Refashioning the Marriage Code: The *Patient Grissil* of Dekker, Chettle and Haughton

VIVIANA COMENSOLI

The folktale of Patient Griselda was first recorded in European literature in 1353 in Boccaccio's *Decameron*. Inspired by the moral import of Boccaccio's tale, Petrarch expanded it in Latin in 1374 (*de Insigni Obedientia et Fide Uxoris*), while in the same year Giovanni Sercambi retold Boccaccio's novella in condensed form. A number of medieval French versions are based on Petrarch's rendition, including the first secular dramatization in 1395 in the anonymous *L'Estoire de la Marquise de Saluce mix par personnages et rigmé*. Chaucer's "Clerk's Tale," which is based on Petrarch's and a French redaction, is the first of numerous English versions.¹ The three extant Elizabethan renditions are John Phillip's late morality *The Play of Patient Grissel* (c. 1558-66), Thomas Deloney's ballad "Of Patient Grissel and a Noble Marquess" in *The Garland of Good Will* (c. 1593), and Dekker, Chettle and Haughton's *Pleasant Comedy of Patient Grissil* (c. 1599). In England the legend continued to be recorded in chapbooks and anonymous tales until the middle of the seventeenth century, thus retaining its popularity among a variety of audiences. While the medieval versions have attracted a great deal of scholarly interest, their Elizabethan counterparts have been largely neglected. Harry Keyishian, who has written the only full-length essay on the Elizabethan dramatizations of the Griselda legend, largely ignores Phillip's and Deloney's adaptations and condemns the 1599 play as a tiresome morality that exalts the virtues of the patient and unassuming wife who faithfully and obediently performs her duties under great emotional strain. In accounting for the legend's appeal to the Elizabethan imagination, Keyishian writes: "Audiences of Shakespeare's day could deal with mighty truths, but they evidently also needed the sickly

reassurance of the Griselda story as well."² The ways in which the sixteenth century appropriated the folktale have never been fully addressed.

The major differences between medieval and Renaissance interpretations of the legend revolve around the portrayal of marriage. During the middle ages the story of Griselda's marriage to a marquess, her subsequent trials and banishment, and her eventual reunion with her husband was recorded chiefly for its allegorical appeal. All of the medieval analogues share a similar design in the presentation of Griselda's trials as an *exemplum* of the Christian soul which submits to earthly suffering, eventually uniting with its divine Lord. In none of the medieval redactions are the vicissitudes of the marriage explored. Petrarch, in a letter to Boccaccio in which he praises the tale of Griselda as the finest in *The Decameron*, clarifies the allegorical significance of Griselda's patience. Petrarch reveals that his own objective in rewriting the story is "not to induce the women of our time to imitate the patience of this wife," which he believes to be "beyond imitation"; rather, his aim is to "lead my readers to emulate the example of feminine constancy, and to submit themselves to God with the same courage as did this woman to her husband."³ The hardships endured by Griselda at the hands of her husband are thus providential tests designed to strengthen the soul's endurance. "Anyone," concludes Petrarch, "amply deserves to be reckoned among the heroes of mankind who suffers without a murmur for God, what this poor peasant woman bore for her mortal husband."⁴

In the sixteenth century the source of interest shifts from the allegory of Christian subjection to the human dimension of the marriage. The Renaissance texts retain only marginally the allegorical superstructure of the medieval analogues, focusing on the ideal marriage rather than on the progress of the afflicted soul toward virtue. The chief didactic structure is the desirability of marriage based on mutual consent, a new emphasis complementing humanist ideas and practices which replaced the monastic ideal of chastity with that of conjugal happiness. Whereas in the Italian redactions the vassals, and in the Chaucer the townspeople, advise a reluctant marquess to marry Griselda so that her virtue will be passed on through the generations, in the later versions it is the Marquess who chooses to marry the poor but virtuous maiden, a choice that meets public disapproval. His marriage to Griselda and his subsequent tests of her patience teach society an important lesson: the value of marriage based on choice, together with the wife's duty to assuage marital conflict through patience and humility. The *topos* of romantic wedlock, with its attendant

spousal duties, is introduced into the legend by Phillip's morality and is fully absorbed by Deloney's ballad. The *Patient Grissil* of Dekker and his collaborators, on the other hand, complicates the issues addressed by Phillip and Deloney⁵ and echoed in contemporary homilies, domestic conduct-books, and domestic plays. While marriage based on choice remains a fundamental issue in the 1599 play, the *ethos* of wifely patience is only ambiguously upheld. In addition, the play explores more fully than do its analogues the male-female/sovereign-subject hierarchies, relating marriage to a broader framework encompassing the individual's ambiguous relationship to social rank and authority. The play's complex treatment of family and social conflict speaks directly to the tension within late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century society between the ideal of the family as a mirror of the homogeneous Christian state, and growing instances of domestic strife and doubt about the ability of secular authority, both in the family and society, to reflect a divine order.

