

Reimagining Griselda: Christine de Pizan's Rewriting of Boccaccio.

In the conclusion of her article “*La Griselda* di Christine de Pizan,” Giovanna Angeli ends her analysis on the sources and characteristics of Christine De Pizan’s rewriting of *Griselda* by inviting critics to investigate the hints of Christine’s attentive reading of the *Decameron* shining through *La Cité des dames*. Indeed, according to Angeli, the absence or insistence of certain narrative elements in relation to Boccaccio speaks volumes on Christine’s re-elaboration of the source material. In Christine’s hands, unexpected aspects of *Griselda*’s personality are revealed, supporting a secular interpretation, instead of a religious one, which critics, first among all Petrarch, have traditionally ascribed to Boccaccio’s *novella*¹. Specifically, by reimagining this character and reframing her story in the larger context of the project of the *Cité*, Christine rids *Griselda* of the aura of religious virtue that characterizes her in Boccaccio’s *Decameron* and makes her a human heroine able to speak to the heart of Christine’s female readership.²

In the *Cité*, after an introduction in which she examines the misogynist literature of her time, Christine provides an extensive list of women who excelled throughout their lives and who embody femininity in a wide variety of ways. Offering concrete examples of valiant heroines to support her key theoretical premises that women can excel in any field, the poet liberates the female body from its supposedly natural condition of inferiority foisted on it by literary misogyny. The list of chosen female exemplars includes mythological women, female literary characters, and historical women—counting some of Christine’s own contemporaries or near contemporaries among them. By melding these categories into the same work, Christine draws attention to the importance of literary representation as a means for expressing the power and authority of women in multiple realms. The character of *Griselda* embodies all the laudable traits and intentions that the women on her list represent. Indeed, her story is a signal point in the *Cité*; in serving as a moment of self-affirmation as well as an act of freedom from male authority, it results in a new appreciation—even reclamation—of the female body and its larger signifying capacity in medieval literary culture.

Like Boccaccio, Christine accords *Griselda*’s story a preferential place within her work; unlike him, however, she places this episode not at the very end, but squarely in the middle of the second part of

her collection, as a keystone for the construction of her *Cité*. She also makes Griselda's one of the longest stories in the text. Maureen Quilligan underscores the great value attributed to Griselda through literary foreshadowing in the tenth chapter of the second section (Quilligan 118). Here, the narrator, Droiture, tells the reader about the greatness of daughters' love and specifically mentions Griselda as an example worth exploring:

Encore a propos d'amour de fille a pere, puet on dire de la tres bonne et saige Gliselidis, qui puis fu marquise de Saluces, de laquelle te recomptey cy après la grant vertu, fermeté e constance. (Curnow 813)³

[Turning again to the question of a daughter's love for her father, one can mention the most virtuous and wise Griselda, who was the marquise of Saluces, whose great virtue, firmness and constancy I will presently describe to you.] (Richards 116)

The poet then quickly moves to another topic and states that Griselda will find a more appropriate place later on. By postponing an in-depth description of Griselda's virtues, Christine arouses the reader's curiosity and creates a sense of expectation. She also foregrounds a connection between herself as authorial figure who was "made" in the image of her intellectual father, and Griselda, whose virtue has been signaled by pious filial devotion to the father. Furthermore, if God, via Christ, is the "father" of the third hagiographic section of the *Cité*, one could consider Boccaccio the literary "father" of the second section. In fact, Christine follows Boccaccio closely, and he serves her both as a source and as a point of departure, as Kevin Brownlee convincingly argues (245).

