INTRODUCTION

THE GRISELDA STORY AND THE GRISELDA TEXTS

The authors of Patient Grissil, Thomas Dekker, Henry Chettle and William Haughton were hardly the first to tell Patient Griselda’s story. The myth had been told and retold and published time and time again. The degree of influence that earlier versions of the story of Griselda had on their play Patient Grissel is debatable, though there is no denying the fundamental plot that unites them. Griselda is a peasant woman married to a wealthy Marquess, who proceeds to test her through terrible treatment; namely, the kidnapping and alleged killing of their children.¹ Yet even after the Marquess denounces the marriage, Griselda remains obedient to him, and the Marquess, assured of her loyalty, marries her a second time. The story is rooted in oral history that is impossible to pinpoint, though there are distinct similarities to the Biblical story of Job, in which God tests Job’s faith by taking away everything he holds dear.

The earliest recorded story of Griselda, likely the basis of Patient Grissil and other revisions of the tale, was the publication of Decameron by Boccaccio in 1353.² A Latin interpretation of the story by Petrarch two decades later likely influenced Chaucer’s work, The Clerk’s Tale, presented in The Canterbury Tales, published sometime between 1387–1400. Petrarch is referenced in this particular publication.

The first known stage production of the Griselda story, Le Mystere de Griselidis, was performed in Paris in 1393. John Phillip penned a version for professional production in English theatre circa

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1 “Griselda (fl. 1350s).” Women in the Middle Ages: An Encyclopedia (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO), 2004.
Phillip’s play has notable similarities to Dekker, Haughton, and Chettle’s work, and indeed is a potential influence on *Patient Grissel*. Its title page reads: “The commodye of / pacient and meeke Grissil, / Weharin is declared, the good example, of her pacience towards her Hus / band: and lykewise, the / due obedience of Children, toward their Parentes.” A notable prose publication, *The antient true and admirable History of Patient Grisel, a poore man’s daughter in France: showing how Maides, by her example in their good behavior, may marry rich husbands; and likewise Wives, by their patience and obedience, may gaine much glory*, bears a similar title and emphasis on the moral message that is salient in the play *Patient Grissel*. Printed in 1619, this narrative is theorized by the Shakespeare Society to be the most direct influence on *Patient Grissil*, positing the publication to be a reprint of the original poem.4

Phillip’s play is distinct from other interpretations of the Griselda story, as it is a morality play in which moral concepts function as characters whose interactions with the Marquess influence his actions.5 (Hoy, 134). Political Persuasion serves as the main culprit persuading Gautier (the Marquess) to test Grissel. The parallel between Political Persuasion, acting as a character in Phillip’s work, and functioning abstractly in *Patient Grissel* as the Marquess’ desire to convince his skeptical subjects that his wife’s moral virtues give her worth despite her little wealth, has been noted by the Shakespeare Society in prior comparisons between the two texts.6 To give an example from *Patient Grissel* from the opening scene of the play, the Marquess declares, “Were but Grissil’s birth / As worthy as her form / she might be held / a

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3 Ibid., 131-32.
6 Dekker et al., *Patient Grissel*, 139.
fit companion for the greatest state.” The political motivations behind the Marquess’ actions are not alluded to in *The Decameron* or *The Canterbury Tales*. In these two texts, the Marquess never gets criticized for choosing to wed a woman of low social class. 

Several ballads bearing the title “Patient Grissel” were entered in the Stationers’ Registry. At least two of these ballads, entered in the year 1565, were written “to the tune of Paycente Grissel”, evidently a prolific tune during the early Elizabethan era. A ballad entitled “A most pleasant Ballad of Patient Grissel. To the tune of the Bride’s Good-morrow” was included in *The Garland of Good Will* by Thomas Deloney, which was entered in the Stationers’ Registry in 1593.

**Publishing *Patient Grissil***

It was not until 1599 that Dekker, Chettle and Haughton collaborated to dramatize their own version of the Griselda tale. The earliest record of their play was made when the theatrical entrepreneur Henslowe loaned Chettle money “in earnest of it.” Still, the majority of the payments were not made to the three collaborators until the play was fully completed nearly two months later. It is presumed that the play was finally staged shortly after Henslowe paid for Grissil’s gown. After the staging of the play, the Lord Admiral’s company took initiative to keep the play out of printing – presumably because it was a stage success and they wanted to keep it out of the hands of competitors. On March 18th 1600, Henslowe actually paid money in order to secure the play from being printed and distributed. The only quarto of the play was published in 1603 in “black-

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7 Ibid., 12.
8 Hoy, *Introduction*, 139.
9 Ibid., 133.
10 Dekker et al., *Patient Grissil*, xiii.
letter, with roman stage-directions and speech-prefixes.”

