

INTRODUCING CHRISTINE DE PIZAN INTO THE CHAUCER COURSE: TALES OF GRISILDA AS TEXTUAL CONTEXT

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“What did the Wife think of rape in the catalogue of crimes?—I am afraid, if she were honest, she would have admitted that it was . . . ‘ful blisful’ [O]ne is tempted to guess that what women most desire is what the original victim of the rape so forcibly got . . .” (221-22).

The first time I read this passage excerpted from Howard Rollin Patch’s *On Rereading Chaucer* (1939), I was a young graduate student, and it made me feel uncomfortable; thirty-five years later, it still does. Yet I know Patch was a respected scholar and teacher. During the years he wrote the book in question, he was a professor of English at Smith College. His book was well received and in 1967 was reissued jointly by Harvard and Oxford university presses for a fourth printing. I cite the passage not to tarnish the reputation of a deceased scholar but to illustrate how differently Chaucer is being “read” (and subsequently taught) at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

During the sixty years since Patch published his book, sweeping changes have taken place within the academy and many have had a significant impact on the current state of Chaucer studies. Far more women are members of the professoriate than at the start of World War II, and a visible female presence on campuses has brought about policy and curricular changes. Within Chaucer studies specifically, women scholars have provided significant “revisionist” readings of Chaucer texts¹ and are largely responsible for the inclusion of Chaucer’s female contemporaries within a no-longer sacred canon. Yet an even greater influence on Chaucer studies has resulted from a virtual revolution in literary criticism during the past forty years.² Today many competing varieties of critical theory are informing Chaucer scholarship, a claim quickly proven by a quick glance at a recent MLA international bibliography. Publishers of textbooks are responding with “case books” in which popular Chaucer texts are analyzed according to various critical approaches; they recognize

that as Chaucer criticism changes, so also does the content of Chaucer courses.³

But changing critical approaches to Chaucer are not the only factors affecting the way Chaucer currently is taught. An additional factor contributing to the transformation of the Chaucer classroom is that of burgeoning pedagogical theory, sometimes developing in conjunction with critical theory.⁴ Improving instruction in colleges and universities is its primary goal. Cognitive psychologists have shown that students rarely learn from passively sitting in lecture halls and taking notes,⁵ and so the old construct of the straight lecture class is "out." Instead, instructors are being encouraged to consider how students learn. A suggested model is a classroom in which both lecture and opportunities for student interaction are balanced, resulting in an environment conducive to "critical thinking."⁶

One response of some Chaucer instructors has been to design their courses around the concept of "Chaucer in context." Such is the position of British educator and historian S. H. Rigby, who argues that "the concepts of society and of 'human nature' contained in works of literature, and even the very notion of literature itself, are never natural or eternal but are always specific according to time and place and thus capable of being analysed in historical terms" (ix). While my approach to Chaucer is somewhat less historical than Ribby's, I agree that literary texts are never "natural or eternal."

In redesigning a Chaucer course I regularly teach for "semester conversion," I have changed the course title to "Chaucer and his Age." My approach in this course, as the new title suggests, is contextual and interdisciplinary. The Chaucer assignments include *Troilus and Criseyde* and selections from the *Canterbury Tales*. What is perhaps unusual is that I construct a large portion of the "context" for Chaucer's writings out of other literary texts. For example, I assign one of the tales and several of its analogues and then ask students to compare and contrast related texts in small group discussions and/or in written exercises.⁷ To guide students in their readings, I frequently provide an introductory "mini-lecture" and also distribute a list of prepared questions⁸ to encourage "active" reading⁹ and to provide an opportunity for classroom interaction. My objectives for such an assignment are as follows:

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- 1) comparison of analogous texts encourages “active” reading of each text;
- 2) comparison of analogous texts enables students to discover that medieval authors tend to “re-tell” old tales;
- 3) comparison of analogous texts enables students to discover that “re-telling” does not cancel out originality or artistic integrity.

The chief disadvantage to the approach is that comparative assignments take time. In a course like mine, students will read fewer of Chaucer’s writings than they would have in a straight lecture class.

