

Petrarch and Boccaccio:  
The Rewriting of Griselda's Tale (*Dec.* 10.10).  
A Rhetorical Debate on Latin and Vernacular Languages\*

The story of Griselda has always raised many interpretative problems. One could perhaps suggest that when Boccaccio has his storytellers quarrel over the meaning of the last *novella*, he is anticipating the critical controversy that this text has sparked throughout its long and successful career in Europe.

The first critic and reader of Boccaccio's tale was Petrarch, whom Boccaccio met for the first time in Florence in 1350. The following year, Boccaccio met the elder poet in Padua to invite him, unsuccessfully, to assume a position as a professor at Florence's *Studium*. The cultural and personal bond between Boccaccio and Petrarch dates back to that time.<sup>1</sup> This friendship, marked by intense correspondence and mutual invitations, was always affected by an inherent tension over Dante's poetics. For Petrarch, the *Commedia* was irreconcilable with his well-known aristocratic and elitist conception of literature; Boccaccio, however, soon became Dante's 'advocate,' promoting the poetics of the *Commedia*.<sup>2</sup>

The Dante debate between Boccaccio and Petrarch expresses a difference of opinion concerning vernacular literature, its dignity and its appropriateness for dealing with issues traditionally entrusted to Latin. *Familiars* 21.15, addressed to Boccaccio, is an important token of Petrarch's attitude towards Dante. Rejecting any charge of envy, Petrarch presents the issue of language as the real reason he dismisses Dante's poetry:

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<sup>1</sup> As is apparent in recent scholarship, we need to reconceive the relationship between Petrarch and Boccaccio as one of intellectual equality – and autonomy – particularly in the light of (but not limited to) the different narrative, rhetorical and ideological strategies they adopted in the Griselda story. See Velli 2004 and 2005, and Bragantini 2018.

<sup>2</sup> On Petrarch's and Boccaccio's attitude toward Dante's legacy, see Hecker 1902, 3–4, 12, 26, Billanovich 1947, 147–48, and Billanovich 1965.

Primum ergo te michi excusas, idque non otiose, quod in conterranei nostri — *popularis quidem* quod ad *stilum* attinet, quod ad *rem* haud dubie *nobilis* poete — laudibus multus fuisse videare; atque ita te purgas quasi ego vel *illius* vel cuiusquam laudes mee laudis detrimentum putem. Itaque quicquid de *illo* predicas, totum si pressius inspiciam, in meam gloriam verti ais. Inseris nominatim hanc huius officii tui excusationem, quod *ille* tibi adolescentulo primus studiorum dux et *prima fax* fuerit. [...] Age ergo, non patiente sed favente me, illam ingenii tui facem, que tibi in hoc calle, quo magnis passibus ad clarissimum finem pergis, ardorem prebuit ac lucem, celebra et cole, *ventosisque diu vulgi plausibus agitatum atque ut sic dixerim fatigatum*, tandem veris teque seque dignis laudibus ad celum fer. [...] Ergo ego clarorum hominum laudibus non delecter, imo et glorier? Crede michi; nichil a me longius, nulla michi pestis ignotior *invidia* est. [...] Dicunt enim qui me oderunt, me illum odisse atque contemnere, ut vel *sic michi odia vulgarium conflent quibus acceptissimus ille est*; novum nequitie genus et mirabilis ars nocendi. (*Fam.* 21.15)<sup>3</sup>

Petrarch's literary criticism, as well as his rejection of a vernacular literature that can lead only to the praise of the *vulgus*, hinge upon the contradictory terms *popularis* and *nobilis* (*res vs verba*).

Petrarch's negative assessment is at odds with Boccaccio's appreciation of Dante's vernacular: "e quello in rima volgare compose con tanta arte, con sì mirabile ordine e con sì bello, che niuno fu ancora che giustamente quello potesse in alcun atto riprendere."<sup>4</sup> For Petrarch, the *Commedia's vulgaris* audience limits its value, whereas Boccaccio finds that inclusivity remarkable: "la quale [*Commedia*] con la dolcezza e bellezza del testo pasce non solamente gli uomini, ma i fanciulli e le femine; e con mirabile soavità de' profondissimi sensi sotto quella nascosi, poi che alquanto gli ha tenuti sospesi, ricrea e pasce gli solenni intelletti."<sup>5</sup>

By debating Dante's decision to write the *Commedia* in Italian, Petrarch and Boccaccio confront one of the main issues of later humanistic disputes: the relationship between Latin and vernacular literature and the recognition, in the latter, of a literary dignity independent of language. It is a clash of poetics that, as I shall argue in this essay, we can follow in the two versions of Griselda's tale.

At the beginning of the *Decameron*, Boccaccio says: "intendo di raccontare cento novelle, o favole o parabole o istorie che dire le vogliamo" (*Proemio* 13).<sup>6</sup> Boccaccio does not intend these terms to be synonymous, as if to

<sup>3</sup> All quotations of the *Familiare*s are from Petrarca 1978 (emphasis mine).

<sup>4</sup> Boccaccio 1995, 65.

<sup>5</sup> Boccaccio 1995, 79.

<sup>6</sup> All the quotations are from Boccaccio 1989.

call all of the stories in the *Decameron* tales, fables, parables or histories.<sup>7</sup> On the contrary, Boccaccio shows a thoughtful use of these technical terms. The word *favola* is used in reference to untrue stories or to imagined things; *storia* or *istoria* indicates tales with a connection to historical events; *novella* is the most common term, designating each tale of the *Decameron*; *parabola*, instead, is a *hapax*. As for the meaning of *parabola*, one should remember the definition of *fabula* proposed in the *Genealogie*:

Fabula igitur ante alia a for faris honestam sumit originem, et ab ea confabulatio, que nil aliud quam collocutio sonat. [...] Harum quatruplicem fore speciem credo [...] Species vero tercia potius hystorie quam fabule similis est. [...] Comici insuper honestiores, ut Plautus atque Terentius, hac confabulandi specie etiam usi sunt, nil aliud preter quod lictera sonat intelligentes, volente stamen arte sua diversorum hominum mores et verba describere, et interim lectores docere et cautos facere. [...] Si terciam, quod nequeunt, dixerunt esse damnandam, nil aliud erit quam eam sermonis

