

INTRODUCTION

The Griselda Story, often referred to as the wife-testing plot,¹ is a tale that has been reborn into the literary world repeatedly since its appearance in fourteenth century literature. It is a story that authors, playwrights, and poets have recognized as easily malleable and it has been amended and tailored over the centuries. Throughout its evolution, and despite its appearance in a variety of literary forms, the fundamental framework of the Griselda story remains identifiable in each adaptation; the noble Walter marries Griselda, the virtuous peasant girl with a reputation for patience and obedience, begins to doubt her perfection, then subjects her to a series of trials during which her children are taken away, she is rejected and returned to her father, and told to prepare a wedding for Walter's new bride- all in order to prove that she is indeed the female ideal of steadfastness. Throughout the trials, Griselda remains loyal to her husband and unquestioning of his motives. Finally, Walter restores her honor, convinced at last of her goodness.² Most versions of the tale explore marriage roles, female obedience, and subservience to paternal forces like God and one's husband, and most literary criticism responds to those themes.

¹ Griselda's appearance in literature is frequently identified as the 'wife testing plot' due to the series of trials that her husband subjects her to throughout their marriage. 'Wife testing', as a genre of literature, is not limited to Griselda tales, however. For more information on 'wife testing' in literature, refer to Lois E. Bueler's The Tested Woman Plot: Woman's Choices, Men's Judgments, and the Shaping of Stories. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2001).

² In his complete study of the origins of the Griselda story, Dudley David Griffith organizes the traditional plot sequence into five sections: Griselda's Promise, The Marriage, The Testing of Griselda, The Separation, and The Reunion. (Dudley David Griffith, The Origin of the Griselda Story. Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 1931. 8-9).

However, though the Griselda story is regularly scrutinized for its discourse on domesticity, I argue that the tale is almost equally about politics and the construction of patriarchal relationships.

The tale was written first in 1352³ by Boccaccio as the last chapter of his *Decameron*.⁴ It was written in Italian, which limited its audience until 1373 when Petrarch translated the story into Latin. In the last decades of the fourteenth century, Geoffrey Chaucer introduced Griselda to English readers as “The Clerk’s Tale” in *The Canterbury Tales*. In 1385 the Griselda story was translated into French; then William Forrest wrote the poem, *The History of Grisild the Second: A Narrative, in Verse, of the Divorce of Queen Katharine of Arragon*⁵ and presented it to Queen Mary in 1558 as a tribute to her mother, Katherine of Aragon. Around 1559, John Phillip composed a dramatic version of the Griselda story; *The Comedy of Patient and Meek Grissill*,⁶ which was followed shortly after by Thomas Dekker, Henry Chettle, and William Haughton’s 1599 play, *The Pleasant Comodie of Patient Grissill*,⁷ first performed in 1600 and printed in 1603.⁸ Amy Goodwin reports

³ There is evidence that suggests the Griselda story may have its real origins in folklore, and that Boccaccio was perhaps just the first to popularize it. For more information on the folk traditions that may have influenced Boccaccio’s version of the Griselda story, please refer to Dudley David Griffith’s *The Origin of the Griselda Story* (Seattle, Washington: 1931).

⁴ In the final chapter of the *Decameron*, Pamfilo asks Dioneo to tell a story of “those who in love or other matters had done something with liberality and magnificence”. Dioneo tells his story “not in admiration of patience, but in condemnation of Gualtieri’s cruelty and of Griselda’s unnatural patience”(Griffith, 7).

⁵ William Forrest, *The History of Grisild the Second: A Narrative, in Verse, of the Divorce of Queen Katharine of Arragon*. Ed. Rev. W.D. Macray. London: Whittingham and Wilkins; Chiswick Press, 1874: referred to from now on as *The History of Grisild the Second*.

⁶ John Phillip, *The Comedy of Patient and Meek Grissill*. *A Gathering of Griseldas; Three Sixteenth-Century Texts*. Ed. Faith Gildenhuis. Canada: Dovehouse Editions, Inc., 1996.