* * *

In an age when the middle class was rising economically and beginning to intermarry with the aristocracy, it is not surprising that the Griselda legend should be reformulated to include the sanction of a marriage of choice between a sovereign and a subordinate. However, the major concern in the Elizabethan versions is with the practice of domestic virtue in any marriage. The subtitle of Phillip's play attests to the new schematic function of Griselda's trials, whose purpose is to instruct the largely citizen audiences in domestic decorum: *The Commoditye of pacient and meeke Grissill, Whearin is declared, the good example, of her patience towardes her husband....*⁶ The writers strive for the appearance of an ordered world governed by married love, reflecting the movement in the literature, theology, and social customs of the period away from the monastic ideal of celibacy to the glorification of marriage. As a number of social historians have shown, the new attitude toward marriage was an effect of a number of complex factors, foremost of which were the gradual disintegration of the feudal system of hierarchy and mutual obligations and rights, and the transformation from a kin-oriented to a nuclear family. The feudal kindred family and its attendant "communal households," which consisted of "several related households sharing the same hearth and the same board and cultivating... common fields," gave way between 1500 and 1800 to smaller, more self-contained households managed by members of a nuclear family and their servants.⁷ By the early

seventeenth century, the family in England and continental Europe assumed an important function in the promotion of social stability. The family formed "an intimate framework" of social activity, and marriage became the Protestant field of virtue.⁸ As early as 1497 Erasmus, in the *Encomium Matrimonii* (published in 1518), extolled marriage as the original sacrament on the basis that it preceded the Fall, and disclaimed the monastic vow of celibacy because it contradicted the divine instruction to procreate.⁹ Over a century later, Jeremy Taylor, echoing Erasmus, forcefully argued that any "disparagement of marriage . . . scandal[ized] . . . religion," for "marriage was ordained by God, instituted in paradise, was the relief of natural necessity and the first blessing from the Lord."¹⁰ George Puttenham, in his commentary on epithalamic poetry, described matrimony as "the highest & holiest" of human bonds.¹¹ The theologian William Perkins considered marriage "a state in itself far more excellent than the condition of a single life," and warned that in order for marriage to be a true "action of spirituall nature" it must be founded on "mutuall love and agreement."¹² The importance of marriage based on mutual consent is consistently praised in Spenser, whose *Amoretti* culminates in a marriage of choice: "Sweet be the bands, the which true loue doth tye, / Without constraynt or dread of any ill" (Sonnet LXV).¹³ In the same sonnet, we learn that marriage should be ruled by

"simple truth and mutuall good will" and founded on "fayth" and "spotlesse pleasure."

Between 1600 and 1650 a number of plays and treatises criticized the feudal practice of arranged marriage.¹⁴ In George Wilkins' tragedy *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage* (c. 1606) the protagonist's bigamy, his abandonment to a profligate life, and his first and chosen wife's suicide are portrayed strictly as the tragic consequences of forced marriage. William Scarborow, the young hero, articulates the didactic message of the play when he foretells the tragic outcome of his guardian's coercion - "Fate, pity me, because I am enforc'd: / For I have heard those matches have cost blood, / Where love is once again begun, and then withstood."¹⁵ The sentiment is echoed in *A Curtaine Lecture* (c. 1637) by Thomas Heywood who passionately denounces marriages of convenience, singling them out as a pernicious source of domestic conflict:

How often have forced contracts been made to add land to land, not love to love? and to unite houses to houses, not hearts to hearts? which hath beene the occasion that men haue turned monsters.... (Sigs. F2-3)

Paradoxically, the growing trend toward marriage based on love coexisted with widespread skepticism toward the conjugal bond as a source of earthly joy and spiritual edification. The tension was rooted in the social fabric of early modern England where the view of marriage as a holy union with binding mutual obligations that included friendship and companionship was challenged by numerous case histories of adultery, bigamy and desertion of spouses, as well as more serious domestic crimes.¹⁶ A phenomenon corresponding to the growth of domestic violence was the proliferation of domestic-conduct books and pamphlets proclaiming the sanctity of the family unit and denouncing those who would bring dishonor to it. The general consensus was that, while harmony should serve as a natural solution for all marital disputes, wives were ultimately subject to the authority of their husbands on the biblical grounds that the husband was created in the likeness of God. A large body of literature also offered advice to abusive husbands. Jeremy Taylor, for one, while preaching that a husband must consider his wife "as himself" and "must love her equally," noted that a "husband's power over his wife... is not a power of coercion but a power of advice" equal to "that government that wise men have over those who are fit to be conducted by them."¹⁷ The dictum that a wife's fortitude and obedience are to be matched by her husband's wise and gentle governance informs the secret betrothal scene in *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage*, where the couple's vows are preceded by a list of mutual responsibilities:

Scarborow. Their [wives'] very thoughts they cannot
term their own.