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Boccaccio 1992, *ad locum*: “Questa serie di sostantivi sta a indicare che la materia sarà mista, e i racconti di varia specie: novelle sono genericamente narrazioni di ogni argomento; favole rammenta l’uso francese di ‘fabliaux’; parabole accenna a esempi e probabilmente alla volontà didascalico-allegorica che non di rado è presente nei prologhi e negli epiloghi delle singole novelle, e qualche volta in racconti moralizzati per via di paragoni [...]; storie indica infine specialmente le narrazioni a sfondo storico, di personaggi illustri.” Sarteschi 2000 discusses the meaning of the terms used by Boccaccio in the *Proemio*, focusing on the cultural, rhetorical and ideological context in which the narrative form of the *Decameron* is born; Boccaccio’s novelty consists precisely in the new genre of the *novella*, the only one capable of mediating between history and fiction. For a discussion on the dichotomy *historia/fabula*, see Albanese 1992–93 and 2004, Pomian 1999, 15–78, Simon 2000, Martelli 2000, Rossiter 2010, 137–39, 151 n.60, 172–73, and Bragantini 2018, 332–35. The boundary between history and fiction remains unfixed and unfixable (in the same way that the two Petrarchan readers’ responses cannot be reconciled) due to the hermeneutic intricacy of these two terms: “Que la connaissance fasse appel à l’imagination n’efface nullement la frontière qui les sépare. Il en est de même s’agissant de l’histoire et de la fiction. Tout en comportant des adjonctions fictives, une narration historique n’en diffère pas moins d’une narration fabuleuse, parce qu’elle invite à sortir du texte et programme les opérations qui permettent d’établir un rapport cognitif avec une réalité extra-textuelle. Affirmer que l’histoire n’est jamais pure ne signifie donc pas contester la réalité de la frontière qui la sépare de la fable. C’est, au contraire, souligner que cette frontière, frontière mouvante et qui a subi dans le passé plusieurs déplacements, n’a jamais été abolie. Et qu’il est inconcevable qu’elle ne le soit jamais” (Pomian 1999, 77–78). In fact, the only way to resolve this aporia is through the new *novella* genre. Cf. also Boccaccio’s strong defense of the authenticity of his *novelle* in the introduction to the Fourth Day: “Quegli che queste cose così non essere state dicono avrei molto caro che essi recassero gli originali: li quali se a quel che io scrivo discordanti fossero, giusta direi la lor riprensione e d’amendar me stesso m’ingegnerei; ma infino che altro che parole non apparisce, io gli lascerò con la loro oppinione, seguitando la mia, di loro dicendo quello che essi di me dicono” (39).

speciem damnasse, qua sepiissime usus est Christus Ihesus, Dei filius, Salvator noster, dum esset in carne, quanquam non eo, quo poete vocabulo *Sacre* vocitent *Lictere*, quin imo vocavere parabola; non nulli *exemplum* dicunt, eo quod ratione dicatur exempli. (*Gen.* 14.9.3–10)<sup>8</sup>

Later on, Boccaccio insists on the semantic proximity between fable and history, and on the truth that is embedded in this narrative genre:

Et dato species fabularum una, quam videri potius hystoriam quam fabulam diximus, sit veritati simillima, antiquissimo omnium nationum consensu a labe mendacii immunis est, cum sit consuetudine veteri concessum ea quis uti posse ratione exempli, in quo simplex non exquiritur veritas, nec prohibetur mendacium. (*Gen.* 14.13.3)

It is with this definition in mind that Petrarch will re-write the *Griselda novella* according to the typology of the *exemplum*.

The terms proposed in the *Proemio* find a *raison d'être* in a rhetorical tradition rooted in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* and then recovered in medieval poetics. *Istorie*, *parabole* and *favole* are not appropriate definitions for Boccaccio's tales; *novella*, however, is the right term to identify the *narratio brevis* of the *Decameron*. From this point of view, one might also assume that the word *novella* embodies all of the meanings of *favole*, *parabole*, *istorie*, not as equivalent, but rather as distinct from each other. If Boccaccio refuses *a priori* to give an explicit interpretation of his tales, it will be up to the readers to discern, from time to time, if the *novelle* are *favole*, *parabole* or *istorie*.<sup>9</sup> The absence of *exempla* from this set of terms is noteworthy in that, according to medieval rhetorical treatises, the *exemplum* corresponds to the traditional definition of *narratio brevis*.<sup>10</sup> By excluding the *exemplum* from the *Proemio*'s range of terms for short prose, Boccaccio seems to reject it as representative of his literary discourse but does not preclude its use in the *Decameron* according to its primary meaning of "exemplary, good or bad."<sup>11</sup>

The rejection of the exemplary and thus unquestionable value of the *novella* is clear in the story of *Griselda*. As usual, Dioneo has the privilege of telling the last tale on any subject he wants. Unlike the other members of the *brigata*, who follow Panfilo's order to tell moral stories, Dioneo separates his tale from the tradition of the *exemplum*. Gualtieri's behavior exemplifies not magnificence, but senseless brutality: "non cosa magnifica ma

<sup>8</sup> All the quotations are from Boccaccio 1998.

<sup>9</sup> On the role of the reader's interpretative process, see Usher 2013.

<sup>10</sup> Delcorno 1989 and Stierle 1994.

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, *Introduzione* 26, 65, 98; *Decameron* 1.3 and 5; 5.10 and 43.

una matta bestialità” (3).<sup>12</sup> Dioneo’s final remark, “la quale [matta bestialità] io non consiglio alcun che segua, per ciò che gran peccato fu che a costui ben n’avenisse” (3), warns the readers not to follow Gualtieri’s example. Dioneo’s ironic words deny not only the validity of the *exemplum*, but also any possible allegorical reading of the tale. Moreover, by setting the last day’s *novelle* far away in time and space (from Spain to France, from the North of Italy to Sicily, from Ancient Rome to the High Middle Ages), Boccaccio seems to question their truth and their effectiveness in the real world. Similarly, Chaucer sets Griselda’s tale in an undetermined past, suggesting that virtuous women like her no longer exist, a possibility that the Clerk makes explicit when he compares Griselda to pure gold and contemporary women to gold alloyed with brass.<sup>13</sup> In so doing, both authors detach themselves from any responsibility for an unquestionable allegorical reading of the tale.

Nevertheless, at least since the appearance of Petrarch’s version, this *novella* has been read as the allegory of the soul (Griselda) tested by God (Gualtieri), along the lines of God’s testing of Job’s patience.<sup>14</sup> This paradigm is already present in Boccaccio’s tale, which stages a sort of *psychomachia*, a moral battle between Gualtieri’s “matta bestialità,” as “vizio dell’anima,” and Griselda’s virtue.<sup>15</sup> At the end of the story, Gualtieri says that his wife’s trials were part of a plan, which he knew from the very beginning, casting himself in the part of God. By defining Gualtieri’s behavior in terms of “matta bestialità,” Boccaccio-Dioneo echoes the classification of

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Haines 1985, 234: “Dioneo describes the marquis’s behavior with a phrase applied to one of the three great modes of sin; indeed, one of the two modes more vicious, more heinous than incontinence. With fraudulence, *matta bestialitate*, is sin at its worst.” See also Battaglia Ricci 2013 for a discussion on the ethical and moral frame of the *novella* as it emerges from Dioneo’s words.