⁷ Thomas Dekker, *et al.*, *The Pleasant Comodie of Patient Grissill*. *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker* Vol. 1. Ed. Fredson Bowers. Cambridge: University Press, 1953. 212-298.

that “by the sixteenth century there were translations and adaptations of Petrarch’s Griselda story in Italian, Catalan, Spanish, Czech, Dutch, German, Polish, Portuguese, Hungarian, French, and English”,⁹ which implies that there is something about the Griselda tale that has a universal appeal. Lee Bliss recognizes this appeal and captures the essence of the Griselda story in declaring that the tale “fascinates and repels” and that “it irresistibly tempts us to seek rational explications that will tame its dark, mythic power”.¹⁰

While the focus of most literary criticism is on Griselda and her patient suffering, this thesis concentrates on Griselda’s generally overlooked counterpart: Walter. Walter’s role in the Griselda tale is not insignificant by any means; in fact, I argue that his function in the story as central to an exploration of politics is more important than Griselda’s. This thesis will explore neither Griselda nor Walter’s relationship with Griselda; rather it will look closely at the compelling political discourse that is manifest in a plot otherwise considered domestic. It will look at Walter’s role as a patriarchal figure in the public sphere, his duties as that figure, and the ways in which he does or does not fulfill those responsibilities. Previous criticism has already recognized Walter’s behavior in his private sphere as brutal and unjustified, and this paper will show how the mismanagement of his household is strikingly similar to the mismanagement of his subjects. Harry Brent writes

⁸ Lee Bliss, “The Renaissance Griselda: A Woman for All Seasons”, *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* Vol. 23. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992. 301- 343.

⁹ Amy W. Goodwin, “The Griselda Story in France”. *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales* Vol. 1. Ed. Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002. 130.

¹⁰ Bliss, 301.

that the tale's "protagonist is Walter, whose duty is to preserve order and stability in his realm. It is a story about power, here exercised within a marriage, which is an emblem for society".¹¹ With a focus on Chaucer's "Clerk's Tale", John Phillip's *The Comedy of Patient and Meek Grissill*, Thomas Dekker, et al's *The Pleasant Comodie of Patient Grissill*, and William Forrest's *The History of Grisild the Second*, I will attempt to further develop an understanding of the Griselda story as a vehicle by which to explore power relationships in the public and private spheres and how Walter's quest for absolute authority affects the stability of those power structures.

Geoffrey Chaucer's "Clerk's Tale", as it appears in *The Canterbury Tales*, is one of the most famous examples of a story derived from the wife-testing plot, and is popularly considered to be the archetype of the Walter and Griselda narrative in English. As one tale among many told by Chaucer's pilgrims on their way to Canterbury, "The Clerk's Tale" thematically corresponds to the other tales in the collection that discuss marriage, female ideals, patience, and humility.¹² Criticism of the tale focuses on marriage dynamics and gender roles, but while its plot is propelled by the complex marriage between Walter and Griselda, the *envoi* to the tale clearly explains that the tale is not intended to be an example for wives. Thus the *envoi* directs

¹¹ Harry Brent, "And Gladly Teche: 'Stedfastnesse' in the *Clerk's Tale* and the Pedagogy of Charlton Laird", *The Legacy of Language: A Tribute to Charlton Laird*. Ed. Phillip C. Boardman. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1987. 1-19, 11.

¹² For a discussion on the significance of "The Clerk's Tale" out of the context of *The Canterbury Tales*, see James Sledd's "The Clerk's Tale: The Monsters and the Critics," *Chaucer: Modern Essays in Criticism* Ed. Edward Wagenknecht. New York: Oxford University Press, 1959. 226-39.

our attention to other themes. Chaucer's rendition of the wife-testing plot functions to explore the dynamics between husband and wife, while it offers, too, a parallel investigation into the relationship between a lord and his people. To some, it portrays Walter as tyrannous and unfocused, it exposes his lack of understanding of the effect of his volatility on his kingdom, it exhibits the lack of trust between Walter and his nobles, and it reveals the extent to which Walter's quest for absolute power becomes obsessive and consuming. However, as Lee Bliss' comment that the tale "fascinates and repels" denotes the element of contradiction in the text, alternative interpretations of Walter's political strategies call attention to his political aptitude, manifest in his prudence in choosing Griselda for her inner attributes. While the meaning of the Griselda story is perplexing in respect to the marriage plot, Chaucer's version seems to be especially contradictory in the way it imagines Walter's political capacity.

