity" (Seniles XVIII). His reminders of his age, however, also imply that he will bring to his translation his own mature concerns.

Narrative Art in the Griselda Story

There is no straightforward way to tell the Griselda story. Every writer must confront the tale's extreme artificiality. Its overt didacticism must be disguised on the one hand, and sufficiently lucid on the other. Walter's cruelty and Griselda's unnatural submission must be acknowledged but subordinated to the virtuous behavior the tale examines. More than most tales, this one keeps the reader teetering on the verge of disequilibrium between two unproductive reading strategies: falling into the illusion that Walter and Griselda are real people, or rejecting it. The best reader must be of two minds. As we will see below, Petrarch suggests the consequences of either pole in Seniles XVII.4 when he recounts the reading experiences of the tearful Paduan and the unmoved Veronese.

We turn first, however, to the ethical frameworks that are used by
Boccaccio and Petrarch to gloss the actions in this narrative. Besides Dionne's comments about bestial and divine behavior, the day's theme—

stories of magnificent or liberal deeds intended to inspire the listeners to valorous actions—is a means by which to understand the story of Griselda. But who performs the magnificent deed in this tale? As Edwards has pointed out, for Aristotle the virtue of magnificence is concerned with wealth and involves an appropriate expenditure of large scale (Ethics 1122a20). Dionne attributes to Gualtieri a kind of magnificence in the frame, but by likening it to bestiality and advising his listeners not to fol-

low Gualtieri's example, he leaves unsaid who in the tale is worthy of emula-

tion. Griselda's low birth, her lack of wealth, and her lack of any monetary spending whatsoever make her an unlikely candidate and have led some readers to attribute this virtue to Gualtieri. However, Boccaccio intro-

duces a third means to assess Griselda's behavior by substituting virtues for riches, making Griselda extraordinarily wealthy. These three ethical schemes may not be the only ones organizing the tale, but I think that they dominate it.15

Boccaccio's clever exchange of wealth for virtue is systematic. Although Petrarch commends Griselda's constancy, and Chaucer's Clerk will addi-

tionally single out her patience as a particularly feminine virtue, Boccaccio attributes to Griselda a full set of related virtues. Virtues, as St. Gregory wrote, "fly in one flock," appearing singly only rarely. Boccaccio had a number of groups to choose from: for example, the cardinal virtues consist of prudence, justice, fortitude, and moderation; the theological virtues consist of faith, hope, and charity. As Victoria Kirkham has argued, Boccaccio draws on the large store of remedial or medicinal virtues that help one to combat the deadly sins and other spiritual malad-

ties. While their membership in this group is less fixed than that in the other groups, it can include humility, charity, patience, meekness, mild-

ness, mercy, compassion, fortitude, constancy, magnanimity, obedience, abstinence, and continence.16 Griselda exhibits all of these virtues, and many of them she pays out like coins to pass Gualtieri's harsh tests.

Throughout the thirteenth-century manual Summa virtutum de remediis anime (hereafter SV), the interrelatedness of the remedial virtues is stressed through metaphors and explicit discussions suggesting how one virtue engages the aid of others or assists others in their duties. Humility, for example, is first in the "preservation" of the other virtues, charity is "first as their mistress and form" (SV 76). Charity achieves its effects through other virtues and is "first said to be 'patient'" (SV 160), while Patience safeguards the other virtues like a "chest in which the treasure of virtues is kept" (SV 164). Obedience is compared to a gardener who "plants the virtues and guards them after planting" (SV 218). Mercy, like compassion, is one of the daughters of charity and "the companion of every good work" (SV 258, 262). The general senses of both abstinence, "the restraint of all illicit impulses" (SV 266), and continence, which rules "desire" through "judgment" (SV 278), indicate how these two virtues enlist the behavior of others mentioned above to check an improper impulse. For his tale to conform to the theme of magnificence, Boccaccio must demonstrate Griselda's magnificent expense of virtues in meeting Gualtieri's harsh demands, and to this end Boccaccio uses words and vocabulary associated with the remedial virtues throughout the work. Indeed, it is difficult to find a substantial passage that does not examine virtues.