<sup>13</sup> “But o word, lordynges, herkneth er I go: / It were ful hard to fynde now-a-dayes / In al a toun Grisildis thre or two; / For if that they were put to swiche assayes, / The gold of hem hath now so badde alayes / With bras, that thogh the coyne be fair at ye, / It wolde rather breste a-two than plye” (Chaucer 1987, 152).

<sup>14</sup> For the presence of the Book of Job in Boccaccio’s tale, see Mazzotta 1986, 122–25 and Bessi 2004, 279–92. For the parallel with Job’s story in Petrarch’s *Griselda*, cf. Berté and Rizzo: “La sua [di Petrarca] versione della novella è un’allegoria della totale, umile e lieta sottomissione che il credente deve tributare con costanza alla volontà divina, come appunto negli esempi biblici di Giobbe e di Abramo, pronto quest’ultimo, come *Griselda*, a sacrificare il suo stesso figlio. [...] Appare quindi voluta una conclusione altrettanto religiosa dell’ultima raccolta epistolare; e va considerato che Petrarca stesso, come Giobbe, si sentiva nei suoi ultimi anni messo alla prova da Dio con le malattie che lo assediavano e che egli dichiara di accettare umilmente e lietamente” (2014, 87–88).

<sup>15</sup> Mazzotta 1986, 122–25.

human sins laid out by Dante's Virgil: "Non ti rimembra di quelle parole / con le quai la tua Etica pertratta / le tre disposizion che 'l ciel non vole, / incontenza, malizia e la matta / bestialitate?" (*Inferno* 11.79–83). Because of his irrational brutishness, Gualtieri cannot be a true image of God.<sup>16</sup> Even Griselda's behavior is open to critical interrogation and disapprobation: as an unnatural mother, she consents to the murder of her children in order to obey Gualtieri.<sup>17</sup> Unlike Petrarch, who exploits the story for the purpose of ethical edification, Boccaccio delineates the allegory and at the same time undercuts it.

The *psychomachia* ends with Griselda's victory. In the moral that Dioneo draws from the story, Griselda's patience is praised and Gualtieri's fitness to rule is questioned. Nevertheless, with his final comment, Dioneo introduces a breach in the moral value of the last *novella*:

Al quale [Gualtieri] non sarebbe forse stato male investito d'essersi abbattuto a una che quando, fuori di casa, l'avesse fuori in camiscia cacciata, s'avesse sì a un altro fatto scuotere il pilliccione che riuscito ne fosse una bella roba. (69)<sup>18</sup>

By alluding to a different ending, Dioneo casts doubt on the story just told and its exemplary value. As an alternative solution, he selects an erotic tale, a revenge sought by Griselda through pleasure, denouncing the extremes of irrational behavior and showing how the highest values of the Tenth Day are impracticable. The fact that Dioneo disagrees with his own story is an immediate indication of the variety of possible readings. Boccaccio leaves the moral lesson to his readers, but, as his *brigata's* divergent responses seem to indicate, there is no single perspective, or interpretation. Boccaccio

<sup>16</sup> Dioneo's negative judgment of Gualtieri also surfaces at the end of the *novella*: "più degno di guardar porci che d'aver sopra uomini signoria" (68). From Boccaccio-Dioneo's perspective, Gualtieri proves himself to be not so much a king as a tyrant. Gualtieri was a name well known to Boccaccio and his fellow Florentines. The "Duke of Athens," Walter (Gualtieri) of Brienne, served as podestà of Florence in 1343, but his government was a failure as a result of his tyrannical approach to ruling. Both David Wallace and Robert Hollander claim that Boccaccio's choice of this name for the hero of the last *novella* was not coincidental. Boccaccio's Gualtieri recalls not only the name but also the tyrannical behavior of Walter of Brienne (Wallace 1991, 105; Hollander 1997, 149–50). For a political reading of the *novella*, see Barsella 2013 and more recently Ruggiero 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Haines: "Griselda, however saintly in her patience, seriously misbehaved as a human" (1985, 237); Hollander: "Given what we have seen of the extremes to which Griselda will go in order to keep her contractual obligation, what we are shown in Day Ten are the extremes to which humans will go in order to maintain the law — in Griselda's case, it is the maintenance of the conjugal contract" (1997, 148).

<sup>18</sup> On this erotic metaphor and its echoing of the "coda ritta della fantasima" (*Dec.* 10.10.1), see Ferroni 2018, 361–62.

thus introduces a dissonant element within the last Day's outline of perfection and greatness. Dioneo's words and the open-endedness of Griselda's tale call into question both the cathartic vision of a happy conclusion and the presence of a thematic *climax* identified by Petrarch in the last story:

Quod cum brevi postmodum fecissem gratamque audientibus cognovissem, subito talis inter loquendum cogitatio supervenit, fieri posse ut nostri etiam sermonis ignaros tam dulcis historia delectaret, cum et michi semper ante multos annos audita placuisset et tibi usque adeo placuisse perenderem, ut vulgari eam stilo tuo censueris non indignam et *fine operis, ubi rhetorum disciplina validiora quolibet collocari iubet* (*Sen.* 17.3).<sup>19</sup>

Boccaccio's treatment of the tale, in which the narrator himself doubts the validity of the moral lesson and the storytelling genre, is very different from Petrarch's, which is a pretext for a didactic lesson. Petrarch's teaching assumes the *status* of an absolute truth imposed on the reader from above, an *exemplum* whose authenticity is beyond question.<sup>20</sup>

The Latin translation of the Griselda tale, the only Petrarchan short story,<sup>21</sup> is part of a corpus comprising four letters. The first (*Sen.* 17.1) is a short missive explaining the order of the following letters and the occasion of their composition. The second (*De non interrumpendo per etatem studio*) is a vibrant affirmation of the need to continue pursuing literary studies despite advanced age and poor health. The third epistle contains the trans-

<sup>19</sup> All the quotations are from Petrarca 2010 (emphasis mine). On the rhetorical precept that required saving the most relevant matter for the end in a way that informs even the composition of the last book of the *Seniles*, cf. Berté and Rizzo: "Ora, pur se Petrarca non lo dice esplicitamente, il precetto dei retori qui richiamato non riguarda solo l'opera dell'amico, ma anche, come nel proemio alle *Familiari* (dove pure c'è un rimando al medesimo precetto), la sua stessa, nella quale non a caso la Griselda è collocata alla fine" (2014, 86). On Petrarch's editorial procedures as a way of conveying a system of meaning and knowledge, see Storey 2018.

