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VOLUME XII, 1897**

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A. MARSHALL ELIOTT

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LANGUAGE NOTES,
VOLUME XII, 1897**

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MODERN
LANGUAGE NOTES.

A. MARSHALL ELLIOTT,
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MODERN LANGUAGE NOTES.

Baltimore, January, 1897.

ON THE ASSERTED MEETING OF CHAUCER AND PETRARCH.

THE reasonable proof of a meeting between Chaucer and Petrarch, at which Chaucer learnt the *Tale of Griseldis*, later the source of the *Clerk's Tale*, involves three main considerations: first, one of Petrarch chronology; Petrarch must have translated the story before Chaucer left Italy in March, 1373; second, one of Chaucer chronology; Chaucer must have had sufficient time in his first Italian journey to make the visit to Padua; third, to prove that the meeting was not only possible, but matter of fact or of probability, we must weigh all reasonable interpretations of the well-known passage in the *Clerk's Prologue*, and arrive, if possible, at the correct one, considering incidentally the probable date of the *Clerk's Tale*. I purpose, then, to treat the subject as briefly as may be under these three heads.

I. THE DATE OF PETRARCH'S LATIN VERSION OF GRISELDIS.

Petrarch's Latin version of the last *Novella* of the *Decameron* is conveniently re-printed for the Chaucer Society in *Originals and Analogues*, pp. 151-172. This edition was made from the Basle edition of 1581, which, like the Basle edition of 1554, prints the tale as an independent work, thus failing to show its relation to Petrarch's collected correspondence. In the Venice editions of 1501 and 1503 and in all the manuscripts of the *Seniles* known to me, the tale is the third letter of the seventeenth book of Petrarch's *Epistolae Seniles*.¹ A graver

¹ The Basle eds. of 1554 and 1581 have an arrangement of the *Seniles* in sixteen books. The final book contains only two epistles, corresponding to 1 and 2 of the seventeenth book according to the description in the text. The reason for this departure from the usual arrangement has never, so far as I know, been satisfactorily explained. Is it possible that the Basle editor had a codex of the *Seniles* showing a tentative arrangement by Petrarch? The absence of the *Griseldis* letter from the *Seniles* in these eds. may be due only to the fact that it had been printed, perhaps fortuitously, earlier in the volume under the rubric *Mythologia*: (ed. 1554, pp. 600-607; ed. 1581, pp. 540-547).

disadvantage due to following the early printed editions rather than the manuscripts, is that the false date June 10th, 1373,² has been accepted as the real date of the *Griseldis* letter. We shall see later that the right date is 1374.

This letter to Boccaccio is naturally divided into three parts. The first, which I shall call the preface, tells Boccaccio that Petrarch receiving the *Decameron* in time of war read only the beginning and the end of the book. The story of *Griselda* so pleased him that he first committed it to memory and later translated it into Latin. This translation he submits to Boccaccio's judgment. For the truth

These two eds. distinguish the preface from the tale proper by change of type, but fail to mark off in any way the envoy from the tale.

² The mistaken date 1373 in the Venice eds. of 1501 and 1503 and the Basle eds. of 1554 and 1581, appears to rest ultimately upon an editorial emendation of a misdated MS. Imagine the first editor to have had before him a MS. the date of which was clearly wrong. He would have been obliged, in the absence of other MSS., to correct the date from his general knowledge of Petrarch's biography. The date 1373, only a year off, would then be a not discreditable editorial surmise, copied religiously in the later printed editions. A MS. of this class actually exists in the Marcian Library at Venice (cod. xvii, class. xi, paper, early fifteenth cent., complete for the *Seniles*). On fol. 120^{ro} is the close of the epistle with the usual valedictory words, but the date 1370 *ydus ianuaris mccc.lxx.* (final *x* cancelled by a vertical stroke). The scribe saw that 1380 was impossible and attempted to set the matter right by taking off ten years. The process is precisely analogous to that of the early editors, but they hit it more nearly with their 1373.