Where Boccaccio's Griselda uses the virtues as strategies in the trials she undergoes, Petrarch's Griselda uses them also in her daily comportment. In both versions Griselda alludes to them through her vocabulary, while the narrators and Gualtieri/Walter often refer to them explicitly. The result is that both Gualtieri and Griselda may be seen to operate in some-

thing like an economy of virtue.

Both Griselda's and Gualtieri's behaviors conform to the literature on the remedial virtues: Griselda's behavior models what is to be withstood, Griselda's what is to be emulated. The various facets of the tests exploit distinctions and intersections among the virtues and probe their natures. Unlike more fully mimetic characters, Gualtieri and Griselda function on one level as exegesis who gloss the actions as the narrative pro-

gresses. Their textbook-like exactitude, however, clashes with their other function as mimetic characters in a fiction that is realistic to the extent that the tests are intended to be psychologically unbearable and unre-a-

sonable. Gualtieri's cruelty is at odds with his fine moral discrimination. The reader's dismay over Griselda's choice to give up her children to be murdered rather than object and disobey may be complicated by the presence of this contradiction in the day's theme.6 While discordant responses at her successfu-

ly passing Gualtieri's tests. The narrative sets up a pattern in which Griselda is to pass her tests in conformity not to life but to the literature on the remedial virtues whose purpose is to aid with the problems of living. Boccaccio conceals this dynamic somewhat in his treatment of the people who respond to Gualtieri and Griselda as real people, modeling for us the same mimetic response. Yet through Dionne's concluding remarks, as we have seen, Boccaccio both questions Griselda's believability and dodges the issues through allusions to the Nicholas de Ethicis.
of increasing nearly to the breaking point two opposed kinds of engagement: he overloads the narrative's didactic content as he deepens the reader's emotional response. Petrarch boldly purges the prose, and we should recognize as Petrarch's artistic, experimental choices the surface of moral didacticism and the increased emotional involvement of the reader.

All characters in Petrarch's adaptation become at some point sources of moral philosophy or edification. Moral maxims fill their speeches as he supplements Boccaccio's narrative with something like the wisdom his character Reason expounds in *The Remedies of Fortune Fair and Foul*. This technique is clear from the beginning when Walter's people combine an eloquent dynastic argument for marriage with a *memoria mori* to persuade Walter of the urgency they feel.50 When Walter asks Janicola if he can accept him as his son-in-law, Janicola, terrified but reminding himself of his obligations to his lord, says: 

*Endurance, friend, you have killed your own wife and then committed suicide. The effects of this are likely to be seen in heaven.*

In Petrarch's rendering, moral sentence is never without some element of pathos. Much less a purist than Boccaccio, he offers an eclectic mixture of virtues, politically expedient behavior, and generally accepted good qualities. Indeed, it is part of his inclusion of different orders of virtues that led to his version's huge popularity in the succeeding centuries and its occurrence in a wide variety of manuscript collections.

Petrarch makes all aspects of Griselda's upbringing and daily life exemplary, developing her beyond Boccaccio's Griselda, whose Gualtieri merely had noted her "manners" (785) ("costumi" [309]) and found her beautiful. As Emilie Kadish has argued, Petrarch's introduction of Griselda and Janicola seems almost like a new beginning of the story.51 Structurally, Petrarch draws a parallel between the powerful marquis who seeks an excellent wife and the poor Janicola who has such a daughter. In displaying how Griselda treats her father, Petrarch foregrounds her virtues that led to his version's huge popularity in the succeeding centuries and its occurrence in a wide variety of manuscript collections.

Petrarch makes all aspects of Griselda's upbringing and daily life exemplary, developing her beyond Boccaccio's Griselda, whose Gualtieri merely had noted her "manners" (785) ("costumi" [309]) and found her beautiful. As Emilie Kadish has argued, Petrarch's introduction of Griselda and Janicola seems almost like a new beginning of the story.51 Structurally, Petrarch draws a parallel between the powerful marquis who seeks an excellent wife and the poor Janicola who has such a daughter. In displaying how Griselda treats her father, Petrarch foregrounds her virtues that led to his version's huge popularity in the succeeding centuries and its occurrence in a wide variety of manuscript collections.
that as troubling as Walter and Griselda's deeds are, I think that on some level readers also approve of Griselda’s textbook conformity to her vows.