Maids, being once made wives, can nothing call
Rightly their own; they are their husbands' all....

Clare. Men must be like the branch and bark of trees,
Which doth defend them from tempestuous rage,

If it appear to them they've stray'd amiss,
They only must rebuke them with a kiss.
(p. 480)

The convention extolling the wife's patience within a turbulent marriage also underwrites a group of domestic comedies performed in the public theatres between 1599 and 1608.¹⁸ Among the most popular was Heywood's *How a Man May Choose a Good Wife From a Bad* (c. 1601-02), in which the abused Mistress Arthur is loyal to her prodigal husband even though he prefers the company of a whore who orders him to poison his wife. The wife's virtue is commended by the community, and the play ends with the reformed prodigal's advice to would-be-husbands concerning the merits of patient and self-effacing wives: "A good wife" will meekly "do her husband's will"; a "bad wife" will be "cross, spiteful and madding."¹⁹

* * *

The Elizabethan reformulations of the Griselda legend are concomitant with the transformation of marriage and the family. The ideal of romantic wedlock as "a school and exercise of virtue"²⁰ is introduced into the legend in Phillip's morality and is subsequently absorbed by Deloney's ballad. Phillip begins to modify the folktale's allegorical structure by portraying the traditional marriage debate between the Marquess and his subjects as a *psychomachia* in which Gautier protests against Fidence and Reason who are entreating him to marry. The Marquess bases his objections on St. Paul's preference for the single life, and the scene builds on the debate between virginity and marriage until the latter, which combines the practical consideration of offspring with earthly joy, is accepted by the Marquess as the preferable condition. Like his medieval counterparts, Gautier chooses to marry Grissel for her virtue, but while he claims not to be "Venus darlinge" he nonetheless admits to loving Grissel deeply: "from profound hart, doth perfit loue proceed" (line 664). Fidence and Reason, however, must win over the Vice Politicke Perswasion before the marriage can be accepted by society.

The Vice-figure, which is unique to Phillip's play, articulates social opposition to the Marquess' choice of bride, thus altering the medieval *topos* that portrays public hostility to the marriage as merely an excuse invented by the Marquess to justify to Griselda his testing of her virtue. In his role as public messenger, the Vice has a powerful effect upon the Marquess, who only reluctantly yields to the entreaty to test Grissel: "Oh cruell withes, that cause my care, oh stonie harts of flint / Can neuer teares nor dolfull paints, cause rigor for to stynt, / But that ye will proceed to worke your cursed will" (lines 1081-83). A significant development is the Marquess'

explanation to his wife of his intention concerning the tests: public pressure, he confesses, makes them necessary (lines 1089-96), thereby deflecting the audience's concern with the Marquess' own coercive conduct. Yet the Vice's role also creates an awkward equivocation with respect to the Marquess' motivation. Cyrus Hoy has noted the "psychologically ambiguous ground" occupied by Politicke Perswasion: while the Vice "moves independently" in this play, "represent[ing] a force in the world that gives credence to what in Boccaccio and Chaucer have been but pretexts concerning voices in society that grumble at Griselda's rise," in the context of the *psychomachia* Politicke is also "the external voice of an inner evil, the overt manifestation of all the Marquess' efforts to deceive himself with specious arguments for Griselda's disgrace."²¹ By stressing the Vice's public role, Phillip thus evades the unsettling possibility that the Marquess' cruelty is an effect of personal weakness which would undermine the conjugal ideal. The play does not develop the interest in the realistic presentation of character, anticipating Deloney's portrayal of the testing as merely the Marquess' conscious ploy to win widespread support for the marriage.