Indeed, while Christine takes the majority of the stories on exemplary women from Boccaccio's tradition, she invests the term "exemplary" with new meaning. Interestingly enough, Brownlee suggests that Christine makes use of the *Decameron* "as part of her strategy of correctively rewriting Boccaccio's *De mulieribus*" (247).⁴ Christine's rewriting starts by shifting the focus of the tale, as Patrizia Caraffi underscores, from the male character ("vo' ragionar d'un marchese"; 867) ["I want to tell you about a Marquis"; 838] to the female one ("Cy dit de Gliselidis, marquise de Saluces, forte femme en vertu"; 900) ["She speaks of Griselda, the marquise of Saluces, a

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woman strong in virtue”; 170]. This is the case also for the other tales that Christine borrows from the *Decameron*: “Barnabò da Genova,” “Tancredi, prenze di Salerno,” and “I fratelli dell’Ellisabetta,” all of which, in Christine’s rewriting, respectively revolve around Barnabò’s wife, Sigismonda, and Lisabetta.⁵ Christine’s change of perspective becomes even more relevant when considering that scholars have pointed out how in Boccaccio Gautier’s “matta bestialità” [mad bestiality] is the real protagonist of the tale. Indeed, according to Teodolinda Barolini “power struggle between the marquis and his wife is secondary to that between the marquis and his men” (28), consequently, cutting back the role of Griselda in Boccaccio’s version. In a similar manner, Susanna Barsella underscores how domestic and political tyrannies are deeply interwoven, therefore connecting ethics to politics.

When readers first meet Griselda, she is just a peasant. Despite her low social status, Gautier, the Marquis of Saluces, who is looking for a woman to continue his lineage, notices not only the beauty of her body and face, but also her loyal conduct. Because of this virtue, he decides to take Griselda as his wife. However, since he is burdened with an inexplicable sadism and mistrust of women, Gautier constantly challenges his wife and puts her love to the test: not only does the Marquis go as far as to make Griselda believe that her daughter and son have died, he even repudiates her. One day, long after this repudiation, Gautier calls Griselda back to the palace and tells her that he is about to marry another woman, who is in fact none other than Griselda’s daughter. Ultimately, impressed by Griselda’s virtue, the Marquis confesses his manipulative actions and asks her to join him in the palace and to put on her elegant clothes so that she can once again hold the title of Marquise of Saluces.

Griselda’s sartorial transformations, as Roberta Krueger convincingly argues, foreground the changes in social class that the character undergoes throughout the narrative.⁶ Griselda ceases to be a peasant and becomes a noblewoman only when she wears the appropriate attire; conversely, she returns to her previous condition simply by taking off the sartorial trappings of nobility. Her first sartorial transformation coincides with the beginning of the narrative itself. When Gautier decides to marry Griselda, the ladies of his court bring a noblewoman’s clothing to her humble house and dress her as a bride:

PEZZULLO

Sy entrerent les dames dedens la petite maisonnette, et vestirent et parent l'espousee moult noblemen—si comme a l'estat du marquis appertnoit – de robes et de joyaulx que il avoit fait apprester. (Curnow 902)

[Whereupon the ladies entered the little cottage and dressed and adorned the bride in the noble fashion befitting the position of the marquis – with the robes and jewels which he had readied.] (Richards 171)

In other words, Griselda reifies her status as a marquise through the act of dressing like one. However, Griselda's transformation into a marquise is possible through the presence of her husband, who authorizes and validates this act of transformation and chooses and sets up the clothes she is to wear. This passage emphatically underscores the gender and class distinction underlying the whole narrative and anticipates the importance of Griselda's reclaiming her own socio-sartorial agency later on in the story.

When, twelve years after the wedding, Gautier sadistically decides to repudiate Griselda to test her love and her fidelity, Griselda promptly starts undressing in response. She declares that since she did not bring any dowry when she got married, she will return to her father's house completely naked. While Gautier's request and his reference to the dowry are explicit in Boccaccio (“ma che tu a casa Giannucole te ne torni con la dote che tu mi recasti”; 874) [“You should return to Giannucole's house with the dowry you brought me”; 845], in Christine (“qu'elle s'en ralast chieux son pere, ainsi qu'elle estoit venue”; 904) [“I'm ready to return to my father's house” ;173], Griselda sanctions this act of cruelty herself:

Si est raison que je te restitue ton meuble: et voycy ta robe dont je me despouille, sy te restitue l'anneau dont tu m'espousas, et te rens tous les autres joyaulx, aniaux, vestemens et atours par lesquelz j'estoye aournee et enrichiee en ta chambre. (Curnow 904-05)

[Here is the dress which I myself will strip off, and let me give you back the ring with which you married me, and I will return to you all the other jewels, rings, vestments, and ornaments with which I was adorned and enriched in your chamber.] (Richards 173)

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The scene has a structural parallel in the moment of undressing/dressing at the beginning of their marriage. Although in both contexts the husband determines the state (and style) of dress, a few differences appear in terms of how the character acts. During the wedding, Griselda remains silent as the women of the court dress her as part of the wedding ritual. At the moment of Gautier's repudiation, however, Griselda takes her clothes off by herself, claiming her agency through an eloquent speech.