Petrarch does alter our rhetorical engagement with the story by expanding the narrator’s commentary on Walter and by greatly diminishing the ethical role of the people, who no longer exemplify the ordinarily human in a sympathetic way. It is not clear to me that Petrarch thematizes them as consistently as Boccaccio does. He cannot completely eliminate their positive ethical role in the narrative. In fact, that the people recognize Griselda’s virtues once she is married is one way in which Petrarch elaborates her virtues. But once Walter begins to test Griselda, Petrarch insulates the people from the court so that they no longer have any advisory capacity, which they have in Boccaccio’s narrative, and they can have no clear understanding of what is actually happening. They become an audience much farther removed from the events than Petrarch’s readers, to whom the logic behind Walter’s actions is revealed. Their typical response is wonder at what appears to be happening. As a narrative device they create some suspense, and Petrarch may be calling Boccaccio’s attention to his own manipulation of them in his narrator’s comment, when the people believe the forged papal bulls, that “nec operum sane fuit aggressus rudibusque animis quod libit persuadere” (line 289) (it was by no means difficult to persuade the ignorant peasants of any story [122]).

Petrarch designates the people less to criticize their ill-formed judgments—as when they condemn Walter as inhumanly cruel—than to show how unsuitable they are to make informed judgments. The people really make only two errors in judgment: first by thinking that a nobly born wife will be the most appropriate one for Walter, and second by concluding that the new wife will be more appropriate than Griselda because she appears to be nobly born. While it is clear that they have forgotten the lesson Griselda’s virtues have taught them, their interest in Walter’s wife differs from his own. It is not clear that they have forgotten their political interest in their ruler leaving an heir. It is hard to fault Walter’s subjects for believing the information that he has calculatedly circulated. The lesson that virtue can be hidden is one that they and other guests must relace at the second wedding. If Petrarch does use their mistake, as it is victims of Walter’s tyranny.

Petrarch’s narrator is no less critical of Walter than Dioneo is of Gualtieri within the narrative, but because Petrarch has radically altered the framing devices Boccaccio uses—eliminating Dioneo’s extra-diegetic remarks that view Gualtieri with contempt—his narrator’s often oblique condemnations, occurring only within the story, can sometimes be misread as timid. But in both narratives the focus on Walter serves to deepen the reader’s understanding of Griselda’s virtuous behavior, and whatever else Walter is thematically, he is first and foremost her exegete. Stronger criticism of Walter would obscure Griselda’s exemplarity and call it into question. Labeling Gualtieri’s behavior was a problem for Dioneo, whose final condemnation revises his initial one. Boccaccio makes the changing perspectives on Gualtieri a functional part of the tale’s polyvalence. Petrarch will also follow this strategy in his presentation of Walter.

Petrarch consistently represents Walter as being guided by his desires rather than his reason, but rather than being overcome by his feelings and appetites, as in the case of simple incontinence, here his reason operates in their service. Thus when “Walter was seized by a desire . . . and appetites, as in the case of simple incontinence, here his reason operates in their service. Thus when “Walter was seized by a desire . . .” he decided to test further the already proven faithfulness of his dear wife, and to repeat the test again” (118) [Cepit, ut fit, interim Walterum, cum iam ablacet egest infantula, mirabilis quidem quam [laudabilis] doctores iudicium cupiditas, satiet expertum care fidem evidere alius et iterum repentamdi (lines 192-94)]. Indeed, Walter is caught in the throes of his own willfulness:

Petroniani rigitissimo conome hic boniviolent et foie coniugatus experimere sufficere. Sed sunt qui, ubi semel incepserunt, non desinant; imo incumbant hereanti proposito. (lines 272-74)