Each subsequent version of the Griselda story in English raises questions in regard to Walter's tyranny and use of authority, Griselda's unrelenting submission, religious allegory, and the implications of patriarchal dominance over state and home. In the late sixteenth century, two more versions of the Griselda story appear in dramatic form; John Phillip's *The Comedy of Pacient and Meek Grissill*¹³ and Thomas Dekker's *The Pleasant*

¹³ The inspiration for Phillip's play most likely comes from *L'Estoire de Griseldis* (1558): For this information, Judith Bronfman (Chaucer's Clerk's Tale: The Griselda Story Received, Rewritten, Illustrated New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1994) cites Charles Walters Roberts' And Edition of John Phillip's *Commodye of Pacient and Meeke Grissill* Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1938, a work which compares the language of Phillip's play to that of *L'Estoire de Griseldis* in order to prove their prominent similarities.

Comodie of Pacient Grissill in 1603. With the emergence of these two dramatic works in the stream of already existing Griselda stories, readers and critics find themselves even more perplexed by the messages the plays seem to imply. Although the wife testing plot is still very much recognizable in their work and they each undoubtedly respect the traditional use of the tale as a mode of domestic *exemplum*, Phillip and Dekker *et al* make several important alterations that prompt new religious and political interpretations of the traditionally domestic-themed story. Dekker alters the story in a way that permits it to explore patriarchal relationships in a political framework whereas Phillip's adaptation of the plot as a morality play uniquely proposes its own political commentary, emphasizes patriarchal relations from a religious perspective, and addresses the role of children's obedience in domestic stability.

There is little written on William Forrest's *The History of Grisild the Second*. But the lack of literary criticism of the mid sixteenth-century poem does not reflect, in any way, the significance of the text. Forrest's version is the most innovative in the way it uses a well known plot in literature to discuss a matter of historical importance; the marriage and tumultuous divorce between King Henry VIII and Katherine of Aragon. William Forrest wrote *The History of Grisild the Second* and presented it to Queen Mary in 1558 as a tribute to her mother, Katherine of Aragon. It is a poem based on the 'Great Divorce'¹⁴ between King Henry VIII and Katherine of Aragon, the daughter

¹⁴ King Henry VIII looked to annul his marriage to Katherine of Aragon in 1527 when he feared she would never bear him a male heir. Throughout his reign, Henry went on to marry

of the great Spanish monarchs- King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella.¹⁵ His poem narrates the tribulations of King Henry's divorce in great detail, though he changes Henry's and Katharine's names to Walter and Grisild, respectively. However, the historical accuracy of the events and the public reactions that Forrest describes were subject to his bias and hence the reader must not disregard the fictional element of *The History of Grisild the Second*.

William Forrest's poem proposes many of the same arguments as other English versions of the tale: Walter is a tyrant, he disregards the welfare of his kingdom in order to pursue his passions, and he is obsessed with absolute power. Additionally, like Phillip's play, Forrest's text investigates the role of patriarchy in religion. *The History of Grisild the Second*, however, illustrates with great clarity the chaos that ensues when political, domestic, and religious hierarchies are disordered. In his quest for absolute authority, Forrest's Walter, who appears to be the most extreme ruler of the four texts in this study, attempts to dominate his household, his kingdom, *and* the church, which he achieves by declaring himself its head. Once Walter achieves the stature he sets out to attain, the political, domestic, and religious destruction-

six times; first to Katherine (married 1509), then Anne Boleyn (married 1533, executed 1536), Jane Seymour (married 1536), Anne of Cleves (married 1540, annulled 1540), Katherine Howard (married 1540, executed 1542), Katherine Parr (married 1543). For more information on Henry VIII's wives, refer to Alison Weir's *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991), and for a complete study of English history, including the reign of King Henry VIII, Queen Katherine, and Queen Mary, refer to W.E. Lunt's *History of England* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1928).

¹⁵ Forrest is able to write from an eye-witness perspective because of his various positions in the court which allowed him to interact with and observe the events about which he writes. When he presented his poem to Queen Mary, Katherine's only daughter with King Henry VIII, Forrest was Mary's royal chaplain, but before that he was familiar with the incidents preceding the 'Great Divorce' and was even present at Katharine's funeral in 1536. (Rev. W. D Macray; taken from the preface of William Forrest's *The History of Grisild the Second*, xi-xxvi).

as a result of his cruelty- is more apparent via the collapse of nearly all his relationships- public and private.