A curious error of a different sort is noticed here simply to show how lightly the scribes took the matter of the date. In Milan at the Brera Libr., cod. AD. xi, 23, f. 108, is found a copy of the short form of the tale, ending as usual with *Seniles est* and of course without the envoy. Like all the copies of this short form it should appear without a date; but the copyist had apparently read at some time the complete version, and there stuck in his mind a vague memory of certain valedictory words and a date. These he wished for his copy; so he invoked them in the form: *Valete plaudite inter colles ovis, ganeos anno 1340*, a really beautiful instance of the possibilities of the scribal imagination. An undated variation of this corrupt form of subscription is appended to the short version of the tale in MS. Add. 10,094 f. 73^{vo}, British Museum. *Valete plaudite inter montes colles engaycos*. This MS. lacks the preface, beginning with: *Est ad ytalie latius*.

Since I have already made a catch-all of this note, I may as well enumerate the two other MSS. of the British Museum that contain the short form of the tale, without the preface: Royal 12, G. xx, ff. 58^{vo}-65^{vo}; Cott. Vesp. E. xli. (P. 118), ff. 77^{vo}-85^{vo}, with very short introductory and concluding notes by the scribe.

of the story Boccaccio alone is responsible, *Fides penes auctorem, meum scilicet Iohannem, sit.* (*Orig. and Anal.*, pp. 151 and 152.)

After the preface follows the Latin version of *Griseldis*, following in the main Boccaccio's *novella* (*ibid.* pp. 153 to 170: *Est ad Italiae latus. . . latus & sobole*). A brief paragraph (*Hanc historiam . . . passa est ibid.*, p. 170) says that the story is not told in the hope that the matrons of Petrarch's time may emulate *Griseldis*' patience, but that all readers may be encouraged by her example to constancy under trial. This as we shall see ended the letter as it was originally sent to Boccaccio.³

Then follows the third part, or envoy. This is often written and printed as a separate fourth

³ M. Jusserand (*Nineteenth Century*, June, 1896, pp. 1001 and 1002) posits an earlier form of the letter and justly concludes that by dropping the envoy we have essentially the letter sent to Boccaccio in 1373, but he appears to be unaware of the fact that this version actually exists in many copies. I cite only those I examined in the British Museum and the Laurentiana. Probably few great libraries have not several copies.

British Museum.	Hari, 2678, fol. 99 ff.
	Hari, 3081, fol. 223 ff.
	Plut, lxvii, H., fol. 67 ^{vo} ff.
	Royal 8, B, vi., fol. 33 ^{vo} ff.
Laurentiana.	Stroziana xci, fol. 169.
	Pluteus lxxviii, cod. ii, fol. 119.
	Pluteus inf. cod. lxxxx, cod. xvii, fol. 50.
	Pluteus xxvi sin, cod. viii, fol. 210.
	Pluteus inf. cod. lxxxx cod. xiii fol. 89.

This is surely the original form of the letter as it was circulated before the envoy had been written, for it is quite impossible that the scribes who wrote these copies, far more numerous than MSS. of the *Seniles*, should have concurred in truncating the epistle of its brief and interesting envoy. (See note 4 for three late MSS. that contain the tale in its short form without the preface.)

I regret exceedingly that I neglected to collate a good copy of this short version with the same epistle in a copy of the *Seniles*. I am satisfied from a cursory reading of both versions that the work underwent no important revision. In fact the mere addition of the envoy to the letter already written probably made it ready in Petrarch's mind for the final place in the *Seniles*.