Deloney's ballad moves rapidly to the courtship between the Marquess and Grissel, dispensing altogether with the Marquess' initial doubts about marriage. The romantic intrigue is brought into relief, and the emphasis is as much on the Marquess' passion as it is on Grissel's virtue:

She sang most sweetly, with pleasant voice melodiously,
Which set the Lord's heart on fire.
The more he lookt, the more he might,
Beauty bred, his heart's delight.²²

While retaining the testing motif, Deloney treats Grissel's trials essentially as a means to prove her merits to the skeptics at court, the Marquess expressing the hope that his cruel behaviour will make others pity Grissel and "her foes . . . disgrace" (stanza 5). Upon the successful completion of the tests, the ballad proceeds to celebrate the joy that patience and constancy in marriage will bring.

Both Deloney and Phillip, then, downplay the Marquess' cruelty during the tests. In both texts, characterization is subordinated to the critique of unjust social practices and to the presentation of wifely patience as a means of securing domestic harmony and social stability. The opposing voices are quickly persuaded of Griselda's merits, and society is easily transformed by the marriage which it celebrates.

Dekker, Chettle and Haughton, on the other hand, counterbalance the romantic situation with the tensions surrounding the marriage, revealing a greater interest in domestic strife and its effects on the Marquess and Grissil as individuals. Although the main plot revolves around the theme of the desirability of marriage based on choice, our attention is drawn to the Marquess' violence against Grissil. One trajectory of the action affirms the growing belief that a husband's coercive behaviour generally stemmed from outmoded social values. The causal analysis, however, is presented with considerable psychological poignancy, highlighting an issue which is only implied by Phillip, namely the Marquess' personal need to humiliate his wife. In the opening scene, a courtier reminds Gwalter of his feudal duty to marry an equal in order to maintain political stability within the kingdom (I.i.22-28).²³ But the Marquess, who has been pretending to scorn love and marriage in order to deflect the court's suspicion, has secretly fallen in love with a poor maiden whose grace and virtue evoke romantic sentiment in him: "Me thinkes her beautie shinging through those weedes, / Seemes like a bright starre in the sullen night" (I.ii.174-75). Upon his introduction of Grissil to the court, the Marquess publicly admits his romantic interest: "I tell ye Lords, / . . . Beautie first made me loue, and vertue woe" (I.ii.251-55). Shocked at Grissil's poverty, the courtiers become forceful opponents of the union, openly deriding Gwalter's choice of bride and warning him that "the world" will be shocked "when the trump of fame / Shall sound your high birth with a beggers name" (I.ii.279-80). The courtiers' persistent taunts evoke in the Marquess feelings of anger, doubt and shame which contribute to a sudden "burn[ing] . . . desire" (I.ii.20) to mortify his wife. During his coldhearted tests of Grissil's patience, we perceive a genuine internal struggle, so that for the first time in the evolution of folktale the Marquess' cruelty approaches psychological depth.²⁴ Sensitive to the public outcry, the Marquess blames Grissil for his dishonor, bitterly regretting the joy he has found in marriage: "(oh my soule) / Why didst thou builde this mountaine of my shame, / Why lye my ioyes buried in *Grissills* name?" (II.ii.59-61). That Gwalter has internalized his opponents' hostility is suggested by the operative phrase "mountaine of my shame" and by his striking admission that his defense against public dishonor is a source of personal anguish:

. . . oh my *Grissill*,
How dearly should I loue thee,
Yea die to doe thee good, but that my subjects

Vpbraid me with thy birth, and call it base, . . .

(II.ii.115-18)

Under profound emotional strain, the Marquess turns Grissil into an object for the court's pleasure, hoping her servility will impress her detractors:

Marq. [to the courtiers] . . . I griue

To see you griue that I haue wrong'd my state,
By louing one whose basenes now I hate.

Enter Grissill with wine.

Come faster if you can, forbear *Mario*,
Tis but her office: what shee does to mee,
She shall performe to any of you three.

(II.ii.133-38)

The strongly subjective nature of Grissil's trials is emphasized in the climactic moment of the denouement when the Marquess admits, "My selfe haue done most wrong, for I did try / To breake the temper of true constancie" (V.ii.204-05).