<sup>20</sup> We find a first reception of Petrarch's Griselda in England in the translation made by Chaucer for his *Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer explicitly mentions Petrarch, not Boccaccio, in the Clerk's tale, suggesting that he considers the Latin story of Griselda a wholly Petrarchan work: "I wol yow telle a tale which that I / Lerne at Padowe of a worthy clerk, / As preved by his words and his werk. / [...] / Fraunceys Petrak, the lauriat poete, / Highte this clerk, whos rethorike sweete / Enlumyned al Ytaille of poetrie." Later on, Chaucer underlines Petrarch's stylistic choice: "I seye that first with heigh stile he enditeth, / Er he the body of his tale writeth, / A prohemye, in the which discryveth he / pemond and of Saluces the contree" (Chaucer 1987, 137).

<sup>21</sup> Clarke 2014, 61.

lation of Boccaccio's *novella*. The last, written just a month before Petrarch's death, returns to the issue of the rhetorical codification of the new *novella* genre.<sup>22</sup>

*Seniles* 17.3 and 17.4 set the *novella* in a frame that departs from that of the *Decameron*, as it is intended to make an ethical and didactic comment as well as a methodological statement. Through his Latin version of *Griselda*, Petrarch proposes his personal idea of the new genre of the *novella*, which takes starts with the *Decameron* and moves into a consideration *Genealogie* 14's definition of *fabula*. *Seniles* 17.3 is a clear example of literary criticism. The opening remark,

Librum tuum, quem nostro materno eloquio, ut opinor, olim iuvenis edidisti, nescio quidem unde vel qualiter ad me delatum vidi; nam si dicam "legi," mentiar, siquidem ipse magnus valde, ut ad vulgus et soluta scriptus oratione, et occupatio mea maior et tempus angustum erat,

is immediately contradicted by the remainder of the letter that reveals a careful reading of the *Decameron* by Petrarch who prefers "inter multa sane iocosa et levia, quedam pia et gravia."<sup>23</sup> The choice of the *pia et gravia* and the use of Latin reveal Petrarch's rejection of the *Decameron*'s polystylism and realism, but Petrarch excuses Boccaccio because of his age and his stylistic conformity to readers and subjects, as was required by the poetics of the time<sup>24</sup>:

<sup>22</sup> On the dating of this *corpus* of letters, see Wilkins 1959, 242–49, 265–66, 314, Wilkins 1960, 110. Gabriella Albanese has dated the epistolary exchange between April 1373 and June 1374 (Albanese 1994). See also Clarke 2014 for a discussion on the textual frame of Petrarch's *Griselda* (with a rich, preceding bibliography) and Berté and Rizzo 2014 for a rigorous philological analysis of this epistolary *corpus*.

<sup>23</sup> I tend to agree with Renzo Bragantini's statement: "I must confess a doubt on my part: can we truly believe that Petrarch read Boccaccio's masterpiece so late? I think we cannot. I have to add that I find rather exaggerated the emphasis often placed on the initial tone of hurried impatience exhibited by Petrarch in the first of the two letters" (Bragantini 2018, 331). On the presence of the *Decameron* in Petrarch's *scriptorium*, see Berté and Rizzo 2014, 83–90.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Geoffrey de Vinsauf: "si materia ergo jocosam habemus prae manibus, per totum corpus materiae verbis utamur levibus et communibus et ad ipsas res et personas pertinentibus de quibus loquimur" (*Documentum de modo et arte dictandi et versificandi* 2.3.163, cited in Faral 1962, 317). Boccaccio echoes the reference to his age in the introduction to the Fourth Day: "Altri, più maturamente mostrando di voler dire, hanno detto che alla mia età non sta bene l'andare omai dietro a queste cose, cioè a ragionar di donne o a compiacer loro. [...] E quegli che contro alla mia età parlando vanno, mostra mal che conoscano che, perché il porro abbia il capo bianco, che la coda sia verde: a' quali, lasciando il motteggiar da l'un de' lati, rispondo che io mai a me vergogna non reputerò

Delectatus sum in ipso transit; et siquid lascivie liberioris occurreret, excusabat etas tunc tua, dum id scriberes, *stilus*, *ydioma*, ipsa quoque rerum *levitas* et eorum qui *lecturi* talia videbantur; refert enim largiter quibus scribas, morumque varietate stili varietas excusatur. Inter multa sane *iocosa* et *levia*, quedam *pia* et *gravia* deprehendi. (*Sen.* 17.3; emphasis mine)

In Petrarch's poetics, the rejection of the humble style authorized by Boccaccio himself in the introduction to the Fourth Day is thus evident in relation to both the readers and the subjects: "le quali non solamente in fiorentin volgare e in prosa scritte per me sono e senza titolo, ma ancora in istilo umilissimo e rimesso quanto il più si possono."<sup>25</sup> Petrarch correlates the variety of style with that of morals ("morumque varietate stili varietas excusatur") and, by describing his Latin style as *ornatus*, he consequently selects a single, 'vertical interpretation.'<sup>26</sup> By contrast, Boccaccio defends the *Decameron's* multiplicity of styles as a path towards richness, a freedom of expression and interpretation: "Convieni nella moltitudine delle cose diverse qualità di cose trovarsi. Niun campo fu mai sì ben coltivato, che in esso o ortica o triboli o alcun pruno non si trovasse mescolato tra l'erbe migliori" (*Conclusionione* 18).<sup>27</sup>

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infino nello stremo della mia vita di dover compiacere a quelle cose alle quali Guido Cavalcanti e Dante Alighieri già vecchi e messer Cino da Pistoia vecchissimo onor si tennero, e fu lor caro il piacer loro" (33).

<sup>25</sup> In the *Esposizioni*, Boccaccio distinguishes between a lower level of the vernacular, spoken by "femminette," and the stylistic heights reached in the vernacular by Dante, who has nothing to envy in the Latin writers: "lo stile comico è umile e rimesso acciò che alla materia sia conforme; quello che della presente opera dire non si può, per ciò che, quantunque in volgare scritto sia, nel quale pare che comunichino le femminette, egli è nondimeno ornato e leggiadro e sublime, delle quali cose nulla sente il volgare delle femine" (*Accessus* 19).

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Rossiter: "Petrarch's translation may be seen as providing an allegorical concretization [...] of Boccaccio's Italian. That is, Boccaccio's deliberately sparse tale and its narrative framework provide the translation with semantic *potentia*; the opportunity for Petrarch to give his translation and, retroactively, Boccaccio's original a definite moral meaning, although, as the epistolary framework of the tale and a great deal of recent criticism show, Petrarch's apparently univocal interpretation conceals a similar plurality to that of his source text — to the extent that the Latin translation may be seen to represent the hermeneutic process itself and to operate as an allegory of its own translative existence" (2010, 135).