M. Jusserand has fallen into an unnecessary error in assuming (p. 1001) that the expression *tempus angustum erat*, etc., was the mark of a revision after the war, when the time was no longer *angustum*. The four MSS. of the British Museum show the *erat* in the early version. Of course the past tense is simply narrative, Petrarch says, "I didn't read your whole book, for the time was troubled through wars on every side." *bellicis undique motibus*. There is in it no necessary implication that the war was over when the words were penned.

epistles of the seventeenth book of the *Seniles*, and, in fact, it was written more than a year after the body of the tale. In it Petrarch returns to the thought of the preface that the story is rather fable than truth, describes the effect of reading the story upon a sentimental friend, a Paduan, and upon a sceptical friend, a Veronese, complains that the *Griseldis* letter and another long one have failed to reach Boccaccio, complains, furthermore, of the vexations interference of the guards of the passes with the postmen, and finally, pleading old age at once as an excuse for intermitting his correspondence, and for his garrulousness in the present letter, he bids farewell to his friends and to the letter, writing: *Valete amici, valete epistole, Inter Colles Euganeos, vj^o, Idus Junias 1374.*⁵ We shall see that this date ap-

⁴ The two Florentine MSS. of the *Seniles* and that of Naples, (*vid.* note 5) also the Venice eds. of 1501 and 1503, print the envoy as a separate fourth epistle of the seventeenth book. The envoy was written, possibly when Petrarch tried a second time to send the letter to Boccaccio, certainly with the object of rounding it out as the *valedictory* epistle of the *Seniles*.

The two Venice eds. add as an eighteenth book the famous "Epistle to Posterity." This is, of course, merely an editorial addition; but it is one already suggested by side-notes in certain MSS.—that of the National Library at Florence and that of the Naples Library (Narducci, Nos. 174 and 266).

⁵ The following MSS. give this correct date of the envoy, 1374 (I have examined personally the codices of Florence, Venice and Milan, others are cited from the two bibliographies of Narducci, *I codici Petrarceschi*, Roma 1374, or the sources indicated).

In complete MSS. of the *Seniles*:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1) Florence, Laurentiana. | Pluteus lxxviii cod. lii, a beautiful MS. of the Fifteenth Cent. From this I have taken the form of the subscription given above in the text. |
| 2) Florence, Bibl. Nazionale. | Abbadia 2560, c. 5, reported in <i>I cod. Petr.</i> under No. 174 as of the Fourteenth Cent. This is true only of the first part, the latter part including our tale is in a rougher hand of the Fifteenth Cent. Subscription as above <i>vj^o idus Junias anno millesimo cccclxxliij.</i> |
| 3) Naples, Bibl. Nazionale. | viii G. 7, <i>I cod. Petr.</i> No. 266, Fourteenth Cent. The date probably by a mere scribal blunder is <i>ij^o (sic) idus Junias m^o cccclxxliij^o.</i> |
| 4) Paris, Bibl. Nationale. | Lat. 8371. Dated 1374. Cited by M. Jusserand in <i>The Nineteenth Century</i> , June 96, p. 1001, Note 3. This MS. is undoubtedly that mentioned by the Abbé de la Sade |

plies only to the envoy written when Petrarch, only six weeks before his death, had decided to make the *Griseldis* letter the last of the *Seniles*.

From an examination of Petrarch manuscripts made some two years ago in Italy, I made the correction of the date 1373, in the early printed editions. While I recognized that the Latin version of *Griseldis* must have been written some time before the date of the envoy which accompanied it in its final form, I saw no reason for supposing that the early form was not written in 1374, till I came upon M. Jusserand's article, "Did Chaucer meet Petrarch in Italy?" in the *Nineteenth Century* for June, 1896. Reluctantly, I confess, I came round to his view of the date of the *Griseldis* letter. The argument which follows is then only a development of that ingeniously set forth by M. Jusserand; much of it was undoubtedly considered by him and rejected as unavailable for a popular article. The gain in rewriting M. Jusserand's article is that I may hope to say convincingly what he will have certainly said more attractively. On the side of the chronology of Petrarch's letters, I am wholly with M. Jusserand, while I shall have occasion to dissent from his conclusion that Chaucer *must* have met Petrarch because he *may* have met him.