Yet, while the audience is moved to sympathize with Gwalter's emotional struggle, the scene builds in such a way that our pity is blocked by the excessiveness of the Marquess' cruelty. The shifting dramatic perspective attests to the tension at the heart of play between the dictates of literary and social conventions on the one hand, and the disturbing presentation of power on the other. The inordinate nature of the testing is first suggested in a brief vignette depicting Gwalter's cruelty as a manifestation of a dark inner impulse, its catalyst being not only repressive social claims and temporary weakness but also the Marquess' brutal exploitation of his power. Removed from the suspicious gaze of the courtiers, Grissil is shown beseeching her husband to share with her the "burden of all sorrowes" (II.ii.43), to which Gwalter responds with a spectacular insult: "I am not beholding to your loue for this, / Woman I loue thee not, thine eyes to mine / Are eyes of Basiliskes, they murder me" (lines 45-47). Given the absence of the courtly faction at this moment, we may well wonder why the Marquess resorts to such degrading epithets, comparing his wife with a mythological reptile that destroys with its gaze. As Grissil quietly acquiesces to her husband's insults, Gwalter's abusive language gives way to sadistic behaviour:

Marq. Cast downe my gloue . . . ,

Stoope you for it, for I will haue you stoope,

And kneele euen to the meanest groome I keepe.
Gris. Tis but my duetie: if youle haue me stoope,
 Euen to your meanest groome my Lord ile stoope.
 (II.ii.78-82)

Grissil is further commanded to tie an attendant's shoes, after which the Marquess "rail[s] at her, spit[s] at her," and "burst[s] her heart with sorrow" (lines 132-33). The bizarre nature of the testing at this point, and the extreme humiliation to which Grissil submits, are underscored by their distinctiveness both in the development of the Griselda legend and in domestic drama. The convention of the patient wife requires only the wife's quiescence, not her grovelling in self-deprecating tasks. Even in *A Yorkshire Tragedy* (c. 1605) where the Husband's madness reaches diabolical proportions and his treatment of his wife and children is wild and morally reprehensible, the Wife's patience is never tried in the same grotesque fashion as is Grissil's. Indeed, the main plot of *Patient Grissil* metes out the rewards for patience with a cynical excess of concession to the ethic of submission as an absolute imperative of female virtue.

The dramatists' skepticism toward orthodox solutions to domestic conflict is further suggested when Grissil steps out of her patient-wife role to contest her husband's cruelty.²⁵ Grissil's rebellion clashes directly with the homiletic overtones of the testing, her bold criticism revealing that the fundamental problem underlying marital strife is the hierarchical structure of marriage and society, which threatens the powerless. Upon being banished from court, Grissil, in an uncharacteristic display of anger, bitterly inveighs against her husband's ruthless behavior, which conflicts with his public duty to uphold justice: "Thus tyranny oppreseth innocence, / Thy looks seeme heauy, but thy heart is light, / For villaines laugh when wrong oppresseseth right" (IV.i.191-93). When the Marquess orders her to part from her children, Grissil again lashes out against the status hierarchy which sanctions injustice: "I must oh God I must, must is for Kings, / And loe obedience, for loe vnderlings" (IV.ii.142-43). Instances of Grissil's insubordination continue into the denouement where she responds with both relief and doubt to her husband's reformation:

Marq. Why stands my wronged Grissil thus amazed?
Gris. Ioy feare, loue hate, hope doubts incompasse me.
 (V.ii.192-93)

Grissil's doubts notwithstanding, the comic resolution of the main plot deflects the urgency of her outbursts, capitulating to the orthodox plea for marital harmony and for society's acceptance of marriage based on choice. Once the skeptics have been convinced of Grissil's merits, Gwalter rejoices in the reunion with his wife, admitting that he too has learned the lesson of forbearance as it applies to the marriage bond. While claiming that he has been chiefly to blame for Grissil's humiliation, he also stresses that a "multitude" of "many headed beasts" has treated his family "with bitter wrongs" (V.ii.210-03).

The problem of dominance in marriage is more forcefully explored in the two minor plots, both of which are new additions to the *Griselda* legend. These plots scrutinize the issues underlying Grissil's outbursts, further displacing the tale's allegorical frame. The longer of these plots, usually considered the subplot, deals with the comical and unsuccessful efforts of Sir Owen, a Welsh knight, to subdue his termagant wife Gwenthyan, amounting to "a parody of the Marquess's tactics with the yielding Grissil."²⁶ Other ironic parallels sustain the dramatic opposition between the subplot and main plot: Gwenthyan's cruelty parodies her cousin Gwalter's testing of Grissil, while Sir Owen's passivity parodies the *topos* of the patient wife. The counterpoint is momentarily suspended by Gwenthyan's announcement that, just as the Marquess "has tryed *Grissill*," her own shrewishness has merely tried Sir Owen (V.ii.262-63). Gwenthyan's subsequent claim, however, that her tests of Sir Owen have taught her the value of wifely subjection (lines 271-72) is contradicted by her sudden warning to the women in the audience to resist their husband's authority:

Gwen. ...awl you then that haue husbands that you would pridle, set
your hands to *Gwenthians* pill, for tis not fid that poore womens
should be kept alwaies vnder.