<sup>27</sup> Boccaccio also defends the style of *Decameron* in the introduction to the Fourth Day: "forse a queste cose scrivere, quantunque sieno umilissime, si sono elle [le Muse] venute parecchie volte a starsi meco, in servizio forse e in onore della simiglianza che le donne hanno a esse; per che, queste cose tessendo, né dal monte Parnaso né dalle Muse non mi allontano quanto molti per avventura s'avisano" (36). This is a courageous and strong defense of the poetic value of his work.

For Petrarch, therefore, only tragic *argumenta* allow a heightening of style and a consequential moral purpose suited to the new humanistic Latin literature. His choice of a high stylistic register and of a figural reading that privileges the *decorum* of the story justifies different narrative solutions that mitigate, for example, the “mattà bestialità” of Gualtieri, or ignore the scene of the dispossession of Griselda, thereby representing Gualtieri’s and Griselda’s behavior as exemplary and in conformance with the literature on virtues.<sup>28</sup>

Later in the epistle, Petrarch introduces himself as an interpreter-translator, claiming to have followed Horace’s advice not to translate word-for-word:

*historiam ipsam tuam scribere sum aggressus, te haud dubie gavisurum sperans, ultro rerum interpretem me tuarum fore. Quod non facile alteri cuicumque praesertim: egit me tui amor et historie. Ita tamen, ne horatianum illud Poetice Artis obliviscere: “Nec verbum verbo curabis reddere fidus interpres,” historiam tuam meis verbis explicui, imo alicubi aut pacis in ipsa narratione mutatis verbis aut additis, quod te non ferente modo sed favente fieri credidi. Quae licet a multis et laudata et expetita fuerit, ergo rem tuam tibi, non alteri, dedicandam censui. Quam quidem, an mutata veste deformaverim an fortassis ornaverim, tu iudica: illic enim orat, illuc redit; notus iudex, nota domus, notum iter, ut unum et tu noris et quisquis hec leget, tibi, non michi tuarum rationem rerum esse reddendam. Quisquis ex me queret an hec vera sint, hoc est an historiam scripserim an fabulam, respondebo illud Crispi: “Fides penes auctorem, meum scilicet Ioannem, sit.” (Sen. 17.3; emphasis mine)*

This important passage shows the real implication of Petrarch’s method. It is primarily a reflection on the idea of the author and on his responsibility toward the text. By playing on the traditional dichotomy between *res* and *verba*, the chiasmic structure of the phrase “historiam tuam meis verbis” very clearly ‘translates’ the relationship between Petrarch’s Griselda and Boccaccio’s. Petrarch proposes himself as *interpres*, in the etymological sense of the word, that is, as a commentator and an intermediary between Boccaccio’s tale and a new and different audience to whom the story can now be addressed thanks to its Latin translation. Moreover, Petrarch positions himself as an interpreter of a story for which Boccaccio, Petrarch insists, has

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<sup>28</sup> Goodwin 2004. See also Albanese 2004, who examines the historical and geographical background of the *exordium* of Petrarch’s tale, which is very different from the quite vague spatial and temporal frame of Boccaccio’s *novella*.

full responsibility (“*Librum tuum*”).<sup>29</sup> Indeed, Petrarch attributes to Boccaccio the very authorial responsibility that Boccaccio himself deliberately rejects in the *Decameron*’s conclusion, where he leaves his work open-ended and affirms that his *novelle*

chenti che elle si sieno, e nuocere e giovar possono, sì come possono tutte l’altre cose, avendo riguardo all’ascoltatore. [...] Ciascuna cosa in se medesima è buona a alcuna cosa, e male adoperata può essere nociva di molte; e così dico delle mie novelle. Chi vorrà da quelle malvagio consiglio e malvagia operazion trarre, elle nol vieteranno a alcuno, se forse in sé l’hanno, e torte e tirate fieno a averlo: e chi utilità e frutto ne vorrà, elle nol negheranno, né sarà mai che altro che utile e oneste sien dette o tenute, se a que’ tempi o a quelle persone si leggeranno per cui e pe’ quali state son raccontate. (8.13–14)

If the Latin is meant to ensure the stability and truthfulness of the story, the vernacular is instead the language of variety and instability: “Confesso nondimeno le cose di questo mondo non avere stabilità alcuna ma sempre essere in mutamento, e così potrebbe della mia lingua essere intervenuto” (27). Insisting on the instability of language and its openness to misinterpretation, along with the subjectivity of literary discourse, Boccaccio declines to give his writing any sort of unequivocal authority.<sup>30</sup> By entrusting the story of Griselda to Latin, though, Petrarch reaffirms the traditional concept of authorship. Boccaccio instead leaves the storytellers to debate the story of Griselda at length without resolving the argument and withdraws, as author, from his story. In a sense, by recognizing the reader’s active role in interpreting and constructing the text, Boccaccio is much more ‘modern’ than Petrarch, for whom the reader is essentially a passive recipient of a lesson to learn. True completeness can be conferred on the text only by the active role of the readers, by their participation in, and interpretation of, the story. Thus, the idea of readership replaces, in a sense, that of authorship.

The previous quotation from *Seniles* 17.3 anticipates the subject of *Seniles* 17.4, namely the debate on the value of the story as *fabula* or *historia*. I shall return later to this subject. I would simply like to emphasize here that Petrarch again entrusts the responsibility for a correct textual interpretation to Boccaccio’s *fides* as author yet also insists on translation as a changing of words. The metaphor of “*veste*” (“*mutata veste deformaverim*”) recalls the episode of Griselda’s undressing, which can be interpreted as a metaliterary

<sup>29</sup> Petrarch insists on Boccaccio’s authority as well: “*res tue et a te scripte erant, quamvis, hoc previdens, fidem rerum penes auctorem, hoc est penes te, fore sim prefatus*” (*Seniles* 17.4)

<sup>30</sup> On the stability of narrative discourse and of reading’s conventions in the *Decameron*, see, for example, Marcus 1979, 93–109.