There are a wide variety of Griselda Stories that could have been used in this study, but the four chosen for this paper propose to invite the most thorough evaluation of the ways in which the ‘domestic’ story is political. Also, each text represents a slightly different time period, a quality that is important to my argument that the malleable Griselda story is timeless and adaptable, appropriate for various political contexts in England ranging from the fourteenth century to the seventeenth century. I also chose to discuss versions of the Griselda story in distinct literary forms; a tale, two plays, and an epic poem to further emphasize its malleability as well as to illuminate its power to deliver similar messages despite obvious variations in format and content.

CHAPTER ONE

ENIGMATIC POLITICS: CONTRADICTION AND COMPLEXITY
IN GEOFFREY CHAUCER'S "CLERK'S TALE"

To begin at the end, the *envoi* of "The Clerk's Tale" is where the Clerk's voice indirectly articulates the connection between the Wife of Bath and "The Clerk's Tale" and reveals its function to defend the Clerk against the Wife's allegations that all clerks speak poorly of women. Answering those accusations, the *envoi* confirms that the Clerk's tale can indeed be interpreted as a domestic tale that esteems the female.¹⁶ However, the envoy also ironically advises, "Oh noble wyves, ful of heigh prudence,/ Lat noon humylitee youre tonge naille,/ Ne lat no clerk have cause or diligence/ To write of yow a storie of swich mervaille/ As of Grisildis pacient and

¹⁶ The Griselda story, especially as Chaucer's "Clerk's Tale", produces so many varied responses in its readers that it is impossible to state exactly what the tale 'means'. For some, it is a tale about female strength, and for others it is about female weakness. Some critics argue the tale is about cruel and unjust governance, while others argue just as strongly that it is about effective governance. Furthermore, in its interpretation as a tribute to women, there is ample debate on what female qualities it is praising. George Lyman Kittredge contends that the story means nothing out of its context in *The Canterbury Tales* and that it is only a "plain and straightforward piece of edification...that exemplif[ies] a single human quality" ("Chaucer's Discussion of Marriage" *Chaucer Criticism: The Canterbury Tales*. Ed. Richard Schoeck and Jerome Taylor. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1960. 130-159, 132), and Judith Bronfman adds that it is "a story about male sovereignty" (Bronfman, 24). Mary Carruthers proposes that *gentillesse* is the subject of *The Clerk's Tale* ("The Lady, the Swineherd, and Chaucer's Clerk," *Chaucer Review* 17, no.3 [1983] 221-234). Lee Bliss suggests that it is a story about "dire poverty and fabulous wealth and status; inhuman brutality in the husband, equally shocking acquiescence in the undeserved suffering and suddenly, after many years, equally unexpected rewards" (Bliss, 301). Charlotte C. Morse believes that the tale evokes feminism because Chaucer's clerk is a "conventional clerk, hostile to the antifeminist type of woman that clerks had developed to rail against...his irony makes the antifeminist type unattractive and thus presses the female audience to prefer Griselda's example" ("The Exemplary Griselda" *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* Vol. 7 [1985] 51-86, 84).

kynde”(CIT 1183-1187). The narrative voice of the *envoi*, whether it is of the clerk or of Chaucer himself, asserts that the wifely example set by Griselda is *not* in fact replicable and that her female attributes are unrealistically ideal.

The contradictions in the *envoi* reflect the complexity of the tale itself. Chaucer’s “Clerk’s Tale”, like its predecessors and successors, has been the fuel to an extensive and ongoing literary dialogue about various power relationships: God to man, ruler to subject, and husband to wife, as well as how those relationships are both dependent on and independent from one another. Chaucer uses the fundamental themes, characters, and plot line of Petrarch’s tale, borrowed from Boccaccio’s original, to create a rendition of the Walter and Griselda narrative that not only serves as oral entertainment for the pilgrims in *The Canterbury Tales*, but also as a text that imagines the complexities and difficulties of establishing and maintaining authority in political, domestic, and religious contexts. Chaucer’s tale generates visions, conflicting at times, about the duty of a ruler to his subjects and the duty of the subject to his/her ruler. Ultimately, these inconsistencies naturally reflect the real difficulty of understanding the strategies, limitations, and reciprocal expectations of political governance.