The Shakespeare Society had *Patient Grissil* edited by J. P. Collier in 1841. Collier modernized the spelling of the playtext in his edition, stating in his introduction that “we have not thought anything was gained, in a case of this kind by the preservation of the old orthography: on the contrary, it looks uncouth to the modern eye, and interferes in some degree with that smoothness of perusal which is required for the full enjoyment of the language of the old poets.”

However, later editions such as A. B. Grosart’s 1886 edition and Fredson Bowers’ 1962 edition, both kept the old-spelling text – most likely because Grosart, Bowers and Collier had different audiences in mind and different purposes or hopes and reasons for re-printing the play.

**Patching a Play: Chettle, Haughton, Dekker and Collaborative Playwriting**

Englishman Henry Chettle was a dramatist and a master stationer. He was born c. 1560 and died c. 1603. Chettle started his career as a stationer and then began an apprenticeship with Admiral’s Men in 1577. He went on to be involved in the making of about thirty-eight plays between 1598 and 1602. Of those plays only four were published, most of them collaborative works. Very few of Chettle’s works survive today. As a dramatist Chettle worked under Phillip Henslowe, a prominent manager and entrepreneur in English theatre. A very spirited man, Chettle is known for his comedies and his remarks about Shakespeare and other authors. One of the main people Chettle often collaborated

13 Dekker et al., *Patient Grissil*, xii.
with was Thomas Dekker, fellow coauthor of *Patient Grissil*. Chettle is attributed with creating the Welsh sections of *Patient Grissil*. If this is true, his humor and style of comedy can be seen clearly in these lively scenes.

William Haughton was an English playwright during the Renaissance period. His birth is estimated to be around c. 1575. Little is known about Haughton besides what is told by Phillip Henslowe, whose company all of Haughton’s known works were written for. Haughton is credited for writing or co-writing over twenty-five plays in his lifetime, for the majority of which there are no printed copies remaining. Haughton’s common collaborators include Dekker, Chettle, and John Day. His most famous work is likely a comedy entitled *Englishmen for My Money* which was published in 1598. In 1605, just one year after receiving his MA from Oxford University, Haughton died from unknown causes. In regards to his authorship in *Patient Grissil*, Haughton is speculated to be the mind behind the characters Sir Owen, Gwenthyman and Julia.

Thomas Dekker is the best known of the three playwrights. Dekker was born c. 1572 in London and died in August of 1632. Dekker is known for the poetic qualities of his works as well as his vast interest in issues of social class and in satire with a moral aim. Like Chettle and Haughton, Dekker also worked with Phillip Henslowe and much of his biography is received from Henslowe’s diary. Along with writing plays, Dekker also wrote prose pamphlets. Between 1613 and 1619 Dekker was imprisoned for debt, which explains why prison is often mentioned in his works. Of the more than fifty plays that Dekker had full or partial authorship in, only twenty survive. The most notable is *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*, published in 1599 and performed for Queen Elizabeth on New Year’s Day 1600. Dekker was the primary author in *Patient Grissil*

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contributing to the main plot of the Marquess and Grissil, as well as the poems/songs and other sections.

How can we account for the triple collaboration? As Brian Vickers explains in his article “Coauthors and Closed Minds,” “the single-author paradigm, though appropriate for Virgil and Horace, Spenser and Milton, Fielding and Richardson, does not fit the material conditions under which drama was produced in London between 1579 and 1642.”17 There is no exact reason why the three playwrights decided (if they had an option) to join together to create plays; instead, there are a multiple possibilities. First, much like any other profession, a major goal of the theatre business was to produce as much of a product as possible, as quickly as possible. Therefore, collaborating with multiple people to produce one play was ideal because the product would be completed sooner. As soon as one play was complete another one could begin and this quick production led to greater profit which was arguably the main goal. To elaborate on this concept, Vickers writes:

The best analogy is with the bottega of the Renaissance painter, bronze-maker, or sculptor, where a group of craftsmen executed a contract specifying the delivery of a given artwork, of an agreed subject matter and dimension, by a specified date. The analogy does not fit completely, of course (analogies are not meant to), for although Philip Henslowe fills the role of the patron who commissioned and paid for the composition, literary production was organized differently.18

Another reason collaborative playwriting was so popular is because, according to Heather Anne Hirshfield, “it involved a validation of cultural legitimacy, a kind of pride in having been able to work with

18 Ibid., 103.
fellow playwrights.”¹⁹ When playwrights such as William Haughton worked with the likes of Thomas Dekker, they became more notable by association. Proprietors like Henslowe wanted talented writers not only to work for him but to work together to create a series of successful plays and playwrights.