Yet, another key difference exists between these two episodes: whereas Griselda's initial sartorial transformation (into a noblewoman and wife) takes place in Gautier's private chambers, the brutality of her repudiation occurs in public, at the court. Here, Griselda's strategic reference to the chamber points to marriage as both legal contract and spiritual covenant between man and wife. By explicitly referring to the location of the original act of adornment, Griselda calls Gautier out as someone whose word cannot be trusted, a man who will not honor a contract, legal or spiritual. Equally, Griselda's allusion to her initial transition from her father's house to her new husband's chamber foregrounds women's lack of agency in marriage. It is the transfer of women from one male space into another that expresses the change of status from daughter to wife.⁷ Furthermore, by alluding to Gautier's incapacity to observe a commitment, Christine implicitly restates Griselda's moral superiority.

Griselda's last sartorial transformation occurs at the very end of the story, after the Marquis reveals the truth: Griselda's children are still alive, and her daughter is in fact the young woman whom he claimed to be marrying. Griselda will get her title back, and domestic tranquility will finally be restored, it seems: "La fu autorisee Griselidis plus que oncques mais, sy fu revestue et paree moult richement" (909). [Griselda was restored to greater authority than ever before, and she was richly fitted out and bejeweled] (176). This last scene echoes the beginning of the tale—or rather, the marriage—once again: the ladies of the court will dress Griselda and thereby reify her transformation, again, into a noblewoman. Yet, there is another crucial difference: by using the term "autorisee," Christine renders Griselda the author of her nobility and her destiny. In doing so, Christine is also aligning Griselda as literary character with Christine's own literary activity. Indeed, when Christine draws on other authorizing structures (beyond Gautier) to restore Griselda's

authority, she affirms herself as a female author in a male-dominated world. The first part of the *Cité* is devoted to disproving common beliefs about women's inferiority, both by denouncing the difficulties women encounter in receiving an appropriate education and by establishing women's value philosophically and then historically. By telling these stories of "exceptional women," Christine is also claiming her own agency and authorship by proving herself deserving of her own space in the literary tradition.

One of Christine's first entries into public literary life is her well-known repudiation of a cornerstone text of medieval French vernacular literature: *Le Roman de la Rose*. Christine's own public authorship is thus largely foregrounded, at the outset, by an explicit challenge to male literary authority, and in particular, Jean de Meun as the major (and final) author of the *Rose*. As Quilligan argues, the *Cité* is an anti-misogynist willful reaction against *Le Roman de la Rose*. Christine develops "a repertoire of strategies for anti-misogynist rhetoric" according to which she revises and then rewrites male literary tradition in order to make it capable of "articulating a female's experience of history" (Quilligan 192).⁸ With this in mind, one can also interpret Christine's rewriting of Boccaccio as a way for her to overturn another foundational vernacular literary male authority and to begin to impose her own voice. Here, she will choose to depict key characters of Boccaccio's work in a different manner, while keeping the overall plot faithful to the original.