To determine the date of composition of the

a century and a half ago (*Memoires sur la Vie de Petrarch*) iii, 796, Amsterdam, 1764. The English compilers, Dobson and Spedding (*Lives of the Italian Poets*), give the date correctly. It is surprising that Chaucer scholars have so long failed to correct the date of the Basle eds. In Hazlitt-War-ton, *Hist. of Eng. Poetry* ii, 349, 1374 stands in the text against 1373, in the footnote with no remark on the discrepancy.

Separate copy of the *Tale of Griseldis*:

5) Rome, Bibl. Vaticana, Vat 1666, Fourteenth Cent. Narducci No. 127, vi^o ydus Junias. Millesimo. ccc^o. lxxiiii^o.

Narducci No. 117 reports a MS. of the *Epistole Seniles* in the Vatican under the press-mark Urbini, 231, of which he gives no account.

All dated MSS., then, show either obvious blunders (*vid.* note), or the date 1374. The external evidence for the date is so strong that I have passed M. Jusserand's confirmatory internal evidence.

Latin *Griseldis*, it is necessary to study the relations of the three letters—or four,⁶ counting the envoy as a separate letter—which compose the seventeenth book of the *Seniles*. I have used in this study my own copy of Petrarch's Latin works, Venice, 1501.

The first brief letter to Boccaccio (I) was written to accompany two long letters. Petrarch writes:

"I had decided not to answer your letters, since they contained sentiments, friendly and profitable indeed, but most distasteful to me, *vehementer a meis sensibus adhorrentes*. In the mean time, I was writing a long letter to you of another matter, which letter I was preparing to re-write from the blotted copy, when a friend relieved me of that labor. Suddenly I thought, 'what will my friend Giovanni say to this? He'll say, this fellow writes superfluous letters and gives no answer where an answer is required.' So impetuously I seized my pen and wrote off another letter nearly as long as the first, in answer to yours. I had the letters addressed waiting for a postman nearly two months. I've sent them open to spare the guards of the passes the trouble of opening them. They'll learn little about war from us. Would that all were as peaceful! Then there would be peace, which now is exiled, *esset enim pax nobiscum que nunc exulat*. Read first the letter in my own hand, then that copied in another hand. When tired out you've come to the end, you will say, 'Is this my feeble old friend? Is'nt it some brisk and hearty youth of the same name?' And indeed I marvel at my own persistency. *Vale!*"

This is in brief paraphrase the whole content of this undated letter.⁷ M. Jusserand⁸ thinks that the allusion in "exiled peace" can be only to the war between Padua and Venice, Nov., 1372 to September, 1373. This date of 1373 is undoubtedly correct. We shall find

⁶ From this point on, where clearness requires it, I have designated the letters by their numbers in the seventeenth book as printed in the Venice ed. of 1501.

(I)—The short letter, printed in full as an appendix to this article. *Sen.* xvii, I.

(II)—The Paduan letter, dated April 26th, *Sen.* xvii, II.

(III)—The preface and the *Tale of Griseldis*. *Sen.* xvii, III.

(IV)—The envoy of the *Tale of Griseldis* dated June 10th, 1374. *Sen.* xvii, III.

⁷ This letter is so important as the starting point of M. Jusserand's argument, and of my own, for the chronology of this group of letters, that I have reprinted it in full as an appendix, knowing that many good Chaucer scholars in this country are hundreds of miles from a copy of *Petrarchae Opera Omnia*.

⁸ *L. c.*, p. 1000.

stronger reasons than these vague allusions to war for dating this entire group of letters in that year.

It is hard to see why this, in itself unimportant, letter should have been included in the *Seniles*, unless it were to introduce the two long letters with which it was originally sent. There is then a strong presumption that the two following letters, (II and III) which with it compose the seventeenth book, are those originally sent with it to Boccaccio.