In collaborative playwriting the different expertise of specific playwrights could be combined to create a text of great variety and complexity. That is to say, while Dekker could contribute poetic elements to *Patient Grissil*, by collaborating with Chettle the play gained another element of humor through Chettle’s grand comedic sense and thus became more complex as a whole. By adding yet one more playwright to the mix the play gained even more depth. It was typical for co-authorship to be shared between two to four playwrights, in which all would receive equal profit, or the “senior dramatist” would receive the largest sum. Thomas Dekker likely received the largest payment from his collaboration in *Patient Grissil* due to his popularity and writing history; however, that is yet to be proven.

Collaborative playwriting was the norm during the Renaissance period and as a result, almost every major playwright during the Renaissance period collaborated in playmaking, possibly multiple times. The reasons for the collaborations vary from recreational to financial; nonetheless, what truly matters is the end product which on most occasions was a multifaceted play.

**Another Take on Patching a Play: Genre**

Examining the genre of *Patient Grissil* provides insight into the social context and significance of the play in the spectrum of early modern

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English drama. Through familiarity with the play and its background, an understanding of its role and contribution to the world of early English drama is established which exceeds the perspective usually (and superficially) attributed to a single play. While classification of genre is difficult and highly debated, knowledge of the genres on the era’s stage, the authors’ predispositions and styles, and the historical context of the tale of Griselda enables readers and critics to come to their own conclusions of *Patient Grissil’s* genre and role on the stage and in the history of English drama.

The genre with which *Patient Grissil* is most regularly aligned is comedy. Dekker, likely the principal among *Grissil’s* collaborating authors, was known for his own brand of comedy. Dekker’s comedy is discussed as possessing insight and inspiration greater than artistic exercise; as critic Ernest Rhys states, “[Dekker] has the rare gift of putting heart into everything he says”.

Known for his comedies that convey not only humor, but also moral commentary, Dekker’s style of comedy presented satire as well as a realistic account of life in his world. While humor was present throughout his plays, Dekker’s satires challenged audiences with idealizations of their society embodied on the stage; while stories and archetypes may be recurrent, the contemporary setting presented not only a relevant comedy, but a foil to early modern English society. Comedy was a protection for Dekker and his contemporaries, who implemented humor, foreign settings, and the use of cultural allusions (in the form of popularized stories, mythology, and history) to comment on the early modern era’s society and culture. Such social critique would be censored in a play blatantly addressing early modern English society. Under this facade, however, criticism was

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allowed to be staged.

The domestic tragedy is a another genre to consider in the classification of *Grissil*. In the early modern period, this genre focused on the tragedies of a family, typically of citizen and lower gentry status. Unlike the comedies, many of these domestic tragedies had historical basis, and were relevant to England and the era; plays of this nature welcomed an examination of the conflict and realities of early modern society. *Patient Grissil* is a morality play, in which the morals of early modern England are illustrated and proffered for analysis. Domestic tragedies focused on the conflict and relationships within a household. Within these scenes of domestic life emerged archetypes that have remained staples of the stage, and are present forces in *Patient Grissil*. The good wife and the shrew emerged from domestic tragedies as a source of comedic hyperbole and social extremes, or as forming unlikely alliances. In *Patient Grissil*, these roles are personified in Grissil as the ideal, patient wife, in a “charming story of a woman’s ideal patience” to be contrasted to Gwenthyann and Julia, shrewish women who subverted the ideal role of women in the era. Domestic tragedies were also referred to as “marriage plays”, plays in which the relationships and prominence of marital and familial themes were central. These plays demonstrated the intersection and conflict of domestic and political spheres and the conflict of class in marriage. The Elizabethan world view is imprinted within domestic tragedies in general and *Patient Grissil* in particular, as the latter discusses the issues of family relations, class, and political conflict in marriage.