The core of Christine's reinterpretation of Boccaccio's tale lies in the way she transforms the female character. Throughout the entire tale of Griselda, the theme of women's body, both dressed and nude, recurs as both indirect allusion and direct concrete referent. For instance, to climb the social hierarchy and marry the Marquis, Griselda has to give up her old clothes; when she needs to leave, she does not own anything she can use to cover herself:

Toute nue de la maison de mon pere je yssis; et toute nue je y retourneray, sauve que ce me semble incouvenable que cestuy ventre, ouquel furent les deux enffans que tu as engendrez, deust apparoit tout nu devant le puepple ... je te pry que pour recompensacion de ma virginité que j'apportay en ton palais ... que il te plaise que une seulle chemise me soit laissiee, de quoy je couvreray le ventre de ta femme jadis marquise.' ... Adonc en la presence de tous les chevalier et dames, Griselidis

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se depoulla et deschauca, osta tous ses aournements, et ne luy remaint que sa seulle chemise. (Curnow 905)

[I left my father's house completely naked, except that it does not appear fitting to me that this womb, wherein lay the children which you fathered, should appear totally naked before the people, and so for this reason, if it pleases you, for no other ... that a single slip be granted to me, with which I shall cover the womb of your former wife and marquise ... Then Griselda stripped herself before all the knights and ladies, removing her shoes and all her jewelry, and she had on nothing except her slip.] (Richards 173)

Interestingly enough, by referring to herself as “former wife and marquise,” Griselda is again doubling down on the question of her legal status. Gautier took Griselda as his wife, thus legally granting her the title of marquise, but then he strips her of it without any explanation. In addition, even though Griselda is no longer marquise, she remains Gautier's wife, highlighting that the marriage commitment is one that cannot be rescinded.

The reference to female nakedness constitutes such a pivotal narrative moment in *Christine* as well as in Boccaccio, for different reasons. At the end of the *novella*, Dioneo, the narrator, takes advantage of the scene of Griselda undressing in order to deliver a sarcastic comment, whose sexual reference contrasts with the figural reading promoted by the critics:

Al quale non sarebbe forse stato male investito d'essersi abbattuto a una, che quando fuori di casa l'avesse in camicia cacciata, s'avesse sì ad un altro fatto scuotere il pelliccione, che riuscita ne fosse una bella roba. (*Dec.* 10.10.69)

[Perhaps it would have served him right if, instead, he had run into the kind of woman who, upon being thrown out of the house in her shirt, had found some guy to rub her fur and got a nice new dress in the bargain.] (Rebhorn 850)

Dioneo's lubricious remarks, as Robert Hollander and Courtney Cahill convincingly argue, confirm the explicitly anti-exemplary intent of the *novella* and the irony underlying the narration. This *novella* is also the last one in the *Decameron*, and as Millicent Marcus

underscores, its position is revelatory of how to interpret it (108). Despite the convincing arguments in favor of a figural reading, confirmed by the extensive religious imagery that Boccaccio consistently uses throughout the narrative, such a radical shift in literary register would be odd at the very least. Griselda's devotion is not exemplary, but rather exaggerated to such an extent that it becomes ridiculous, ultimately losing that solemnity that characterizes her in the first place (Courtney and Hollander 137).

On the contrary, Christine restores Griselda's exemplarity by downplaying Boccaccio's religious imagery. As Rosalind Brown-Grant has persuasively argued, Christine conceives and writes the *Cité* with a specific anti-misogynist agenda in mind. Even though Brown-Grant does not mention explicitly the episode of Griselda, Christine's intent is to denounce widespread abuses inflicted on women, and specifically, abuses grounded in common cultural narratives, such as the Griselda tale. For this reason, a character like Griselda, rewritten *ad hoc*, becomes the occasion for the author to denounce injustices and foster female solidarity. Rewriting Boccaccio, Christine reverses the norm, and grants agency to the female character, whose active choice to undress rejects the male figure's authority to do it for her or to her. The act of undressing loses its function as mere performance for a male spectator, and instead, transforms into a gesture of self-affirmation. Indeed, while it is an external presence that performs the act of dressing over Griselda's body, she acts on her own behalf in undressing herself. Removing the clothes that Gautier gave her allows Griselda to denounce publicly her husband's unjustified cruelty, marked by his breach of trust and social violence. In fact, even if Gautier wants to humiliate his wife by ordering her to undress in front of the court, he ends up confronted with the opposite effect: Griselda is entirely willing to demonstrate her purity through the very act meant to destroy her through abasement and to renounce immediately her privileges, thereby proving a complete detachment from material goods. Self-asserted nudity thus allows Griselda to regain her agency by rejecting social norms embodied by clothes.