(V.ii.290-292)

Richard Levin, writing about the unevenness of the play's multiple-plot structure, is uneasy with the structural and thematic incongruities it generates: "the values of the folktale source of the main plot," he argues, "dictate that Grissil's utter self-abnegation be treated as the wifely ideal," but the moral scheme "places Gwalter in an ambiguous position, for while his persecution of Grissil... is defined by the double structure as a gross distortion of proper husbandly behavior at the opposite pole from Sir Owen, the folk doctrine would have us accept it as the prerogative of his sex (and

rank)"); because the plots combine two polarities, "the comedy of the subplot actually works at cross-purposes with the idealization of the main-plot heroine, whose claim to perfection is undercut both by its *reductio ad absurdum* in the henpecked Sir Owen and by Gwenthyan's spirited refusal to emulate . . . Grissil."²⁷ The disjunctions created by the subplot, I propose, do not constitute dramatic failure; rather, they confirm the dramatists' awareness, already intimated in the main plot, of the impossibility of fully assimilating the homiletic structure of the folktale with the play's realistic impulses.

The parodic elements in the subplot are reinforced by the shorter plot, which deals with the misogamy of the Marquess' sister Julia. After observing the behavior of the married couples, Julia rejects marriage altogether, preferring the freedom of maidenhood. Gwalter's assertion that "Patience hath won the prize and now is blest" (V.ii.274) is undermined by Julia's expectation that others besides herself are skeptical of the tidy resolution:

... amongst this company I trust there are some mayden batchelers,
and virgin maydens, those that liue in that freedome and loue it,
those that know the war of mariage and hate it, set their hands to my
bill, which is rather to dye a mayde and leade Apes in hell, then to
liue a wife and be continually in hell.

(V.ii.278-83)

Julia is suspicious of the peace which has been won: marriage, she concludes, is an ongoing war.

* * *

The tension in the 1599 play between the preservation of conventional paradigms on the one hand, and the resistance to homiletic closure on the other, reaches beyond the issue of sovereignty in marriage to the play's treatment of authority in society at large. In its modifications of the Griselda legend, the play treats the conjugal ideal as an extension of a broader hierarchical power structure. The complication is merely implied during those moments when we witness Grissil's surprising critique of the Marquess' abuse of his role as both husband and sovereign; it is foregrounded in the contrast between the Marquess and Grissil's father Janicola, who serves throughout the play as a model of wisdom and Christian steadfastness. Although Janicola's occupation as a basket-maker renders survival in a money economy a hardship, his serenity and fortitude give succor both to his children and to his apprentice: "thogh I am poore / My loue shall

not be so . . . / the cheare is meane, / But be content" (I.ii.151–55).²⁸ An ideal father and master, Janicola rules his household gently and selflessly. An Elizabethan or Jacobean audience would recognize that Janicola's role as head of a household includes moral responsibilities that are similar to those of his sovereign, who is ultimately accountable to God. Dekker, for one, was fond of the analogy between sovereign and father: in *Foure Birds of Noahs Arke* (1609) he writes that a ruler's moral obligation to his subjects, like a father's to his children, is to guide and comfort them, and teach them "brotherly affection one towards another, . . . in loyaltie to him that is their Sovereigne."²⁹ In the same year King James declared that "Kings are . . . compared to Fathers in families: for a King is trewly *Parens patriae*, the politique father of his people";³⁰ and William Perkins defined the family as the "first Societie" or "the Schoole, wherein are taught and learned the principles of authoritie and subiection."³¹ For Perkins, "the superiour" who fails "in his charge, will prooue uncapable of publike employment; so the interiour, who is not framed to a course of economicall subiection, wil hardly vndergoe the yoake of Ciuill obedience."³² Janicola's frequent speeches on the need to subdue conflict with steadfastness provide a litany on the action, underscoring Gwalter's ruthless behaviour toward not only his wife but his subjects as well. In a significant departure from his sources, Dekker extends the Marquess' cruelty to Grissil's entire family: hoping to appease the courtiers, Gwalter orders that Janicola and all the members of his household, who have been brought to court with Grissil, be humiliated and banished with her (III.i.69–100). The juxtaposition of Janicola (the wise, temperate father) and Gwalter (the impulsive, punishing ruler) as characters and as philosophical polarities is an abstract statement on the necessity of benevolent authority, both in the home and in the kingdom. In the denouement, Janicola's family is reunited at court once the Marquess appears to have learned the lesson of good rulership. Asked by the Marquess whether he will sanction Grissil's marriage, Janicola laconically replies, "I say but thus, / Great men are Gods, and they haue power ore vs" (V.ii.177–78), echoing King James' assertion that "Kings are iustly called Gods, for that they exercise a manner or resemblance of Diuine power vpon earth."³³ Yet the dramatically orthodox resolution is attenuated by the preceding action in which Janicola has remained essentially a morality-figure while the cruel Marquess has been a more plausible and psychologically more fascinating character, marking the diminishing capacity of earthly authority to imitate divine benevolence.