*Patient Grissil* also displays attributes of city comedy. These

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22 Ibid.
23 Rhys, “Introduction.”
24 Henderson, “The Theater and Domestic Culture.”
comedies, popularized by Dekker and his contemporaries, provide insights into the conflicts of city life, specifically the politics of courtship and marriage, through the realm of satire and cynicism.26

Overall, *Grissil* assumes aspects of multiple genres, while not being tied to one entirely. Aspects of romance and tragicomedy are prominent factors in the playtext, too. Romance became increasingly fable-like as the dated romance of early comedies became obsolete. Romance was typically not considered as a genre itself; rather, a secondary plot alongside the tragedies, histories, and comedies. Tragicomedies are plays that are a mix of tragedy and comedy, such as *Patient Grissil*. Genres developed in early modern drama in a creative climate of inspiration and the work of others; through exposure to others’ works and others’ plays, early modern playwrights began the collective creation of genres. *Patient Grissil*’s ambiguity of genre can classify it best as a patch of a play. With patches of many genres, *Grissil* is fashioned from the fabric of the timeless Griselda text, but altered to fit into a fashionable new niche of its own: that of the patched play.

**The Welsh Connection**

Welsh characters provide comic relief in *Patient Grissil*, but their dramatization has more complex cultural underpinnings. Wales was annexed to England in 1536, and before and since, the Welsh never saw eye to eye with the English. The Welsh, like the Irish and Scottish, were constantly fighting battles with the English, rebelling in their refusal to fully recognize the English as the rightful rulers of the land.27

Welsh women in particular were depicted as brutal and tribal by the English in the Renaissance period, their brutality intrinsically linked to their actions and more extensively, to the Welsh language.

Depictions of Wales in Renaissance drama “come from those who had colonized it,”28 the English, not the Welsh themselves. The Welsh at the time of the Renaissance were struggling to distinguish themselves from the English and Irish as their own nationality, but the English who were colonizing Wales at the time used the power of the press to demean the indigenous Welsh image. Welsh women were characterized as violent and brutish; a widely circulated account made of their violence included the mutilation and defacing of dead Englishmen soldiers’ bodies. It was believed that Welsh women’s violent nature, in part, was the cause for the violent nature of the Welsh entirely. This colonial view of the Welsh combined with hatred of the Welsh language equated to a racial tension between Wales and England in the Renaissance.

The Welsh language was banned in 1536, the same year that England annexed Wales. Curiously, the Welsh language was often represented on stage in the Renaissance, albeit as “bad or deformed English.” When performed on stage, the Welsh language was exploited as a satire of Welsh characters’ “inability to pronounce consonants properly and their confusion of feminine and masculine pronouns.” The Welsh language was said to be “a speech nothing like, nor consonant to the natural Mother Tongue within this Realm,” contrasted to English.29 The hatred for the Welsh language and the colonial perceptions of Welsh women created segregation amongst the English and the Welsh, generating a large array of satirized plays, predominantly popular on the English stage. All this is worth bearing in mind, especially when considering Gwenthyran’s unbridled speech. Her character may be

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28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
comical, but is far from clownish.

Clowns in Renaissance Drama

S.P. Cerasano puts it best when she says in *A Companion to Renaissance Drama* that “while some actors were typed as tragic heroes, no playing company could function without at least one actor who was an adept clown.” Clowns in Renaissance plays performed an important role. Although the title “clown” holds a certain uncultured image in modern times, they were essential in Renaissance drama.

Interestingly, however, the role of the Renaissance clown is difficult to describe because it would change so much depending on the theater troupe, the role of the clown, and the actor himself. Clowns, just like any person or actor, differed in their acting and humor. Their backgrounds and styles were different, so playwrights would change and write different parts for different clowns – sometimes with help from the clowns themselves.