In spite of this drawback, I believe that students receive a better understanding of Chaucer’s contributions to literature than they would if they had read more texts but were denied an opportunity to interact with those texts. This may be illustrated by a description of the way I currently teach the Clerk’s Tale. When I used the lecture model, I found the Clerk’s Tale difficult to teach, perhaps because it elicits “violent and hostile reaction among twentieth-century readers who fault the Clerk for telling a story whose impact and meaning depend upon an acceptance of gender as hierarchically and repressively ordered” (Staley 235). But now I find the week spent on the “Griselda unit” one of the most stimulating of the semester. This unit consists of the Clerk’s Tale and its “links,” the Boccaccio and Petrarch versions of Griselda’s tale, a French translation of Petrarch included in the book of *Le Ménagier de Paris*, and the story of Griselda as retold in *The Book of the City of Ladies* by Christine de Pizan.¹⁰ I realize that Christine probably did not know Chaucer’s tale and did not finish writing the *City* until 1405 (Richards in De Pizan xxv), five years after Chaucer’s death. Nevertheless, the “and his Age” in the rubric for my course permits the addition, and, more importantly, I believe that including Christine’s tale has greatly enriched student understanding of the Clerk’s Tale. In fact, I now consider Christine’s story of Griselda an essential component in the unit: its primary value is that it permits a “feminist” rebuttal of the tale by a contemporary of Chaucer’s.¹¹

Christine de Pizan develops her “book” around the idea of constructing an allegorical city that embodies her Utopian dream—a place where good women can dwell together harmoniously in a classless, non-

sexist society.¹² Her version of the Griselda tale serves as one stone in that city. In the opening passages of the work, a first person narrator, significantly named Christine, says that she became upset while reading Mathéolus, author of the late-thirteenth-century misogynous *Lamentations of Matheolus*, because it was full of lies about women. Three “goddesses” (allegorical personifications) come to her aid and help her build the symbolic city, which will correct the misprisions of clerks by presenting truthful stories about women’s virtue. As Farrell observes, throughout the *City* “Christine . . . omits any suggestion of feminine weakness. Her text is not dialogized; it is a polemic in support of a specifically feminine definition of virtue, and every word in it is intended as a direct word” (146). Christine’s tale of Griselda is narrated by Lady Rectitude, one of the “goddesses,” who depicts the heroine as a strong woman and an *exemplum* of womanly faithfulness.

The first time I decided to incorporate Christine’s tale into my course, my primary purpose was basically feminist and “revisionist.” I wanted to introduce an important medieval woman writer to students given little exposure to medieval literature. Since I believe that both Chaucer’s and Christine’s versions of the Griselda tale challenge and subvert the literary tradition of clerical misogamy, my secondary goal was to reveal those subversions to my students. As I have become more knowledgeable about active reading and its relationship to critical thinking, I have come to care much less about whether students accept my interpretations and much more about empowering students to defend their own critical positions. As rhetorical theorist John Clifford observes, “There are always opposing voices that create contradictions for our sense of self. Within literary studies there is clearly space for resistance, space for students and teachers to help each other respeak their subjectivities through an exploration of the intellectual and emotional landscapes on which we hope to build literate and democratic symbolic order” (111).

Once I decided to teach the Clerk’s Tale in a “contextual” way, I had concerns about how to guide students in their reading of analogous texts and decided that a heuristic was needed.¹³ Noting that two articles in a recent journal were devoted to the subject of the Clerk’s Tale and Bakhtin (Engle and McClellan), I turned to recent studies of Bakhtin. Since I introduce Bakhtin’s theory of Carnival in the course when offering

competing explanations of Chaucer's overall intention in the *Canterbury Tales*,¹⁴ it seemed an appropriate course of action. During my search, I discovered Lindley's *Hyperion and the Hobbyhorse*, a study of Bakhtin's Carnival theory, and serendipitously found the following passage:

In summary, whatever the historicity of carnival, the carnivalesque is undoubtedly real, a shaping element in major texts from the *Canterbury Tales* to *Paradise Lost* and beyond. . . . It does not operate, however, in the simply positive way that Bakhtin mythologizes. It is used more to interrogate dystopias than to establish utopias. . . . (24)

Inadvertently Lindley had provided what I sought. I was confident that Christine's tale of Griselda contributed to its author's political agenda in the *City*, but I felt less certain of Chaucer's purpose in the Clerk's Tale. Lindley's phrase, "interrogating dystopias," seemed apt, for within the Clerk's Tale, as in most of the other Canterbury tales, there is an element of "tearing down," of diminishing. Chaucer's purpose in relating the Griselda story (although not the pilgrim Clerk's) may be viewed then as essentially what Lindley calls *dystopic*, particularly on the subjects of women and medieval marriage as well as literary representations of such subjects. In addition, the very question itself, whether Chaucer is "interrogating" such institutions in the Clerk's Tale, makes for good class discussion.