These proofs of conjugal good will and faithfulness might have been enough for the most demanding husband; but some people, having begun a course of action, will not desist. No, they press on further, clinging to their plan. (122)

Aquinas’s explanation of the perversion of the appetite faculty leading to vice or brutishness sheds light on Walter’s behavior:

As a good action is not without practical reason and right desire—we pointed this out in the sixth book (1269)—a perversion of the two faculties can bring about an act to be avoided in moral matters. If then perversity occurs on the part of the appetite faculty so that the practical reason remains right, there will be incontinence—a condition that is present when a man has correct evaluation of what he ought to do or avoid but draws away to the contrary by reason of the passion of desire. But if the perversity of the appetite faculty becomes so strong that it dominates reason, reason follows that to which the perverted desire inclines, as a kind of principle, considering it to the ultimate end.69

For Aquinas, the disposition to perform an evil action by choice is a vice. Petrarch falls short of condemning Walter’s action as evil, but by elaborating his faulty decision-making process, Petrarch establishes in Walter a pattern in which impulses, desires, and feelings are the ends his reason
serves. For example, when the servant has returned with Walter's daughter, the narrator comments, "vehementer paterna animum pictas movit; susceptum tamen rigorem [propositi non] inflexit" (lines 226-27) (A father's devotion moved Walter's feelings deeply, but he did not bend from the rigorous course of his intention [120]). Reason is not the arbiter between his desires to show compassion and to test his wife, but rather the slave of the stronger passion.

Petrarch's negative characterization of Walter is cumulative, and the narrator's censure takes different forms. In the first two examples above, the narrator generalizes Walter's behavior. In the last example, the criticism of Walter seems diluted by the suggestion that he does feel compassion. But this mitigating of Walter's cruelty misreads Petrarch's attempt to show the war between Walter's impulses. Throughout the tale, commentary critical of Walter is infused with descriptions of his actions so that it seems more specific than general or categorical. Petrarch's emphasis on Walter's passion for hunting has not struck all readers as censiorious or related to his later testing of Griselda. Yet in his "Remedies" Petrarch has derided hunting as an anti-intellectual, trivial, and slothful pursuit. In the narrative he juxtaposes Walter's devotion to hunting with his neglect of other duties and the future. His impulsiveness is suggested again when his people present him with a reasonable argument for marriage, and Petrarch, departing from Boccaccio, represents Walter as being swayed by the depth of their feeling rather than their argument:

Moverunt pie preces animum viri. . . . Ceterum subiectorum mihi volunatibus me sponte subicio, et prudencie vestre fuisse et fidei. . . . Itaque quando volis placitum est uta uxorum ducam. (lines 9), 93-94, 99

These pious prayers moved the heart of the man. . . . Even so, I submit myself freely to the will of your subjects, confident in your prudence and faith. . . . And therefore, because it pleases you, I will choose a wife. (112)

The justness of the people's request seems secondary to the emotional effect of their eloquent, deferential petition has on Walter.

The narrator does come close to suggesting that Walter is bestial. This view is associated with that of the people, whose incomplete knowledge of events makes their judgment muddled:

Geperat sentin de Waltero decolor fama crebrescere; quod videleci et inhumana durice, humilis penitencia ac pudore conligui, filios lussisset interfici. Nam neque paerti comparbant, neque uinam generum essent uilis auditor; quo se ille vix alloquin clares et suis carus multus infamem odiosumque reddiderat. Neque ideo trux animus flectebatur, sed in suscepta sevritate [experientiique] sua dura illa libidine procedebat. (lines 279-84)

Gradually, ugly rumors began to spread about Walter: because of his wild and inhuman harshness, humiliated by remorse and shame of his wife, it was said, he had ordered the children murdered. For the children were nowhere to be seen and no one had heard where they were. In this way a man otherwise beloved and illustrious made himself notorious and hated by many. Yet his harsh spirit was not deflected; he persevered in his established sternness and his cruel desire to test Griselda. (122)