We may, in fact, confidently recognize the letter written in Petrarch's own handwriting. *Illam . . . manu mea scriptam* in the letter immediately following, (II) the second of the seventeenth book. Near the end Petrarch acknowledges Boccaccio's advice, that he should, for his friend's sake, spare himself his usual arduous labors and studies, to the end that his life might be long extended. Petrarch refuses to take this advice, believing that the only true life lies in action and progress. He would wish to die in his full vigor, but since this is denied, he says in closing:

"Opto ut legentem aut scribentem uel si Christo placuerit orantem uel plorantem mors [me] inueniat. Tu uale mei memor & vive feliciter ac uiriliter perseuera. Patavi. iij. Kat. matas ad uesperam."

This, then, is the letter that Petrarch wrote off impulsively to Boccaccio, and the matters called by Petrarch, with humorous exaggeration, *amicabiles . . . uehementer tamen a meis sensibus abhorrentes* are only Boccaccio's suggestion that his friend should withdraw from active life and excessive study. The allusion to Petrarch's "youthfulness" at the close of the short letter (I) is the humorous statement of the fine thought that a man should die in harness seriously expressed in this Paduan letter. Again M. Jusserand⁸ says that this letter must be dated April 28, 1373, because it is addressed from Padua where Petrarch lived during the Venetian war. We have, then, one of the letters mentioned in the first of the seventeenth book (I). It is there said to be nearly as long as the undescribed letter sent with it. Though the Griseldis letter is actually, without the envoy, a little longer than this Paduan letter (II) we shall not immediately decide with M. Jusserand that it is, therefore,

the second letter mentioned. This much we know, that, the Paduan letter (II) went some two months after it was addressed, with the short letter (I) and a third, which may be the Griseldis letter (III), late in June, probably in 1373.

In the envoy (IV) Petrarch writes:

"I learn that that letter (Tale of Griseldis (III) of which he has been speaking) and a second, two long letters have not reached you, Ceterum & illam & alteram duas magnas epistolas ad te non peruenisse nunc sentio."

The pronoun *illam* carries with it the implication that Petrarch regarded the envoy as a separate epistle. The date 1374 at the close of the envoy is then not applicable to the *Tale of Griseldis*. We know then that the Griseldis letter (III) was sent off with another long letter far enough before June 10th, 1374, for Petrarch to have known that the two had gone astray. Since the envoy tells nothing of the contents of the other long letter we must resist the strong temptation to jump at the conclusion that it was the second of the seventeenth book (II) already described.

Boccaccio himself supplies the missing link of evidence. In a letter to Francesco da Bracciano, Petrarch's son-in-law, dated the 7th of November, 1374, Boccaccio, after eulogy of his dead friend Petrarch, asks for copies of two lost letters which Petrarch had sent him, describing them unmistakably as the second and the third (the Griseldis letter) of the seventeenth book of *Seniles*:

"Præterea summo opere cupio, si commodo tuo fieri potest, copiam epistolæ illius [II] quam ad me satis longam et extremam scripsit, in qua, credo, sententiam suam scribebat circa eo, quæ sibi scripseram, ut iam assiduus laboribus suis amodo parceret. Sic et copiam

⁸ Boccaccio's description of Petrarch's letter (*Seniles* xvii, 2.) as a letter, *quam satis longam et extremam scripsit*, for a long time made me reluctant to accept a date of 1373 for the epistle. Boccaccio's Latin ought to mean that it was Petrarch's last letter, consequently written in 1374. If this could be established, it would carry over the Griseldis letter to 1374, a year after Chaucer had left Italy. The reasons given in the text for placing all the letters in the year 1373, are cogent enough to outweigh this testimony of Boccaccio. It is always possible, I fear, that Boccaccio meant by *Extremam* merely "his last letter to me" knowing that it had been written a year and a half. The form *summius* in the passage quoted in the text is no extreme instance of Boccaccio's latinity.