Clowns acted as a sort of bridge between the audience and the actors. Bente Videbaek explains that “a clown performer has a curious, in-the-middle position. He is not quite part of the proceedings on stage, as he spends much of his time in close contact with the audience, whom he provokes to react; he is also not “one of us,” as he is recognized by his fellow actors as part of their universe.” The clown goes beyond the traditional roles of an actor. The clown in a Renaissance play is more powerful than the regular actors because he is able to transcend the stage. As the writers for the National Shrine Clown Association explain, “throughout the Renaissance, jesters or fools perpetuated the art of

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clowning in the palaces of kings and on the stage. Clowns could answer back to kings, bishops, and all in authority. By making fun of anyone and satirizing social customs and more, jesters were often catalysts for social change.”32 Clowns could use satire where others could not because their antics were seen as humorous. If a regular actor was to portray a king or bishop as dumb or silly, they would be in a lot of trouble. Clowns, however, were allowed to constantly push the boundaries of satire and slander. Clowns were often given special permission within their own plays to also be satirical and slanderous to their fellow actors. Babulo in Patient Grissil, for example, is able to mock many of the characters in the play, including the Marquess, without any real repercussions.

Videbaek explains that “the clown could be defined as a function or a catalyst, rather than a character. He moves comfortably among social classes, and he relates well with the audience.”33 As Renaissance clowns role in the troupe was to help audience members connect to and interact with the players, the morals and messages of play sometimes hinged on the role of the clown and his ability to convey them to the audience. The clown himself might add his own moral message into the play.

Renaissance clowns were not always just actors. Clowns were often very talented and bright individuals. Their skills would range from song composing to playwriting or from sword fighting to juggling. Clowns, especially the most famous of them such as Richard Tarlton or Robert Wilson, were not content to simply read their lines and act. They wanted to help change the minds of their audiences.

33 Videbaek, How to Teach a Moral Lesson.
**Family and Gender Relations in the Early Modern Period**

*Grissil* is driven by a dramatic conflict that is at the intersection of the private and the public: the eponymous character’s testing is done publicly, yet the play sheds light on private emotions. The early modern era, in fact, saw little differentiation between the public and the private spheres of life. Indeed, given the fluid nature of the home, privacy – as we know it – was rare. To understand how the “public and private were connected and at times indistinguishable in the early modern period,” one must delve into cultural expectations, among which are the understanding of men’s and women’s sexualities and personalities: that men were often the stable ones who kept women’s wayward tendencies controlled. However, this is not always the case. *Patient Grissil* offers other views of masculinity and femininity as well, which give insight into the structure of Renaissance families.

In the early modern era, the prevailing view of men and women was one of, respectively, protection and vulnerability – one in which the men were tasked with ensuring their wives’ fidelity, a remarkable feat at a time when women’s sexuality was viewed as uncontrollable. Therefore, men took on – and were given – a role which often resulted in their actual or portrayed anxiety, as they ensured that their wives were not rendering them as cuckolds. This is one potential interpretation for the Marquess’ testing of Grissil. He must prove that he has secured a ‘safe’ spouse, one who will lend him credibility as a proper husband, but also as a man. Indeed, his desires to prove Grissil’s constancy not only to his

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peers, but to his subjects, indicates the unique position which placed men of power in the center of the public’s consideration than men of a lower class.

Household stability was an indicator of social stability in the early modern period, and a husband incapable of keeping his affairs in order could be a serious detriment to the health of society. A man such as the Marquess could find little privacy, even in the place generally afforded to men and women—the marriage bed. However, not all men and women were even able to marry, sometimes due to wealth or lack thereof. No matter the individual’s marriage status, their relationships were governed by codes of behavior and propriety.

It is important to reiterate here that even private actions, such as prayer, had larger, public purposes and effects, such as preparing an individual for a productive adult life. The community in which a family lived had a vested interest in couples’ lives, and could – and would – intercede on behalf of an abused individual, or a potentially adulterous pair, to name two instances. Though this occurred more frequently in poorer communities, where it would be harder to hide from neighbors, this was not the only case; wealthy couples could still write for intervention in the case of abuse. This is not to say that community standards required an absolute elimination of abuse—rather, punishments for actual (or perceived) wrongs against the family or community had to be socially-regulated through courts of law and of public opinion. The power to punish could not be given or trusted to one hand alone.

In *Grissil*, there are clear and differing levels of manhood, familial relationships, interactions among friends, and with those at

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40 Ibid., 329-31.
court, all of who occupy the public’s consideration, as all relationships directly, or indirectly, affected the public.