The people's assessment is based on the false rumor that Walter has had his children murdered, but their faulty premise undermines their conclusion. The narrator's own more knowledgeable judgment links Walter's methodical testing of Griselda—not the murder of her children—with cruelty. Like Boccaccio, Petrarch returns to the problem of classifying Walter in his own innovative frames, the moral conclusion and the final letter of "Semilis XVII. Although Wallace has found warrants for what has seemed like Petrarch's muted criticism of Walter, I hope to have shown that Petrarch's criticism is not muted but implies that the impulsive Walter is a dangerous kind of ruler whose reason can serve good or bad impulses equally, and that artistic and thematic motives rather than strictly logical ones explain the forms Petrarch uses to criticize Walter. Even though Boccaccio gives a stronger role to the people in objecting to Guaitieri's behavior, he gives them no power to resist him. Their exemplarity, moreover, points not to their actions but to the ways in which they form judgments—the slippery relation between reason and will—in contrast to those of the two main characters. Their approval or censure has no effect on Guaitieri. Dioneo's final commentary suggesting that he does not belong in a palace offers a way of understanding Guaitieri but not of removing him.

Petrarch's moral conclusion responds to the frame of Day 10 of the "Decameron" in some obvious ways. Although no longer exemplifying magnificence but something closer to great-heartedness, the tale satisfies Panfilo's request for exemplary tales that will inspire valorous actions. For Panfilo, however, less interested in fame than in the spiritual value of the conduct. His moral conclusion also responds to Dioneo's negative application in his introduction, where he has advised
his listeners not to follow Guastier's example. Petrarch's phrasing of his moral conclusion recalls Dioneo's: the marquis's actions were remarkable "non cosa magnifica ma una matta bestialita" (308) (not so much for their munificence as for their senseless brutality [784]). Petrarch, however, explains both who should emulate and what is to be emulated: he writes that he has told the story "non tam ideo, ut matronas nostri temporis ad imitandum hutus uxoris pacientiam, que michi vix mutabilis videtur, quam ut legentes ad imitandum saltem femine constanciam excitarem" (lines 399-401) (not so much to urge the matrons of our time to imitate the patience of this wife [which seems to me almost unchanging] as to arouse readers to imitate her womanly constancy" [128]).

Petrarch establishes in his moral conclusion. For his own translation: "I prefaced that the guarantee would rest with the author, that is, with you" (669). In the final pages of the Decameron, his translation has clarifies and privileges an exemplary reading, while acknowledging the tale's difficulties. For Petrarch's inscribed readers, his translation has been a study of imitation, and these readers may be provoked not just to compare the two renderings but also to debate the very grounds for moral action and moral judgment.

If Petrarch had left the Griselda story alone after his moral conclusion, one might argue that he attempted to trump Boccaccio by replacing Boccaccio's use of Aristotle in his frame with Christian Scripture. But a year later Petrarch was still considering the interpretive problems the tale poses, and, in his final letter, he takes up issues that his moral conclusion had not resolved. Although the loss of the first three letters prompts the writing of Sentes VII 4, Petrarch's intention to imitate Boccaccio's narrative also motivates it. Petrarch opens the letter by reminding Boccaccio that he has translated the tale for him, and, once again, in an allusion to Boccaccio's "Author's Conclusion," he makes Boccaccio the authority for his own translation: "I prefaced that the guarantee would rest with the author, that is, with you" (669). In the final pages of the Decameron, Boccaccio had answered objections to his work by comically pointing out the story's difficulties. For Petrarch's readers, his translation has been a study of imitation, and these readers may be provoked not just to compare the two renderings but also to debate the very grounds for moral action and moral judgment.

Petrarch's earlier identification of two mutually exclusive audiences—those who do not speak Italian (for whom he claims to have written the tale) and those who know both Italian and Latin (whom he addresses in his dedication)—Petrarch's moral conclusion can have two very different readings. For those who do not know Boccaccio's tale, the conclusion clarifies and privileges an exemplary reading, while acknowledging the tale's difficulties. For Petrarch's inscribed readers, his translation has been a study of imitation, and these readers may be provoked not just to compare the two renderings but also to debate the very grounds for moral action and moral judgment.