To emphasize the poignancy of Griselda's words with respect to women's social condition, Christine, in contrast to Boccaccio, reduces the character's instances of direct discourse to two moments in the whole story in order to draw attention to the importance of her speeches. Not coincidentally, in Christine's rewriting, Griselda speaks directly for the first time when she undresses before leaving

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Gautier's court. Wanting to preserve her modesty, Griselda asks for a piece of clothing to cover herself. In making this request, she underscores that she did not have any choice when she left her father's house: she was not allowed to bring any items of clothing with her since she had nothing that would have been appropriate for a marquis's wife to wear. At the moment of repudiation these tables are turned: if Gautier sends her away from her marital home with nothing whatsoever, he will bring shame upon himself. Since Griselda describes her body as that which carried the children that Gautier fathered, his repudiation of her will, in effect, extend to his own "authoritative" body by making visible to all his ethical failings and lack of morality. In this context, Griselda's body standing nude in front of the court does not evoke sexual connotations, nor does it communicate either weakness or shame.

Yet, Christine also does not present the character of Griselda as a proper *exemplum* on the model of a recognized saint. Boccaccio structures his tale tightly around the contrast between Gautier's cruelty and Griselda's sanctity; the crueller he is, the more patient she is:

Che si potrà dir qui, se non che anche nelle povere case piocono dal cielo de' divini spiriti, come nelle reali di queglii che sarien più degni di guardar porci che d'aver sopr'uomini signoria? (*Dec.* 10.10.68).

[What more is there left to say except that divine spirits may rain down from the heavens even into the houses of the poor, just as there are others in royal palaces who might be better suited to tending pigs than ruling men?] (Rebhorn 850)

Christine, in contrast to Boccaccio, downplays this aura of sanctity and instead attributes Griselda's strength to her humanity, not to the divine. The specific terms Christine uses when she refers to Griselda emphasize the character's strength and agency, rather than her passivity. For instance, after the final reconciliation, the narrator, Droiture, enumerates Griselda's many qualities as "grant fermete, force et constance, et grant admiracion de sa vertu" (Curnow 908) [unsurpassed steadfastness, strength, and constancy and was filled with admiration for her virtue] (Richards 175). Christine's word choice creates an image of heroism distinct from Boccaccio's docile and submissive Griselda in the *Decameron*: "era tanto obbediente al

marito e tanto servente” (871) [“She was so obedient and attentive to her husband” Rebhorn 842].

Christine maintains Boccaccio’s image of Griselda as a woman subjugated to the husband in Gautier’s direct speech, which immediately follows the narrator’s intervention on Griselda’s strength and value. The Marquis wants to reiterate his wife’s exceptional nature, but he praises her for different reasons from those that the narrator had highlighted: “l’esprouve de ta constance et de la vraye foy, loyaulté et grant amour, obeyssance et humilité esprouvee que tu as vers moy” (Curnow 909) [the proof of your constancy and true faith, loyalty and great love, obedience and proven humility which you feel for me] (Richards 175). What stands out here is the presence of the husband as the sole focus of Griselda’s attention and reason for virtue. Moreover, this portrait revolves around religious values, such as faith and dedication, in line with Boccaccio’s source. Christine’s juxtaposition of these two radically different visions of Griselda—the one of the female narrator and the one of Gautier—shows the incapability of the male gaze to grasp Griselda’s true nature. As a matter of fact, the human tenacity that Christine foregrounds is in Boccaccio a pearly devotion to patient piety: “La donna con paziente animo” (873) [The lady listened patiently] (Rebhorn 844); “frutto della tua lunga pazienza” (877) [the fruit of your long patience] (Rebhorn 849). In the *Decameron*, Boccaccio, through Dioneo’s focalization, evokes Griselda’s patience in five different occurrences, and it becomes the distinctive feature that makes her more saintlike than human. Her description is highly reminiscent of that of the patriarch Job from the Old Testament. Confirmation of this connection between Boccaccio’s Griselda and Job is in the way that both characters embrace their fate: “He said: ‘Naked I came forth from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I go back there’” (*New American Bible*, Jb 1:21). Stripped from all his belongings and naked, Job embraces death, as Griselda does when she returns to her father’s house.⁹ By comparing Griselda to Job and emphasizing her transcendental goodness to such an extent that it becomes exaggerated, Boccaccio turns the *novella*, which Petrarca interpreted as an *exemplum*, into the parody of itself. In this way, Boccaccio deprives Griselda of her human willpower, which is central in Christine’s rewriting.