The 1599 play is the most innovative and complex of the Renaissance versions of the Griselda legend. Before the legend died out toward the middle of the seventeenth century, it became chiefly an instructional piece in status-seeking and economic survival for women of the lower classes. The 1619 chapbook, as its title suggests, presents the tale as a lesson in expediency: "The / Ancient True and Admirable / History of / Patient Grisel, / a Poore Mans Daughter in France: / Shewing / How Maides, By Her Example, In Their Good Behaviour / May Marrie Rich Husbands; / And Likewise Wives By Their Patience and Obedience / May Gaine Much Glorie."³⁴ In contrast to the bold wish-fulfillment expressed by the author of the chapbook, the attempts by Dekker, Chettle and Haughton to grapple with domestic and social conflict register a high degree of skepticism, corroborating early modern England's increasing disenchantment with the institutions it upheld.

Wilfrid Laurier University

Notes

- 1 The medieval adaptations of the Griselda story are noted in W. F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster, eds., *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales* (New York: Humanities Press, 1958), pp. 288-331. All extant and lost analogues are cited in Cyrus Hoy, *Introductions, Notes, and Commentaries to texts in 'The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker' Edited By Fredson Bowers*, 4 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1980), 1: 131-43. See also D. D. Griffith, *The Origin of the Griselda Story* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1931); and Leo Saliknger, *Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 39-41.
- 2 Harry Keyishian, "Griselda on the Elizabethan Stage: The *Patient Grissil* of Chettle, Dekker, and Haughton," *Studies in English Literature* 16 (1976), 261. More recently, Larry S. Champion, in *Thomas Dekker and the Traditions of English Drama* (New York: Peter Lang, 1985), p. 19, has cast the 1599 play in a slightly more favorable light, arguing that, although Dekker "fails to provide motivation that is either adequate or consistent," the play's "comic structure... appears firm." Catherine Belsey, in *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985), p. 171, while claiming little originality for the 1599 play, concedes that Grissil's suffering "leaves the audience to... ponder the question whether there is any proper limit to the silent endurance of patriarchal tyranny," but does not pursue the insight.
- 3 Petrarch's letter is cited in Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. and ed. Mark Musa and P. K. Bondanella (New York: Norton, 1977), p. 186.
- 4 Petrarch, p. 186.
- 5 Both Mary Leland Hunt (*Thomas Dekker: A Study* [New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1911], p. 59, n. 35) and Harold Jenkins (*The Life and Work of Henry Chettle* [London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1934], p. 161) disclaimed the 1599 play's debt to Phillip. More recently, however, Cyrus Hoy has suggested that "Phillip's play represents a stage in the development of the Griselda story, specifically as concerns the Marquess' motivation, that ought not to be overlooked, for it points the way that both... [Deloney's] *Ballad* and the play of 1599 will take in their attempts to account for Griselda's treatment at the hands of her noble husband" (*Introductions, Notes, and Commentaries...*, 1: 139). Although Hoy does not