discourse on both language — from a lower to a higher level of style (*humilis stilus* to *sublimis stilus*)<sup>31</sup> — and translation — from one language to another. This metaliterary value is even more evident in Petrarch’s *Griselda*: “nequid reliquiarum fortune *veteris novam* inferret in domum, nudari eam iussit et *a calce ad verticem novis vestibibus* indui” (*Sen.* 17.3; emphasis mine). Here, the stress is on the opposition between old and new, while the phrase “*a calce ad verticem*” alludes to the structure of a tale, from the beginning to the end. Petrarch also uses the verb *transformare*, which is an evident allusion to the act of translation: “Sic horridulam virginem, indutam, laceramque comam recollectam manibus comptamque pro tempore, insignitam gemmis et corona velut subito *transformatam*, vix populus recognovit” (*Sen.* 17.3; emphasis mine).<sup>32</sup> But *mutatis verbis mutata res*. Petrarch’s translation is not only a linguistic and rhetorical exercise; it is also a work of interpretation, a change of *res*, of meaning. Petrarch flattens the different levels of interpretation of Boccaccio’s tale, privileging only a spiritual allegory and, by de-historicizing the *novella*, he also undermines the political and urban concreteness of Boccaccio’s *Griselda*.<sup>33</sup>

As a stylistic and technical discussion on the validity and exemplarity of Boccaccio’s vernacular writing, Petrarch’s translation is a humanistic rhetorical operation that aims to raise the *novella*’s genre to the rank of a work of literature for a learned — and male — audience. The switch from the vernacular *levia et iocosa* to the Latin *seria et pia* is realized not only through the choice of a different linguistic register, but also through an allegorical reading of *Griselda*’s story. Petrarch makes his tale the vehicle of a double didacticism, one secular and the other religious. The secular lesson is articulated in the subtitle of the translation; the religious one, that the soul is tested by God, surfaces through *Griselda*’s ordeals and Gualtieri’s cruelty. The positive value of the tale, therefore, is realized in its being a *speculum* for a good wife on the one hand and an allegory of the soul on the other,

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<sup>31</sup> For Boccaccio, this does not necessarily mean a passage from the vernacular to Latin, but rather the transition from a lower to a sublime stylistic quality of the vernacular, of which the last day offers a clear example.

<sup>32</sup> For a reading of Petrarch’s *Griselda* as an “allegory of translation,” see Rossiter 2010, 158–60 (emphasis in the text).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Rossiter: “Petrarch’s translation is not only dependent upon an allegorical hermeneutics but also directed towards the spiritual and moral lesson which the literary technique aims to instill within its readership. [...] Petrarch has clearly chosen to translate Boccaccio’s tale as an allegory which is consonant with his conception of Latin’s superiority over the vernacular” (2010, 136; cf. 146).

inasmuch as God-Gualtieri puts Griselda to the tests of *constantia*, *obedientia*, *patientia* and *fides*.<sup>34</sup> The final *moralizatio*, which echoes the definition of *fabula* proposed by Boccaccio in the *Genealogie* (Christ's parables are exemplary *fabulae*), frames the story of Griselda as a moral treatise, one that respects a traditional pattern (*de obedientia et de fide uxoria*) and whose Latin garb protects it from readerly criticism while simultaneously granting it a measure of textual independence and autonomy<sup>35</sup>:

Hanc historiam stilo nunc alio retexere visum fuit, non tam ideo ut *matronas*<sup>36</sup> nostri temporis ad imitandam huius uxoris patientiam, que michi vix imitabilis videtur, quam ut *legentes* ad imitandam saltem *femine constantiam* excitarem, ut quod hec viro suo prestitit, hoc prestare Deo nostro audeant, qui, licet — ut Iacobus ait apostolus — “intentator sit malorum et Ipse neminem tentet,” probat tamen et sepe nos multis ac gravibus flagellis exerceri sinit, non ut animum nostrum sciat, quem scivit antequam crearemur, sed ut nobis nostra fragilitas notis ac domesticis indiciis innotescat. Abunde ego constantibus *viris* ascripserim, quisquis is fuerit, qui pro Deo suo sine murmure patiat quod pro suo mortali coniuge rusticana hec muliercula passa est. (*Sen.* 17.3; emphasis mine)

Doubting that women really can follow Griselda's example of marital obedience, Petrarch encourages reading the story through the lens of allegorical exegesis. Petrarch presents his translation-interpretation as an *exemplum* of Christian *probatio fidei* and, by casting the tale as a Boccaccian *parabola*, he overturns Dioneo's provocative conclusion, reasserting instead the positive value of the *exemplum* that Boccaccio rejects in the *Decameron's* proem. The adoption of Latin means, moreover, the choice of a very specific audience. The ideal readers of this exemplary story are not housewives (*matronae*), but men who must show the same firmness (*fortitudo animis*) shown by Griselda (*anima*) in her service to God (Gualtieri). By lowering Griselda to a simple *femina*, Petrarch denies her any value outside the bounds of the *novella*, but when she is made into an example for a select male audience, she becomes a *senhal* for something else, a tool of moral teaching.

By reducing Boccaccio's open-ended narrative to a closed moral allegory, Petrarch underscores the political implications of authorship as a way

<sup>34</sup> On the presence of Christian elements in Petrarch's translation and on Griselda as *figura patientiae*, see Rossiter 2010, 152–57.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Mazzotta: “Petrarch's allegory is a veritable ‘translation’ because it deliberately transforms into a pietistic tract and considerably simplifies the ironic complexities of Boccaccio's story” (1986, 123).

<sup>36</sup> Petrarch's reference to the “*matronae nostri temporis*” seems to distinguish them starkly from Boccaccio's female readers, the “*vaghe donne*” of the *Introduzione*.

to lead, to determine and, ultimately, to control the response of a small, select audience of Latin readers. Petrarch ‘tyrannically’ takes over Boccaccio’s *novella* in an attempt, as it were, to reduce the danger of a subversive liberty of interpretation. From this point of view, the translation is a usurpation of literary authority; it is a process of de-authorizing and re-authorizing a text. Like Gualtieri, who puts garments and ornaments on Griselda in order to make his wife suitable for her new role and accepted by his subjects, Petrarch embellishes Boccaccio’s prose through a stylistic and linguistic *ornatus* (“an mutata veste deformaverim an fortassis *ornaverim* tu iudica”) in order to control the response of a privileged audience of learned male *legentes*.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, as we shall see, Latin cannot control the interpretative problems raised by the *novella*. Eventually, in fact, the *novella* resists the usurping and manipulative power of translation and reaffirms its autonomy thanks to its readers’ different interpretations.