Griselda’s second instance of direct speech in the *Cité* further accentuates her human strength and occurs when she begs Gautier not to harass his future wife as he did her. Following Krueger’s

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observations, in comparing Griselda's speeches in Christine's version to those in Boccaccio's, readers immediately notice fundamental differences in the style rather than in the content:

Ma quanto posso vi priego che quelle punture, le quali all'altra che vostra fu già, déste, non diate a questa, che appena che io creda che ella le potesse sostenere. (*Dec.* 10.10.59)

[However, I beg you with all my heart not to inflict on her the same wounds you once gave the other spouse you used to have, because I find it hard to believe she'll be able to endure them.] (Rebhorn 849)

Mais d'une chose par bonne foy je te vueil prier et admonnester, c'est que tu ne la vueilles pas molestier ne aguillonner des aguillons dont tu as l'autre si fort esprouvee. Car ceste est plus jeune et plus souef nourrie ; si ne pourroit pas souffrir par aventure come l'autre a fait. (Curnow 908)

[I would however make a single request of you and give you only one bit of advice: that you neither trouble nor needle her with the torments you inflicted on your first wife. This woman is younger and has been raised more delicately so that she probably cannot bear as much as your other wife did.] (Richards 175)

In both cases, Griselda asks Gautier to have mercy upon the young girl who is about to become his wife. However, focusing on Christine's linguistic choice helps us understand the direction that the author is giving to her rewriting. By using the term "puncture," Boccaccio echoes the Epistle to the Galatians, in which Saint Paul claims to bear on his body the marks of Jesus Christ. By thus alluding to the stigmata, Boccaccio establishes a clear connection between Griselda and Christ, and reinforces an aura of holiness all around her. On the other hand, compared to Boccaccio, Christine uses terms such as "molestier," "aguillonner," "aguillons," and "souffrir" to create vividly domestic images of violence, which are absent in Boccaccio. In Christine's version, the prayer becomes, in effect, an occasion for denouncing Gautier and the abuses of a violent husband over the female body and soul. Griselda is not really addressing the man here; instead, she is speaking primarily to a female audience. Christine's

ideal reader may well be a female one who not only understands but can also relate to Griselda's words. In this regard, as Rosalind Brown-Grant states, Christine is in line with her late medieval male contemporaries, linking the figure of the author to that of the teacher, or better said, the "advisor" (Brown-Grant 3).

This female presence, embodied both in the female audience and in the person of the author, invites a reading of Christine's work through the lens of Luce Irigaray's seminal text, *Speculum de l'autre femme*, a critique of Lacanian theory through the lens of female subjectivity. In fact, while men, according to Jacques Lacan's theory, constitute their subjectivity through their own image, women, according to Irigaray, recognize themselves and constitute their femininity via other women. For Irigaray, women constitute the process of knowing themselves through recourse to physical acts that pass through bodily awareness. For this reason, Irigaray sets the image of the speculum against the Lacanian mirror. Whereas the mirror passively reflects the image of the subject, the speculum allows for multiple refractory views of the female body, both by itself and by others. The speculum, as a medical tool, used by health practitioners to examine the female body, also allows a woman to achieve external visualization of the intimacy of her own body. The speculum, simply put, allows both self and others to view some of the most private elements of the female body. Moreover, the term speculum alludes also to the speculum as medieval genre, intended as a compendium—an encyclopedic text that explicitly encodes male authoritative knowledge, which Christine challenges with her *Cité des dames*.