As I introduce the Griselda unit, I cite Dinshaw's observation that "the story of Griselda in the fourteenth century is a story of translation" (132). Then in a "mini-lecture," I provide evidence, a brief history of the tale in which I list additional versions composed later in the fourteenth century, borrowing much of my lecture material from summaries provided by Dinshaw (132) and Frank (155). In part I hope to prove that the Griselda story was part of the "popular culture" of the time, that "reference to Griselda was almost proverbial when speaking of wifely obedience" (Bornstein 322).

As we turn to the Clerk's Tale specifically, I point out that one of the subjects Chaucer examines in this tale is power, and here I quote Staley: "Studies of the political valences of the tale of Griselda as it was passed

from Boccaccio to Petrarch have suggested Chaucer's participation in an elaborate literary conversation about tyrannical power" (235).¹⁵ Then I point out that one reason I have assigned Christine's tale alongside Chaucer's is to include an authentic female voice in the multi-textual "conversation" about power.

As students move into small groups, I distribute copies of an outline listing three items for their consideration: the way the Clerk tells his tale, the way the Clerk and his fellow male pilgrims interpret that tale in the "links" following it, and the way the Clerk's tale and its "links" interact with the Wife of Bath's anti-clerical Prologue (which they studied the week before) and the Clerk's references to her in the Envoy. As I distribute the outlines, I express my opinion that it was no accident Chaucer assigned the Griselda tale to a clerk, a member of a group known for its misogynistic literature. To strengthen my case, I point out that in the Clerk's opening speech Chaucer is suggesting this tale "belongs" to clerks: the pilgrim Clerk boasts that he learned his tale "at Padowe of a worthy clerk" (IV 27). From here I argue that in "clericizing" the tale, Chaucer shifts the focus away from Griselda so that Walter becomes "firmly established as the tale's center of gravity around which all else necessarily revolves" (Lynch 45).¹⁶

After students have had time to work in groups, we meet for a general class discussion. If no one points out that the Clerk has transformed Griselda into a flesh-and-blood version of his "ideal woman," I suggest that they consider the possibility. I have two quotations printed out (both from feminist critics) supporting this view, and I offer these as "prompts" for student comment. I cite Dinshaw's observation that the Clerk in his translation of Petrarch actually "restores what [Petrarch] has . . . eliminated[,] . . . gender, the here and now, and a consideration of a woman's point of view . . ." (153). In addition, I cite Hansen's argument that Chaucer "stresses the heroine's archetypal femaleness" and thereby transforms Griselda into "type and embodiment, if not caricature, of the idealized medieval good woman" (198-99). Finally, I direct attention to the heuristic of "dystopias." Here I submit for class discussion my own critical opinion that Chaucer is subverting the non-sexist, Christian moral of Petrarch's allegory. The pilgrim Clerk repeats Petrarch's moral, "But for that every wight, in his degree, / Sholde be constant in adversitee / As

was Grisilde" (IV 1145-47), but afterwards specifically makes an offhand remark to the male pilgrims, the "lordynges," that "It were ful hard to fynde now-a-dayes / In al a toun Grisildis thre or two . . ." (IV 1164-65).

During the next class period I open discussion on the relationship between the clerk and the Wife of Bath, the second item the students had discussed in small groups. Students usually are able to point out that if Griselda is the Clerk's "fantasy" woman (silent, passive, perfectly submissive), then the Wife of Bath (impatient, loud, boisterous) is his nightmare. I remind them that the Clerk must negotiate with the latter female during the fictional pilgrimage. I ask students to indicate how Chaucer establishes these two pilgrims as adversaries. Some reasonable responses are that the Wife "disguises" herself in "clerkly" attire by preaching her "doctrine" of female "maistrie" in a parody of a clerical disputation or that the Wife boasts of having corrupted another penniless Oxford clerk and mutilating his misogynistic "book." I tell students that this was a real sin to the pilgrim Clerk: "For hym was levere have at his beddes heed / Twenty bookes, clad in blak or reed . . ." (I 293-94). I also ask students what the Clerk means by calling the Wife of Bath an "archwyf" in the Envoy. In my opinion this word indicates that the Wife is the epitome of evils attributed to wives in clerical misogynistic literature, an apt description for a character constructed out of shards of that literary tradition. I call attention to how Chaucer "plays" with matters of style and substance within the two texts so as to balance them against each other. While the Wife announces that she will "speke of wo that is in marriage" (III 3), it is the Clerk who actually relates an abused wife's tale of woe.