- analyze the Marquess' behavior in the context of Phillip's presentation of the ideal marriage, I am indebted to his provocative discussion of the evolution of the testing motif.
- 6 John Phillip, *The Play of Patient Grissel* (London: The Malone Society Reprints, 1909). Further references to the play will be to this edition.
 - 7 Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society*, trans. L. A. Manyon, 2 vols. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1961), 1: 130-31.
 - 8 Keith Thomas, "Women and the Civil War Sects," in *Crisis in Europe 1560-1660*, ed. Trevor Aston (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), p. 317. Thomas notes that "great efforts were made by the State and by local authorities to see that everybody was attached to a household, and the government displayed a strong prejudice against bachelors and masterless men" (p. 317). See also Lawrence Stone *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), *passim*.
 - 9 Erasmus, *Encomium Matrimonii*, in Emile V. Telle, *Érasme de Rotterdam et le Septième Sacrement* (Genève: Droz, 1954), pp. 160-61.
 - 10 Jeremy Taylor, *A Course of Sermons for All the Sundays of the Year* (1653), Sermon XVII: "The Marriage Ring," Part I, in *Jeremy Taylor: The Whole Works*, ed. Reginald Heber and Charles P. Eden, 10 vols. (1850: rpt. Hildesheim and New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1970), 4: 209, 210.
 - 11 George Puttenham, "The Maner of Reioysings at Mariages and Weddings," in *Edmund Spenser: Epithalamion*, ed. R. Beum (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, 1968), p. 53.
 - 12 William Perkins, *Christian Œconomy or, A Short Survey of the Right Manner of Erecting and ordering a Family, according to the Scriptures* (1609; London, 1618), 669.B and 671.C.
 - 13 Edmund Spenser, *Amoretti*, in *Spenser: Poetical Works*, ed. J. C. Smith and E. De Selincourt (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), p. 573.
 - 14 For a useful survey of the plays and treatises dealing with the topic of forced marriage, see Glenn H. Blayney, "Enforcement of Marriage in English Drama (1600-1650)," *Philological Quarterly* 38 (1959), 459-72.
 - 15 George Wilkins, *The Miserie of Enforced Marriage*, in Robert Dodsley, *A Select Collection of Old English Plays*, ed. W. C. Hazlitt, 14 vols. (London: Reeves and Turner, 1874-76), 9: 488. Further references to the play will be to this edition.
 - 16 Catherine Belsey, in "Alice Arden's Crime," *Renaissance Drama* ns 13 (1982), 83, notes that "crimes of violence," including domestic crimes, "were by no means uncommon" during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Cf. Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800*, p. 137; and Michael MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam: Madness, Anxiety and Healing in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981), *passim*.
 - 17 Taylor, Sermon XVIII: "The Marriage Ring," Part II, 4: 219-20.
 - 18 The dramatic conventions of these comedies are noted in Michael Manheim, "The Thematic Structure of Dekker's *The Honest Whore*," *Studies in English Literature* 5 (1965), 363-81; in Andrew Clark, *Domestic Drama: A Survey of the Origins, Antecedents and Nature of the Domestic Play in England, 1500-1640*, 2 vols. (Salzburg: Universität Salzburg, 1975), 2: ch. 7; and G. N. Rao, *The Domestic Drama* (Tirupati: Sri Venkateswara Univ. Press, [1978?], ch. 1.
 - 19 Thomas Heywood, *How a Man May Choose a Good Wife from a Bad*, in Dodsley, *A Select Collection of Old English Plays*, 9: 96.
 - 20 Taylor, Sermon XVII, Part I, 4: 211.
 - 21 Hoy, 1: 140-41.
 - 22 Thomas Deloney, *The Garland of Good-Will*, ed. J. H. Dixon (London: The Percy Society, 1852) stanza 30. Further references to the ballad will be to this edition.

- 23 Thomas Dekker, *Patient Grissil*, in vol. 1 of *Dramatic Works*, ed. Fredson Bowers, 4 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1962). Further references to the play will be to this edition.
- 24 In my assessment of the play's psychological overtones, I take issue with Cyrus Hoy, for whom the urge to test Grissil "seems to have sprung full blown from the head of the Marquess" and is "not occasioned by any felt need to win for her the hearts of his people" (1: 141). Cf. Harry Keyishian, who argues that "Gwalter's decision to test his wife is motivated by no external circumstances" ("Griselda on the Elizabethan Stage," p. 255).
- 25 Commentators generally overlook Grissil's feisty moments. Champion complains, "Never once does Grissil . . . openly resist her husband's actions or covertly establish the slightest hint of a private level of awareness with the spectators" (*Thomas Dekker and the Traditions of English Drama*, p. 19); cf. Belsey: "Grissil does not utter a word of protest" (*The Subject of Tragedy*, p. 170).
- 26 Hoy: 1: 143.
- 27 Richard Levin, *The Multiple Plot in English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 50.
- 28 One authorial detail which is widely accepted is that Dekker alone seems to have been responsible for those sections depicting poverty and human suffering, as they are characteristic of Dekker's pamphlets and later plays. See Hunt, *Thomas Dekker*, pp. 15-16; and Hoy, 1: 143-46.
- 29 Thomas Dekker, *Four Birds of Noahs Arke*, ed. F. P. Wilson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1924), pp. 124-25.
- 30 "A Speech to the Lords and Commons of the Parliament at White-Hall," in *The Political Works of King James I*, ed. Charles H. McIlwain (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1918), p. 307.
- 31 Perkins, *Christian Economy*, Qq5.
- 32 Perkins, Qq5.
- 33 *The Political Works of King James I*, p. 307.
- 34 Cited in Hoy, 1:133.