The discussion of style in *Seniles* 17.3 gives way to the debate in 17.4 between the tearful Paduan and the unmoved Veronese regarding the figural value of the *novella* and the relationship between *fabula ficta* and *historia vera* that Petrarch gleans from the definition of *fabula* that Boccaccio gives in the *Genealogie*. In this letter, Petrarch refers to a rich category of historical *exempla* drawn mainly from Valerius Maximus’ *Dicta and facta memorabilia* in order to enhance the verisimilitude of Griselda’s story.<sup>38</sup> The endorsement of history is intended to resolve the debate between *fabula* and *historia* as well as to disparage the common opinion that *difficilia* are *impossibilia*<sup>39</sup>:

Quis est enim, exempli gratia, qui non Curium, ex nostris, et Mutium et Decios, ex externis autem, Codrum et Philenos fratres, vel, quoniam de feminis sermo erat, quis vel Portiam vel Hipsicratheam vel Alcestim et harum similes non fabulas fictas putet? Atqui historie vere sunt. (*Sen.* 17.4)

By defining the Griselda tale as a *historia* rather than a *fabula*, Petrarch insists on the exemplarity of the tale but also on its authenticity, just as the stories of Portia, Hysicratea and Alcestis are considered historical narratives that really took place.

<sup>37</sup> On Petrarch’s re-clothing and adorning of Boccaccio’s *novella*, see Tylus 2013, 425–28.

<sup>38</sup> According to Lynn Shutters, Griselda’s extreme willingness to fulfil Gualtieri’s will fits uncomfortably into late medieval ethics and religious morality; if so, the influence from pagan models may be a way of accounting for the tale’s problematic elements. Although Shutters mainly dwells on the rewriting of the story by Chaucer, she does not fail to notice that classic patterns of extreme feminine virtue were well known to Petrarch who likened Griselda to Portia, Hysicratea and Alcestis. See Shutters 2009, 64–67.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Petrarch: “esse nonnullos qui, quecunque difficilia eis sint, impossibilia omnibus arbitrentur” (*Seniles* 17.4).

The two rhetorical categories of *historia* and *argumentum* that Petrarch adopts to define his tale are meant to ensure the truth of the story just as much as its ethical and didactic value. Petrarch never questions Gualtieri's or Griselda's behavior. No word of censure or reprimand touches the two characters, and Gualtieri is always noble and wise ("nec minus moribus quam sanguine nobilis"). Even his decision to try the patience of Griselda is something worthy of praise or wonder ("mirabilis quedam — quam laudabilis doctiores iudicent — cupiditas sat").

In the *Decameron's Conclusion*, the female members of the *brigata* debate Griselda's story, some criticizing one aspect and some praising another. They do not resolve the argument since Panfilo interrupts the conversation to recall the *brigata* to Florence. Declining to ascribe unequivocal authority to his writing, Boccaccio leaves the story open to multiple interpretations, as his storytellers' divided responses seem to indicate. The dispute between the two readers from Verona and Padua somehow repeats the debate of the *Decameron's* storytellers but, at the same time, reduces the debate among Boccaccio's women ("e assai le donne [...] n'avevan favellato") to a dialogue among men.<sup>40</sup> The responses of the two readers reveal different approaches to the text. The *amicus patavinus*, thinking it is a true story, is moved by Griselda's tale; in contrast, the *amicus veronensis* questions the veracity of the story:

"Ego etiam," inquit, "flessem; nam et pie res et verba rebus accomodata fletum suadebant. Nec ego duri cordis sum, nisi quod ficta omnia credidi et credo: nam si vera essent, que usquam mulier vel romana vel cuiuslibet gentis hanc Griseldim equatura sit? Ubi, queso, tantus amor coniugalis, ubi par fides, ubi tam insignis patientia atque constantia?" (*Sen.* 17.4)

Unlike Boccaccio, who suggests that his text resists a univocal exemplary system of interpretation, Petrarch entrusts the incontrovertible truth of an ideal story to the reliability and safety of a highly codified linguistic and stylistic register. He tries to resolve the debate initiated by Boccaccio's *brigata* through an appeal to the psychological reactions traditionally associated with the *exemplum*. Nevertheless, the contrasting reactions show the failure of Petrarch's project. Petrarch pursues a singular moral reading of Griselda's story that is at odds with the subjective responsibilities of the readers. Petrarch addresses his tale to that same (male, scholarly and humanistic) audience whose members should correctly interpret the text yet who do not eventually grasp the *novella's* allegory, which for Petrarch is the

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<sup>40</sup> On the identity of these readers, see Cook 1918, Martellotti 1951, Branca 1950, 58, and Branca 1996, 390.

only true interpretation. The two readers' contradictory feelings show a different reaction to the story of Griselda; they do not even seem to have understood the spiritual meaning sought by Petrarch, who eventually avoids resolving the dispute between the two readers.<sup>41</sup> The final reference to the rhetorical category of *historia* as proof of the veracity of Griselda's tale appears rather as part of the rhetoric of the discourse, and if it confirms that the story of patient Griselda is authentic despite its rarity, it tells us nothing about the legitimacy of its exemplary value. In the end, the moral conclusion of Petrarch does not resolve the interpretative problems of the tale; as in Boccaccio, its meaning remains open to the reader's interpretation, over which the author seems to have no control. The two readers question the authority of Petrarch's translation and, therefore, his political attempt to control the audience. Indeed, their reactions testify to the limitations of Petrarch's cultural and political project. To state that Petrarch recognizes the failure of his translation project and therefore the validity of Boccaccio's solution is, perhaps, out of place, and essentially alien to his personality. Yet, Petrarch does recognize the failure of his authorship. The final tone of the letter is resigned and pessimistic, almost foretelling his imminent death: "Valete amici, valete epystole inter colles euganeos, VI Idus Iunias 1374." Ultimately, the term *valete* represents a sort of *congedo*, a leave-taking from the very idea of authorship.<sup>42</sup>

The conclusion of the Clerk's tale in the *Canterbury Tales* is closer to Boccaccio's conclusion than to Petrarch's. After having noted that virtuous women like Griselda no longer exist, the storyteller decides to mitigate the extreme severity of the *novella* with a song:

For which heere, for the Wyves love of Bathe —  
Whos lyf and al hire secte God mayntene

<sup>41</sup> According to Amy Goodwin, the two readers' reactions correspond to Dioneo's final comments: the Paduan's tears correspond to Gualtieri's "matta bestialità," whereas the emotionlessness of the Veronese corresponds to Gualtieri's cynical view about his wife's patience and steadfastness (Goodwin 2004, 63–65).

<sup>42</sup> David Wallace argues that the Petrarchan Griselda can be read "as a farewell to imaginative writing, and as a door closing on the most intense and sustained relationship of Petrarch's life," namely his friendship with Boccaccio (Wallace 2009, 323). Cf. also Berté and Rizzo 2014: "la raccolta delle *Senili* così come ci è giunta trova il perfetto coronamento e la sua conclusione nelle calcolate e compiute armonie che compongono il libro XVII. La riprova indiretta dell'intenzionalità di questa conclusione è nel fatto che Petrarca inserì le lettere che ancora gli accadde di scrivere dopo le XVII 2–3 e prima della XVII 4 nei libri precedenti [...]. Il libro XVII è strutturato come degna e meditata conclusione dell'ultimo epistolario" (89 and 107). On this feeling of farewell and ending as conveyed by the *congedo*, see Tylus 2013, 421–25; on the correspondence between the ending of life and the ending of writing in Petrarch and Boccaccio, see Ferroni 2018.