During the latter part of the class period we discuss the third item students had discussed in their small groups, the Clerk's audience. Focusing in particular on the Envoy (IV 1177-1212), I ask students to explain the Clerk's advice to the "noble wyves." As a prompt, I cite Chance's explanation of Ekko as "a symbol of female empowerment . . . employed by the Clerk as a paradigm to empower 'noble wyves'—to give them voices . . ." (252). According to Chance, "Ekko also accurately reflects Griselde in her echolalic rhetorical responses to her cruel, testing husband: she offers an opportunity to make trouble through mimesis, deliberately exaggerated gender behavior that subverts and therefore empowers" (252). Then I ask students whether the Clerk is telling the

Wife of Bath that her approach to gaining “maistrie” has been faulty, that she should behave more like a woman.

After spending two class periods on the Clerk’s Tale, students are prepared to discuss the version by Christine de Pizan. I begin this class with a dramatic reading of selected passages from Christine’s introduction to the *City* (I.1.1-I.1.2) to “set the stage” for Christine’s tale. Then in an introductory “mini-lecture” on Christine’s biography, I attempt to cast her life in words that contemporary students will be able to connect with their world. I explain that Christine found herself an impoverished widow at the age of twenty-five and then had to endure a fourteen-year-long struggle to clear legal entanglements surrounding her husband’s estate. It was during this time that Christine turned to a professional writing career in order to support herself, her three children, her elderly mother, and a niece (Willard 39-40). She did not gain financial independence until after she had sold her father’s estate in 1392 to Philippe de Mézières, the man whose prose translation of the Griselda tale became her primary source (40).

To provoke some discussion I ask students why a self-sufficient woman and a responsible single parent would have any interest in the story of a submissive wife who passively acquiesces to a tyrannical husband’s illogical commands that their children be slain. I also ask why Christine, when composing her tale, apparently did not consult the translated story included in the *Ménagier’s* book, the story written for the “instruction” of a fifteen-year-old wife (Bornstein 323). After some short responses, I suggest that Christine’s personal acquaintance with Mézières perhaps sparked her interest in Griselda, that perhaps the circumstances of her life at the time gave her cause to empathize with the “female Job.”

Then I present a second “mini-lecture” in which I note that as early as 1399, Christine had begun to defend her sex in a series of writings, “criticizing and rebutting the sharp turn toward misogyny in the attitudes and reading of her time” (Kelly 9). As Blumenfeld-Kosinski has observed, for Christine, “the misogynistic tradition was first and foremost a ‘written one’” (299). Christine especially wanted to challenge the misogyny found in Jean de Meun’s portion of the *Roman de la Rose*, a work my students know from an excerpt they read when studying the Wife of Bath. I also

note that McLeod and Wilson argue that Christine adopts the methodology of writers of misogynist literature with the following results: "The male clerk is thus made to seem deceitful, unethical, and unclerical while the woman scholar is truthful, moral, and studious" (70). Finally I suggest that Christine, by engaging in such literary disputations, "recreates" herself as a kind of female clerk, an idea I owe to Kevin Brownlee;¹⁷ in this way Christine is able to share "common ground" with her male opponents.

After this "mini-lecture," I ask students to comment on the context Christine creates for her Griselda story within the *City*. Often someone will read Lady Rectitude's line, "You will never find such perversion in women as you encounter in a great number of men," and students invariably call attention to Rectitude's first example: "Judas Iscariot who cruelly betrayed his good Master . . ." (II.49.5). Students especially enjoy citing Lady Rectitude's conclusion: "[Y]ou will find that men should really keep quiet and that women should bless and praise God who placed their precious souls in feminine vessels" (II.49.5). I then ask students to note differences that they have found in their readings of Christine's Griselda tale and Chaucer's. (Students had been asked to make a "jot list" of differences while they were reading and to bring that list to class.) Students usually describe Christine's Griselda as a more self-sufficient woman than Chaucer's: she waits upon her father and also "supports him with her spinning." The most important difference, they argue, is that Christine's Griselda possesses a voice. They note her long, moving speech on "property" after Gualtieri asks her to return all that he has given her. Nor do students miss descriptive details in that scene: Gualtieri is on the verge of tears, a feminine sign of weakness, while Griselda behaves in the "manly" way, stoic and dry-eyed. Usually some student will point out that it is Guiltieri instead of Griselda who complains at the end of the tale, "Rest assured that there is no man under the heavens who has come to know the love of the marriage bond through so many trials as I have with you" (II.50.4). Sometimes there are comments that Griselda's chances for happiness are not realistic because Guiltieri, at the end of the tale, remains stupid and ego-centric. I would like to conclude this discussion of student responses with an anecdote. In one class an older student, the mother of a teen-aged daughter, made an interesting observation: she said that she had become frightened by the unit because it had made her realize that the

basic plot of all the Griselda tales (an abused woman marrying and living “happily every after” with her abuser, who is exonerated because of his wealth and social position) is still “selling,” that it is being used by contemporary writers of “dime store” romances purchased by teen-aged girls.