**SHREWS AND SHREW-TAMING**

Grissil may be a model of unquestioning obedience, but other female characters, like the Welsh widow Gwenthyan and perhaps even the Marquess’s sister, Julia, do not restrain their speech. For this, they could have merited the title of “shrews,” along with the measures used in the early modern era for managing female speech. Modern society may not be wholly comfortable with the Elizabethan notion of “shrew-taming” because “absolute obedience to unjust authority offends us as immoral,” but taming shrews – and ensuring a docile female subjectivity – is exactly what kept Elizabethan society in order. The image of a shrew today tends to be embodied in the archetype of a wizened old crone, but in early modern England, the concept encompassed any woman who “verbally resisted or flouted authority publicly and stubbornly enough to challenge the underlying dictum of male rule.” Women who spoke unfavorably disrupted the order, and so they were seen as needing training, much like a falcon or a horse. Such motifs of unruly animal depicting unruly woman were standard within Elizabethan culture. To early modern English society, “taming” these women was necessary to ensure not only that their female relatives or wives were respectable, agreeable women; but that society as a whole was respectable and agreeable.

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While upsetting the social order was a particularly serious charge in a time as politically unstable as early modern England (due in a large part to the reversal of gender roles seen by the very reign of Queen Elizabeth), the shrew connotation held other serious implications for women. A woman’s “unruly member” – her tongue – needed taming, because a woman’s “open mouth” was “a signifier for invited entrance elsewhere.” Being labeled a shrew also meant frequent associations with witchcraft, which was such a widespread belief and issue within Elizabethan culture that the fear of an “unruly” or “inassimilable” woman graduating from a shrew into a witch was very real.

Women who threatened the social order by challenging authority, advertising their sexuality, or who were considered uncomfortably close to witchcraft were punished rather harshly in order to maintain safety and civility. In many court cases of the early modern period, women were branded as shrews for “scolding” or “dominating one’s husband”; in some towns they were subsequently carted through town to an instrument known as the cucking-stool, which involved strapping the victim down to a chair that was then dunked repeatedly underwater. An even harsher punishment was the bridle, which, exactly like the bridle of a horse, was slipped over the woman’s head with a metal depressant—or bit—that pushed down her tongue. Not only did this present a sexual violation, but the bridle was only taken off after a physical sign of obedience from the woman, who was forced into “pantomimes of pain, guilt, obeisance to authority and self-abjection” from her inability to speak. The punishments, which were treated as public events and even charged townspeople admission, both humiliated and physically degraded women through their “carnivalized” quality.

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45 Boose, “Scolding Brides,” 196, 204.
47 Boose, “Scolding Brides,” 190; 205-06; 189-90.
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Luckily, neither of these punishments is inflicted on Grissil or even Gwenthyan, although both women are being very much tamed by their husbands. Grissil, who consistently undergoes “psychological miracles” under the testing of Gwalter, represents the ideal wife: obedient, chaste, and loyal; while Gwenthyan, who will have none of this taming nonsense from Sir Owen, is the quintessential loud, disobedient shrew. The trials of both women serve as dramatized representations of sixteenth-century female expectations and invite speculation about gender archetypes and how they have or have not changed, but not only in regards to femininity: the very notion of “shrew-taming” encourages thoughts about the men’s role and their expectations, which actually prove very similar to the modern concepts of the in-charge husband (Gwalter) and the “pridled,” or “whipped,” boyfriend (Sir Owen). These stock characters, and many of the gender and societal implications in Patient Grissil, still prevail in modern society today, even though the concept and practice of shrew-taming is (hopefully) outdated.

Reading Patient Grissil Today

The concept of a “pridled” husband, calls attention to the modern relevance of Patient Grissil. Gender stereotypes for men and women within marriage still exist, as they did in the Renaissance. As such, while Patient Grissil comes from a dated story, first appearing in writing in Boccaccio’s Decameron in the fourteenth century, the play is still relevant to modern readers, particularly in a college setting. While such an old story, exhibiting absurd female submission, intense class divisions, and an odd educational system, at first glance may hardly seem relevant to modern audiences, Patient Grissil touches upon current gender, economic, and educational issues. Thus, this text contains modern-day

49 Dekker, et al., Patient Grissil.
Patient Grissil emphasizes the role of women in and out of marriage by depicting various female stereotypes. Each female character is an extreme. Julia staunchly defies the status quo by refusing to marry; Gwenthyan shrewishly defies her husband, and Grissil adheres to her husband’s will to such an extreme that she does not fight to keep her children safe. Studying gender stereotypes and their deconstruction is a prevalent in academia today and Patient Grissil provides an avenue to study these stereotypes and their destabilization.