Reexamining the polysemous nature of Griselda in the context of Irigaray's "autre femme" draws attention to the fact that Griselda starts talking by using the first person, and then slips into the third, even using the term "autre" repeatedly to refer to herself while addressing Gautier: Griselda calls herself "*l'autre* [que tu as] si fort esprouvee" [the other [whom you] tested so severely]; she then immediately states, "ceste . . . ne pourroit pas souffrir par aventure come *l'autre* a fait" [that one . . . wouldn't be able to endure as much suffering as the other one did]. When she mentions the new wife by using the third person "ceste," she is creating an immediate identification between the two women. Indeed, Christine's Griselda is acutely aware of the injustice to which she is subjected, and she expresses this awareness through the lens of linguistic alienation from the self. In doing so, "ceste," which changes its sense, too, according

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to the linguistic context, assumes a universal value, simultaneously referring to Gautier's new bride and to any other woman. Christine's technique is a powerful one. In relating for us an individual woman's experience of alienation and in allowing the character to articulate it for herself on her own terms, Christine gives us a portrayal of alienation capable of representing multiple fractures in the lens of subjectivity: the "other woman" and all women, the "other women" and one's own self. Whether Griselda, Christine, or the reader finds herself paradoxically grounded in alienation and solidarity: the alienation felt at the heart of female subjectivity when confronted with dominant discourses of misogyny, and solidarity promoted among women as a productive response to this profound alienation.

In *Visualizing Boccaccio*, Jill M. Ricketts devotes the first chapter to an analysis of the relationship between Griselda and Gautier in Boccaccio's tale and the effect that it has on the audience of the *Decameron*. Ricketts emphasizes how the audience feels a profound sense of discomfort towards both a manipulative character, like Gautier, and a passive one, like Griselda. Whereas in Christine's rewriting, Griselda's resistance results in a harsh critique of the patriarchy, in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Griselda does not redeem herself from her condition of passivity. However, although the title of Ricketts' book refers specifically to illustrations of the *Decameron*, this chapter does not discuss any visualization. Indeed, illustrations would be helpful to further our understanding of the reception and visual interpretation of the dynamics of gender and class distinction in this narrative. As Todd Boli asks in his book review, what could be learned from actually looking at a visualization of the Griselda story? (508). In the article "Attorno al corpo di Griselda," Giovanna Angeli includes several fifteenth-century illustrations displaying key moments in Griselda's story. Among these examples, however, there appears no illuminated manuscript in which visualization is invested with paratextual value, nor any whose direct interaction of text and image allows a comparative reading.¹⁰ Nevertheless, a notable and illuminating example of the visual interpretation of the character of Griselda appears in the manuscript Pal. Lat. 1989.¹¹

This beautifully illuminated manuscript dates back to 1414 and is the result of the joint efforts of copyist Laurent de Premierfait and the Master of *La Cité des dames*. The illustration—tempera and gold foil on parchment—appears on folio 320r, at the bottom of the page, and depicts two crucial moments in Griselda's life, which are juxtaposed to each other and framed under two arcades. In the scene on the left,

Griselda is represented in the act of undressing. Even though she is still partially dressed, the illuminator suggests Griselda's nudity by depicting her barefoot and with unadorned hair. Gautier's authoritative posture is represented by his firm open hand, ready to receive the dress that Griselda is removing. Griselda, on the other hand, looks downward, avoiding Gautier's gaze, in a posture of total submission.

Conversely, on the right, domestic peace has been reestablished, and Griselda again dons her sumptuous dress and all her accessories, including hair decorations and an ornate belt. Hindman and Hedeman have underscored the striking ability of the Master of *La Cité des dames* to reproduce the finest details of contemporary clothing and other setting elements with a notable accuracy that is one of the main virtues of this artist and his workshop. In contrast to the scene of the undressing, Griselda's and Gautier's heads are aligned at the same level, and Griselda seems to be smiling at her husband as her gaze meets his. The scene on the right follows the typical presentational logic of medieval iconography with the man located on the right and woman on the left. However, in the scene on the left, we observe a full reversal of this presentation: Gautier is on the left, while Griselda stands to the right; the female figure is the one situated at the "right side" indicative of the divine, whereas the male figure is in the position of weakness and "error" traditionally attributed to the woman.