Certainly much more can be said about student responses to the two Griselda tales, but the preceding discussion suggests that creating a “Griselda unit” provides a valuable approach for teaching the Clerk’s Tale. Study of comparative Griselda texts teaches students about attitudes toward women, power, and marriage in the late Middle Ages, and sometimes in the present. For students concerned about originality, the comparative approach shows that medieval authors could be “original” and subjective even though they frequently retold old tales. The study enables students to comprehend that literature is written for reasons other than “just wanting to tell a good story.” It enables students to discern how authors may use variations on the same fictional plot to accommodate their own subjective viewpoints, that authors choose whether to politicize or to interrogate dystopias. This particular assignment invites students to consider whether Chaucer and Christine were aware of the misrepresentation of women in medieval clerical literature and whether either or both authors used the popular tale of Griselda to expose and challenge that literary tradition.

In addition, this assignment has more general pedagogical value. In completing it, students actively engage texts; they employ critical thinking skills; they gain experience in interactive debate. The many class discussions and related assignments also serve as an exercise in “invention.” By the end of the final class discussion, students are ready to write essays about the Clerk’s Tale or its analogues or both. It should be noted that this teaching strategy provides benefits for the instructor as well. My understanding of the Clerk’s Tale has been greatly enriched by my own “conversation” with the assigned texts and with students. More important, I no longer dread teaching the Clerk’s Tale; for me that “task” has become an exciting and much anticipated “intertextual” adventure.

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¹Running counter to Patch's interpretation and that of other earlier critics is Dinshaw's "reading" of the rape episode in the Wife of Bath's Tale: "[T]he Wife maintains that the literal text—her body—can speak for itself. [T]he Wife vociferously speaks as that Other created and excluded by patriarchal ideology, and in this way she reveals the very workings of this ideology. Most penetratingly, as her *Tale* suggests in its narrative focus on a rapist, if the patriarchal economy of the trade of women proceeds without necessary acquiescence, it is always potentially performing a rape. (The rape is . . . Chaucer's own innovation to the traditional stories that inform this tale, a deliberate alteration that argues for its significance in the whole of the Wife's performance)" (115).

²Influential reader response theorist Wolfgang Iser recently accounted for the phenomenal growth of critical theory by noting that because literature had "long since lost its erstwhile importance as the capstone of bourgeois culture," attempts were made "in the sixties and seventies to devise frames both for a rational exchange of views and for conceptualizing the function of literature" (311). Iser posits that eventually this "excavation of meaning led to questions about why the meaning had been concealed in the text and why authors should indulge in such a game of hide and seek with their interpreters . . . [and] even more puzzling was why the meaning—once found—should change again, even though the letters, the words, and the sentences of the text remained the same" (311). Iser concludes that "Gradually such a situation—when realized—created an awareness that the presuppositions governing interpretation were largely responsible for what the text was supposed to mean" (311).

³See, for example, Beidler in his recent case book on the Wife of Bath; in addition to including texts of the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale, Beidler's book provides definitions of five major critical theories, each supported by an illustrative essay on the Wife written by a representative theorist; these include new historicism (Lee Patterson), Marxist criticism (Laurie Finke), psychoanalytic criticism (Louise Fradenburg), deconstruction (H. Marshall Leicester, Jr.), and feminist criticism (Elaine Tuttle Hansen).

⁴McLaughlin attempts such an integration of theories, arguing that “Students need to see literature in terms of how meaning is produced within language and culture, and in terms of how language encodes the power structures within society” (262); he concludes that “the [classroom] model that provides the most effective ‘equipment for living’ is one that combines the insights into language of structuralism and semiotics with the insights into power of ideology critique” (262).

⁵Meyers explains the reasoning from the viewpoint of cognitive psychology: “The work of Piaget and development theorists like Perry and Kohlberg strongly suggests that active forms of transmission work better than lecture to stimulate cognitive and ethical development in students. . . . The main problem with the lecture as a primary mode of teaching is the disallowance of any time for students to interact with and process subject matter. Furious note taking : . . . is no substitute for processing information by thinking out loud, restating concepts in one’s own words, discussing issues with fellow students, or challenging a teacher’s assumptions and conclusions” (57-58).