If Petrarch had left the Griselda story alone after his moral conclusion, one might argue that he attempted to trump Boccaccio by replacing Boccaccio's use of Aristotle in his frame with Christian Scripture. But a year later Petrarch was still considering the interpretive problems the tale poses, and, in his final letter, he takes up issues that his moral conclusion had not resolved. Although the loss of the first three letters prompts the writing of Sentes VII 4, Petrarch's intention to imitate Boccaccio's narrative also motivates it. Petrarch opens the letter by reminding Boccaccio that he has translated the tale for him, and, once again, in an allusion to Boccaccio's "Author's Conclusion," he makes Boccaccio the authority for his own translation: "I prefaced that the guarantee would rest with the author, that is, with you" (669). In the final pages of the Decameron, Boccaccio had answered objections to his work by comically pointing out the story's difficulties. For Petrarch's readers, his translation has been a study of imitation, and these readers may be provoked not just to compare the two renderings but also to debate the very grounds for moral action and moral judgment.

If Petrarch had left the Griselda story alone after his moral conclusion, one might argue that he attempted to trump Boccaccio by replacing Boccaccio's use of Aristotle in his frame with Christian Scripture. But a year later Petrarch was still considering the interpretive problems the tale poses, and, in his final letter, he takes up issues that his moral conclusion had not resolved. Although the loss of the first three letters prompts the writing of Sentes VII 4, Petrarch's intention to imitate Boccaccio's narrative also motivates it. Petrarch opens the letter by reminding Boccaccio that he has translated the tale for him, and, once again, in an allusion to Boccaccio's "Author's Conclusion," he makes Boccaccio the authority for his own translation: "I prefaced that the guarantee would rest with the author, that is, with you" (669). In the final pages of the Decameron, Boccaccio had answered objections to his work by comically pointing out the story's difficulties. For Petrarch's readers, his translation has been a study of imitation, and these readers may be provoked not just to compare the two renderings but also to debate the very grounds for moral action and moral judgment.

If Petrarch had left the Griselda story alone after his moral conclusion, one might argue that he attempted to trump Boccaccio by replacing Boccaccio's use of Aristotle in his frame with Christian Scripture. But a year later Petrarch was still considering the interpretive problems the tale poses, and, in his final letter, he takes up issues that his moral conclusion had not resolved. Although the loss of the first three letters prompts the writing of Sentes VII 4, Petrarch's intention to imitate Boccaccio's narrative also motivates it. Petrarch opens the letter by reminding Boccaccio that he has translated the tale for him, and, once again, in an allusion to Boccaccio's "Author's Conclusion," he makes Boccaccio the authority for his own translation: "I prefaced that the guarantee would rest with the author, that is, with you" (669). In the final pages of the Decameron, Boccaccio had answered objections to his work by comically pointing out the story's difficulties. For Petrarch's readers, his translation has been a study of imitation, and these readers may be provoked not just to compare the two renderings but also to debate the very grounds for moral action and moral judgment.

If Petrarch had left the Griselda story alone after his moral conclusion, one might argue that he attempted to trump Boccaccio by replacing Boccaccio's use of Aristotle in his frame with Christian Scripture. But a year later Petrarch was still considering the interpretive problems the tale poses, and, in his final letter, he takes up issues that his moral conclusion had not resolved. Although the loss of the first three letters prompts the writing of Sentes VII 4, Petrarch's intention to imitate Boccaccio's narrative also motivates it. Petrarch opens the letter by reminding Boccaccio that he has translated the tale for him, and, once again, in an allusion to Boccaccio's "Author's Conclusion," he makes Boccaccio the authority for his own translation: "I prefaced that the guarantee would rest with the author, that is, with you" (669). In the final pages of the Decameron, Boccaccio had answered objections to his work by comically pointing out the story's difficulties. For Petrarch's readers, his translation has been a study of imitation, and these readers may be provoked not just to compare the two renderings but also to debate the very grounds for moral action and moral judgment.
man, at least not that I know” (669). The Paduan’s disposition makes him a sympathetic reader but also leads him to a certain kind of meaning. Petrarch glosses the man’s tears with lines from Juvenal’s Satire XV, a pagan’s poem: “Nature admits / She gives the human race the softest hearts; / She gave us tears—the best part of our feelings” (669). While these lines endorse the human capacity for compassion, the satire from which they are taken is about cannibalism, and they refer to the inability of human justice to rectify the atrocities that bestial humans commit against others. The lines surrounding the passage Petrarich quotes read as follows:

You could never devise a fitting punishment for this crime, or
A penalty stiff enough for a people in whose minds
Hunger and rage are alike, on a moral par: When Nature
Gave tears to mankind, she proclaimed that tenderness was endemic
In the human heart: Of all our impulses, this
Is the highest and best. So we are moved to pity the plight
Of a friend on the dock—or a ward who’s brought his guardian
To court for embroilment, and whose adolescent kis-curls
Make you wonder whether those tearstained checks are a boy’s or a girl’s. 68

For Petrarch, the Paduan’s tears are directed at Walter’s extreme cruelty and not at Griselda’s virtuous triumph. The Paduan has responded to the tale as “matta bestiality.”

The Veronese reader contrasts his own dry-eyed response to the Paduan’s, yet his comments echo in a different register Dioneo’s own concluding remarks that have questioned both a real wife’s steadfastness and whether such treatment as Walter’s would best be served by fidelity. The Veronese comments:

I too would have wept, for the touching subject and the words fit for the subject prompted weeping, nor am I hard-hearted; but I believed, and still do, that the whole thing was made up. For if it were true, what woman anywhere, whether Roman or of any nation whatever will match this Griselda? Where I ask, is such great conjugal love, equal fidelity, such signal patience and constancy? (669–79)

Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics, as I have argued above, is the moral guide we use in Boccaccio’s text to evaluate Dioneo’s comments. However much the remarks of the Veronese resemble Dioneo’s, Petrarch makes his readers bring to bear on them a different understanding. Petrarch reports that to avoid an unpleasant exchange he did not debate the views of the Veronese, but in the letter he rebuts the charge that Griselda is unbelievable with a list of pagan figures whose great deeds model and extend human potential.14 He locates the deficiency of the Veronese’s response in his disposition: “There are some who consider whatever is different for the thermometer impossible for everyone, and they so judge everything by their own measure as to put themselves in the first place” (670). This critique recalls Petrarch’s even harsher condemnation of Boccaccio’s critics in Sentences XVII.3: “[T]here is a breed of men who are insolent and lazy, who rebuke in others whatever they themselves either do not want, do not know, or are unable to do” (655). If the Paduan’s sensitivity and kindliness made him somewhat torqued, the Veronese is presented as belonging to a class of readers who dismiss in texts what does not conform to their own cynical views. Petrarch’s accomplishment in this final letter is dazzling. His treatment of his two readers not only extends his imitation of Boccaccio’s Griselda story to encompass Boccaccio’s “Author’s Conclusion”; the order and content of these two readers’ responses correspond to Dioneo’s opening and closing comments on Boccaccio’s tale. Moreover, Petrarch’s commentary on the Paduan’s and the Veronese’s responses clarifies his challenge to Boccaccio’s use of Aristotle; what Petrarch opposes to Aristotle is not exclusively Christian Scripture, but rather those works that engage one’s emotions to revile evil and commend and emulate virtue. In some ways, Sentences XVII.4 revises the self-portrait Petrarch has given in the second letter. With the Veronese reader, Petrarch has failed; his tale has not inspired the man’s heart or altered his disposition. The response of the Veronese, perhaps more than that of the Paduan, colors the rest of the letter as it takes up motifs found in the first three: letter writing, the border guards, Petrarch’s health and age, and the turmoil in the country. With respect to all of these issues, Petrarch is pessimistic and resigned. One has little control over not just the reception of texts, but much else in life. Petrarch dismisses his project to translate the Griselda story and to link the two versions together as a game, for he vows in future letters to “write so as to be understood but not to amuse myself” (671). These comments reflect so reproof of Boccaccio’s tale. The Paduan and the Veronese have responded to Petrarch’s own telling of the Griselda story, and their response to his version could not be more different from his own to Boccaccio’s tale.