In heigh maistrie, and elles were it scathe —  
 I wol with lusty herte, fresh and grene,  
 Seyn yow a song to glade yow, I wene;  
 And lat us stynte of earnestful matere.  
 Herkneth my song that seith in this manere.

Chaucer's recommendations seem in stark contrast to the moral end of Petrarch's text: in fact, he urges married women to avoid Griselda's behavior by being domineering and manipulative toward their husbands. Therefore, even in Chaucer the question of an unambiguous interpretation of the *novella* and of Griselda's extreme devotion to her husband remains unresolved and questionable.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, by re-translating Griselda's story from Latin to Middle English and re-adapting it to his audience's demands, Chaucer shows the instability, variety and ductility of literature, as well as Boccaccio-Dioneo's open-ended conclusion and Petrarch's failed attempt to make literature into something fixed or easily controlled and manipulated.

To conclude, the two versions of Griselda's story represent a clash between Petrarch and Boccaccio over vernacular and Latin literature, over their opposing goals (pleasure and didactic purpose),<sup>44</sup> over the narrative strategies adopted in both tales,<sup>45</sup> over the readers (unhappy-in-love female readers, and learned male readers) and over the role of the intellectual and

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<sup>43</sup> "Grisilde is deed, and eek hire pacience, / And bothe atones buryed in Ytaille; / For which I crie in open audience / No wedded man so hardy be t'assaille / His wyves pacience in trust to fynde / Grisildis, for in certein he shal faille. / O noble wyves, ful of heigh prudence, / Lat noon humylitee youre tonge naille, / Ne lat no clerk have cause or diligence / To write of yow a storie of swich mervaille / As of Grisildis pacient and kynde, / Lest Chichevache yow swelwe in hire entraille! / [...] / Ye archewyves, stondest at defense, / Syn ye be strong as is a greet camaille; / Ne suffreth nat that men yow doon offense. / And sklendre wyves, fieble as in bataille, / Beth egre as is a tygre yond in Ynde; / Ay clappeth as a mille, I yow consaille. / Ne dreed hem nat; doth hem no reverence, / For though thyn housbonde armed be in maille, / The arwes of thy crabbed eloquence / Shal perce his brest and eek his aventaille. / In jalousie I rede eek thou hym bynde, / And thou shalt make hym couche as doth a quaille" (Chaucer 1987, 152–53). On Chaucer's rewriting of Griselda's tale and its relationship to Boccaccio and Petrarch, see Kirkpatrick 1983, Pastore Passaro 2005, 45–58, and Rossiter 2010, 132–90.

<sup>44</sup> While in Petrarch the didactic value of Griselda's story and, more broadly, of literature is preeminent and exclusive, Boccaccio seems to follow more closely Horace's precept of *miscere utile dulci* (*Ars poetica* 343). The *novelle* of the *Decameron* are designed for the delight and use of a female audience: "delle quali le già dette donne, che queste leggeranno, parimente diletto delle sollazzevoli cose in quelle mostrate e utile consiglio potranno pigliare, in quanto potranno cognoscere quello che sia da fuggire e che sia similmente da seguitare" (*Introduzione*, 14).

<sup>45</sup> Petrarch borrows from Boccaccio, not only the structure of the frame, but also the mechanism of the debate as a means of comparison between opposing views.

his authorship. Through Dioneo's final remark and the *brigata's* open-ended debate, Boccaccio addresses the issue of conflicting interpretations and the crisis of authorship because of the indefinite nature of literal meaning.<sup>46</sup> Petrarch tries to impose a rigid interpretative scheme, but his project eventually fails since he does not consider the individuality of his readers' interpretations. If, from a political perspective, Griselda stands for resistance to tyranny,<sup>47</sup> her story dramatizes, on a metaliterary level, the autonomy of the vernacular and its resistance to the linguistic dominance and manipulation of Latin that, in a Petrarchan world, coincides with the monarchic excesses of a despotic power. In the *Decameron*, Boccaccio clearly links the vernacular to the female audience; in the *Introduzione* to the Fourth Day, he also compares his female readers to the Muses of his vernacular works.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, if the feminine element (Griselda) remains out of reach of the despotic power of Gualtieri, the feminine element (the vernacular) remains out of reach of Latin's despotic power as well. The individuality and subjectivity of reading undermine the political *authority* of Petrarch (the author) and his will to control his audience. At stake are two different ways of conceiving of culture and literary activity that reflect distinct political belief systems. With regard to this comparison, one could say, the tyrannical masculine authority of Latin is at odds with the Florentine vernacular republican *libertas* of Boccaccio, who celebrates the *urbanitas* and the associative polity of his *brigata*. In the new, modern world of Boccaccio, the vernacular has become the language of variety, freedom and, above all, subjectivity and individuality, for both a male and a female audience.

The world of Boccaccio is a world open to many influences, Latin and vernacular alike; it is rich and varied in its instability and defies all rigid and absolute interpretative schemes. By contrast, Petrarch's elitism and exclusivity are reflected in his choice of Latin and in his personal debate with Dante. Each model is equally valid, even though Petrarch's beautiful poetic translation forfeits the complexity of Boccaccio's ironic gaze on human comedy. The debate regarding Dante and vernacular literature leads to a positive outcome for Boccaccio; for Petrarch, instead, it remains unresolved. Indeed, the failure of Griselda's Latin translation shows that Latin is also sus-

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<sup>46</sup> This freedom of interpretation does not mean haphazard license: "The various interpretations, he [Boccaccio] declares, are not in a stark *either-or* relationship — they merely correspond to justifiably different focus or context" (Usher 2013, 252).

<sup>47</sup> Pastore Passaro 2005, 46, 52–58.

<sup>48</sup> "[E] forse a queste cose scrivere, quantunque sieno umilissime, si sono elle [le Muse] venute parecchie volte a starsi meco, in servizio forse e in onore della simiglianza che le donne hanno a esse" (*Dec.* 4.36).

ceptible to the instability generally ascribed to the vernacular. Boccaccio admits to that instability and uses it as a narrative device and as an occasion to reflect upon narrative strategies. Nevertheless, Petrarch's project ultimately triumphed and *Griselda* circulated no longer under the name of its first author but as a Petrarchan work.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> On the fortune of Petrarch's *Griselda*, see Branca 1996, 388–93, McLaughlin 2006, Ros-siter 2010 and Smarr 2018.

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