The children, who appear next to Griselda to complete the family portrait, are dressed as richly as their parents. The Master of *La Cité des dames* was well known for his careful attention to depicting an abundance of details adopted from the scenes of domestic life, as evinced also by the presence of the dog and the dinnerware on the table. The choice of the artist to make this illumination the last of the entire manuscript is the ultimate demonstration of the pivotal role that the gesture of undressing has in the development of the plot and imagery of Griselda's story. Even if Christine gives to Griselda a connotation different from Boccaccio's by eliminating imagery of deferential obedience and having her denounce the injustice of women's condition, both the *Decameron* and the *Cité* seem to mainly revolve around sartorial transformations, although for different purposes. Interestingly enough, the Master of *La Cité des dames*, the artist responsible for illustrating Christine's works, did so under her direction; it is thus conceivable that she gave explicit input for the

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illuminations of other manuscripts particularly dear to her, such as Boccaccio's.¹²

The scene of undressing, the closing illumination of the *Decameron's* manuscript and a key ritual gesture in medieval society (and our own), still speaks to us today. The example of Griselda, while not so exemplary in the canonical sense, becomes, in Christine's hands, a new way to understand the female body as that which does not have to follow the logic of the patriarchy, but instead, can open up new possibilities in studies on female corporeality as an expression of the self. It also has the potential to serve as an expression of solidarity in the constitution of a new community. Through her rewriting, Christine is able to confront Boccaccio and establish her own authorial presence. Boccaccio, one of the most influential *auctoritates* in the medieval literary canon, becomes a crucial touchstone for Christine's own self-affirmation. Future research into other occurrences of Boccaccian characters, not only from the *Decameron* but also from *De mulieris claris*, will doubtless cast additional light on the way Christine interprets Boccaccio's source, channels it, and makes it part of the new voice with which she advocates for female agency and solidarity.

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NOTES

¹ The status of Boccaccio's *novella* is highly debated among scholars and will be problematized in this paper later on.

² As both Maureen Quilligan and Rosalind Brown-Grant point out, Christine has a female audience in mind when she writes the *Cité*, which is without a doubt the text that best embodies her constant attention to the defense of women.

³ All the citations from the original text of *La Cité des dames* in Old French come from Curnow. Maureen Cheney Curnow's dissertation is the available edition for the text in Old French. English translations of these passages are from Richards, unless otherwise noted.

⁴ For further information on Boccaccio's *Decameron* as one of the sources of the *Cité* see also Bozzolo.

⁵ It is worth mentioning that besides Boccaccio, the critics have pointed at other authors who have recounted Griselda's story and who may have influenced Christine's rewriting, namely Petrarch in the *Seniles*, and Philippe de Mézières in *Livre de la vertu du sacrement du mariage*. According to Angeli, Christine disregarded Petrarch's adaptation, preferring Mézières's text, references to which can be found in Griselda's episode in the *Cité*. For further information see also Koutouzoff.

⁶ For further information on the role of clothing in the courtly context, amorous attire and gendered sartorial difference between men and women, see Burns.

⁷ In *Visualizing Boccaccio: Studies on Illustrations of the Decameron, from Giotto to Pasolini*, Ricketts (20) emphasizes how Griselda has no mother and she is caught between two patriarchal figures.

⁸ The use of the term anti-misogynist as found in Quilligan refers to Christine's explicit and deliberate stance against the misogynist literary tradition and defense of women. For further information, see also McLeod.

⁹ For a more in-depth analysis of Griselda's comparison with Job, see: Ferrante.

¹⁰ For a deeper understanding of the visual tradition of Boccaccio's works, see Branca. On Griselda's depiction see especially Simcik in volume two of Branca.

¹¹ Readers can browse the digitized copy of the manuscript MS Pal. Lat. 1989 at the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana: digi.vatlib.it/view/bav_pal_lat_1989/0651.

¹² About this topic see also Laura Rinaldi Dufresne, *The Fifteenth-Century Illustrations of Christine De Pizan's 'The Book of the City of Ladies' and 'The Treasure of the City of Ladies': Analyzing the Relation of the Pictures to the Text*. Edwin Mellen, 2012.

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