Randolph-Macon College
Ashland, Virginia
(agnostin@rmc.edu)

Amy W. Goodwin

Goodwin 65

THE CHAUCER REVIEW
New Haven, 1979] 21, 5, will be cited and the information of Petrarch's philosophy and art differ from this edition and will be cited by page number. For more details, please refer to Petrarch's works cited page number.

For more information on Petrarch and Chaucer's works, please refer to the following publications:


12. For more extensive discussion, please refer to the following works:


For Petrarch's preoccupation with summing up his life in his last years, see Mann, Petrarch, 101.

In Boccaccio's Genealogia Gentilium (ed. and trans. Charles G. Oggoed, Boccaccio on Poetry: Being the Preface and the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Books of Boccaccio's Genealogia Gentilium [1956; repr. Indianapolis, 1958]), he praises himself as an "eminent" poet, "as that distinguished man Francis Petrarch, at whose feet I have long been a listener," (7), "the greatest poet of our time," (89), and "the present glory of the art of poetry." (92). See also Petrarch's letter to Boccaccio discussing their relative fame, 3.1.2, in Letters of Old Age, trans. Leonardo, Berlin, and Bernardi, 157-66.

The act of translation was not neutral but conferred a kind of cultural significance on the source and target languages. See Rita Copeland, Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts (Cambridge, Eng., 1991), 30-11, 21-36. Translating a vernacular text into Latin and imitating his own disciple probably posed some theoretical issues for Petrarch, but the rhetorical strategy he had adopted for his own poetry had, in fact, offered him a range of classical and contemporary models to choose from to represent the author, the work, and himself. Petrarch's solution was to choose a poetic model which his contemporaries would consider as "both an exercise and a form," (Copeland, 9), in purpose to give the aspiring rhetor insight into the power of a superior works of oration and poetry, and it combines felicitously the translator's interests as both a reader and reader.

"For my part, in the daily exercises of youth, I used chiefly to set myself thus: (to read) some poetry, the most impressive to be found, or at least as much of some speech as he could keep in my memory, and then to decline upon the actual subject-matter of my reading, choosing as far as possible different words. But later I noticed this defect in my method, that those words which best befitted each subject, and were the most elegant and in fact the best, had been already seized upon. . . Thus I saw that to employ the same expressions profited me nothing, while to employ others was a positive hindrance, in that I was forming the habit of using the less appropriate. Afterwords I resolved not to employ the expression I followed when somewhat older—to translate freely Greek speeches of the most eminent orators. The result of reading these was that, in rendering into Latin what I had read in Greek and Latin, I only found myself using the best words—and yet quite differently from those words also coming by analogy certain words such as would be new to our people, provided only that they were appropriate" (Cicero, De Oratore, ed. and trans. E.W. Sutton and H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library 1 [Cambridge, Mass., 1934]).

"Our earlier orators thought highly of translation from Greek into Latin . . . Cicero himself advances it again and again, say, he actually published translations of Xenophon and Aeschines, which were the result of this form of exercise: . . . The purpose of this form of exercise is obvious. For Greek authors are conspicuous for the variety of their themes, and there is much art in all their choicer phrases, while, when we translate them, we are at liberty to invoke the best words available, since all that we use are our very own," (Quintilian, Institution Oratoria, trans. H.E. Butler, Loeb Classical Library 4 [Cambridge, Mass., 1933], X.5.2-4).


Grove points out "the several instances in which the people confuse Walter" in Boccaccio's tale but also argues that Boccaccio satirizes the people's "pudicity" ("Chaucer's 'Clerk's Tale,'" 72).

For a discussion of the importance of exemplary narratives for Petrarch and his response to the Veronese ("Exemplary Griselda," 3.1.2-23).