⁶Although it is difficult to find a satisfactory definition of this popular pedagogical term, Meyers offers a reasonable working definition: “Learning to think critically involves expanding one’s thinking processes by moving beyond naturally egocentric attitudes and perceptions and the immediacy of concrete experience. . . . One of the biggest challenges for college teachers is helping students broaden their range of experience and exposing them to new values and modes of perception. The abilities to make sense of new experiences and to envision possibilities outside one’s own immediate experiences are important ingredients of critical thinking” (26). Meyers advises instructors that “to develop students’ critical thinking abilities to the fullest, the classroom environment must be highly interactive” (9).

⁷Sometimes I assign works of literature that are not analogous to Chaucer’s writings but nevertheless contribute to the “context”; for example, I assign *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* to provide students with an understanding of Chaucer’s “Age” and at the same time provide a common frame of reference for discussing *Troilus and Criseyde*, the Knight’s Tale, and the Wife of Bath’s Tale.

⁸Paul stresses the importance of well-planned questions and other activities: "To teach a student critically is to devise activities and an environment conducive to the general, reasoned, intellectual development of students" (121).

⁹Clifford indicates the importance of encouraging students "to read against the grain, against the ostensible intention of the text" (110); I believe that my use of comparative analogous texts forces them to do so.

¹⁰One of my required texts, *The Canterbury Tales: Nine Tales and the General Prologue*, ed. Kolve and Olson, was designed for a contextual class: it contains the Boccaccio and Petrarch versions of the Griselda story and also the one along found in *Le Ménagier de Paris*; an additional text, readily available, that can be added to the assignment is an Early Modern English translation of Christine's Griselda made by Brian Anslay, a yeoman of the wine cellar to Henry VIII, printed in Bornstein.

¹¹I call Christine a *feminist* in this context even though I am aware of the critical controversy over whether in fact she should be so designated. The controversy began with Delany's "Mothers to Think Back Through." Delany was challenged by Christine Reno in "Christine de Pizan," responding in "History, Politics, and Christine Studies"; the latter two essays are included in Brabant.

¹²Willard suggests that Christine's idea for creating an allegorical city most likely grew out of her reading of St. Augustine's *Civitate Dei* and Boccaccio's *De Claris Mulieribus*, a collection of tales about so-called "good" women (135).

¹³Meyers points out that "A specific perspective or framework for analyzing materials and issues in a discipline is an important cognitive element in critical thinking" (8).

¹⁴Lindahl, a prominent folklorist, claims that in the *Canterbury Tales* Chaucer has "*re-created* a consummately medieval festival . . ." (45). Inverting Bakhtin's idea of Carnival, Lindahl further asserts that Chaucer "reshapes literature into festival, crafting a frozen representation of a lively play form never before (or since) rendered in writing, a world fully consonant in its rules and interactions with celebrations witnessed and enacted by the poet's contemporaries" (45). I submit these quotations to my class for focused discussion of the "game" passage of the General Prologue.

¹⁵Staley takes the argument further than I am willing to go in class discussion; she contends that Chaucer “appropriates both the screen of a translated text and an inherited code of gender relations to throw into sharp relief the assumptions upon which order was supposedly founded. Rather than define the social body in terms of its fundamental unity, the Clerk divides that fictionalized wholeness into its separate parts” (233).

¹⁶Lynch describes Walter’s need to test and re-test his wife as a kind of parody of William of Ockham’s epistemology that was being taught at Oxford during the latter part of the fourteenth century; she points out: “All that is necessary for intuitive knowledge (according to Ockham) is the *hic et nunc*, primarily visual, presence of the intellect and its object, which excites in Walter the habit of knowing and loving that leads to his marriage . . . but which he replaces with a sort of secondary, abstractive experimental knowledge that has curiosity as its motive force, since it seeks knowledge needlessly and for its own sake . . .” (62-63).

¹⁷Brownlee describes how Christine presents herself as a kind of female clerk in some of her earlier works intended to discredit the writing of Jean de Meun: “Throughout the dossier she expertly employs clerkly discourse to confront the single most authoritative clerkly figure in the medieval French literary canon: Jean de Meun. In doing so she expands the very terms of the clerkly discursive system in such a way as to authorize her own identity as clerkly speaking subject. In this context . . . her *dittié* of the *Débat* is at once the product and the proof of her legitimacy as female clerkly author” (259).

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