The playtext portrays a society in which class divisions are very important, yet crumble throughout the story. Janiculo and his children begin as poor basket weavers who are separated from the nobles until these nobles visit Janiculo’s house. This breaks down boundaries but Grissil continues to insist that she is far beneath the Marquess. Class distinctions continue to crumble after Grissil and the Marquess getting married and her family moves to the palace but grow stronger when the Marquess removes the family to their original home. In the end they move back to the palace, concluding the play without class divisions. Breaking and building class divisions is especially relevant today as building up the middle class becomes increasingly important, yet out of reach.

Education plays a small but relevant role in the play. Grissil’s brother, Laureo, spends nine years at the university only to return home, as poor as ever, and continue a life of basket making. For modern audiences, this can function as an exaggerated narrative of present-day scholars. How many college students today spend four amazing years of learning only to move back in with their parents, because of the economic downturn? The text subtly comments on education by testing models of liberal education and applied education. Liberal education proves unhelpful to Laureo, who returns home after a long period of learning what appears to be useless information. But applied education is
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also contested as Janiculo, whose education likely only included learning how to make baskets, is impoverished despite his trade. Neither type of education could get this family out of poverty. Currently, we debate whether a liberal education is superior to learning a trade. Laureo and Janiculo provide contrasting models of education that are relevant to today’s debates on educational models.

A Note on the Text

This edition of *Patient Grissil* was developed for a primary audience of undergraduate students in English, Women’s Studies and Theatre courses. It is also meant to be accessible to all undergraduate students interested in reading or performing Renaissance plays. Thus, all decisions and changes made regarding formatting or annotating the text have been made to appeal to this specific audience. In order to strike the right balance between accessibility to the “play reader” and the “play actor,” the editors have critically considered all of the editing choices previously made by Collier and Bowers and made our own decisions to best fit our audience.

Previous editions of the play have kept the early modern English spelling, presumably in order to stay as close to the original printed text as possible. However, our purpose is less to imitate the original print and more to increase accessibility for the contemporary reader. Thus, we have chosen to print the text with modernized spelling.

All dialogue that appears in the original text in Welsh or Latin has been italicized as an indication or warning to the reader or performer about the switch of language. Meanwhile, we have chosen to eliminate the italics in certain places, such as character names appearing within the dialogue and the character name dialogue tags, in order to avoid confusion with the italics of the foreign languages. In large part, long Welsh passages have not been translated as it was decided that the
purpose of these Welsh passages was not to signify, but rather, to have a comical effect. Thus, a translation of those moments in the text would detract from the humor rather than to add to the understanding of the play.

In his book, _Shakespeare’s First Texts_, Neil Freeman writes about modern editions of Renaissance texts and specific editing choices and changes made to these texts. He writes about the importance of capitalization in Shakespeare’s texts, stating: “In many ways, capital letters reflect the logic of the mind in action. This is not to deny the emotionality or passion of the moment. Rather it suggests no matter what is going on and no matter how emotional the circumstances, the character can and must strive to get a particular word across.”

To help our actor-readers, we have chosen to preserve even the “odd” words such as mid-sentence nouns or conjunctions capitalized as they are throughout the 1603 edition of the text. We trust that capitalizations do not interfere with understanding or accessibility of the text for the contemporary reader, and would entail a better understanding of emotional content.

With similar reasoning, we have also chosen to stay loyal to the 1603 punctuation. Though some punctuation may seem odd to the contemporary reader, we have decided that the original punctuation indicates subtle yet important acting cues, and we have found that changing the punctuation to match contemporary standards (evolving as they are) may alter readers’ and actors’ interpretations of the text and consequently the meaning of the text.

To eliminate confusion, we have chosen to refer to characters in the stage directions by their full character names. The choice is necessary to distinguish between character names with similar abbreviations in the 1603 copy text, such as Marq (for Marquess) and Mar (for Mario). The text was also made more accessible to a theater audience by explicitly

50 Neil Freeman, _Shakespeare’s First Texts_ (Vancouver: Folio Scripts, 1994), 126.
rendering stage directions such as actions, entrances and exits that were implied within the playtext. These added explicit directions are indicated by square brackets and italics throughout our edition.

Lastly, we have differentiated between “verse” and “prose,” through formatting as was done in the 1603 version because of a possible and likely difference in meaning and performance cues between a verse style recitation and a prose style recitation.