The opening lines of the tale anticipate the political discussion that the narrative generates. Before Chaucer even introduces Walter or Griselda, he allots descriptive priority to their land. He writes, “Ther is, at the west syde of Ytaille,/ Doun at the roote of Vesulus the colde,/ A lusty playn, habundant of vitaille,/ Where many a tour and toun thou mayst biholde,/ That founded were

in tyme of fadres olde”(CIT 57-61). Immediately following the landscape imagery, Chaucer introduces Walter, the “markys whilom lord was of that lond”(CIT 64) and portrays him as a young, energetic noble who retains the obedience and respect of his subjects. The second stanza reads, “And obeisant, ay redy to his hond,/ Were alle his liges, bothe lasse and moore”(CIT 66-67). Therefore, the government that Walter maintains over his land as well as over his subjects who reside in the land is highlighted at the beginning of the story, long before the Clerk develops the dynamics of the matrimonial and authorial control that Walter exercises over Griselda. Moreover, Chaucer not only politicizes the land but he also uses it in a way that references the domestic. To describe the land, Chaucer uses a very sexual imagery. Instead of commenting on the traditional elements of landscape such as trees and terrain, Chaucer remarks on its fertility: it is “A lusty playn, habundant of vitaille”(CIT 59). With this description, the land is both sexualized and feminized. The clerk uses variations of the word *lust* fourteen times throughout the tale in a wide range of contexts to signify a dichotomous power dynamic between the dominant and the subservient. For lust to exist there has to be someone who desires and something or someone who is desirable.¹⁷

¹⁷ The word *lust* implies two separate components; one which lusts and the other which is objectified; the one with the desires is essentially the dominant force because the other is powerless to prevent being desired. Because Walter is the one who objectifies his land and Griselda, one could reason that only Walter is in control, even though it takes both components for the lust to exist. The text is suggestive that Walter expects absolute control as a result of this relationship. However, Walter’s case is actually on the contrary; although he ‘lusts’ for the obedience of his subjects, he is not rewarded with the absolute control that he desires or anticipates. The fact that he marries at his subjects’ requests is reflective of the power that the people are able to maintain despite Walter’s relentless efforts to possess all

Nearly all versions of the Griselda story mention, either elaborately or briefly, Walter's fondness for hunting and gaming. In depicting Walter, Chaucer describes Walter's favorite pastime using the same sexually charged language as he does for the land; "But on his lust present was al his thoght, /As for to hauke and hunte on every syde"(CIT 80-1).¹⁸ The hunting metaphor serves as way to demonstrate, perhaps satirically, that masculinity is measured in part by a man's ability to satisfy his desires. It is also measured by the power a male uses to attain control and domination over something, whether it is land, a polity, or a wife. Walter's hunting can be seen as an expression of his masculinity, and thus an execution and reinforcement of the authority he maintains over his subjects. At the same time, as Richard Almond has pointed out, "for the ruling class, avoiding idleness, and therefore sin, was important and hunting provided the ideal anodyne of healthy, violent and enjoyable

authority. Ultimately, the text imagines real limitations to a medieval lord's power- something which Walter seems unwilling to accept. Throughout the tale, Walter's subjects respect their subordination to Walter while they simultaneously exercise the little agency they have; they are, together, a force that Walter is unable to conquer entirely. Perhaps Walter's inability to totally control his public is what propels him to direct his search for absolute power elsewhere- over Griselda. Furthermore, the repetition of the word *lust* throughout the tale suggests that Walter's government is not based on cooperation but is in a sense parasitic.¹⁸ The hunting metaphor is also highly relevant to classifying the tale as a domestic text. The image of a hunter on the quest for his prey is not far from the idea of a man in search of a wife. Walter's *lust* for hunting is simultaneously indicative of his susceptibility to succumb to his desires and suggestive of his lust and desire that propel him in search of the ideal woman. The hunting metaphor not only forecasts the way in which Walter pursues a partner (Griselda) but it also functions as a commentary on the male-female relationship in which the woman is the prey, valued, vulnerable and sought after; and the male is the hunter, the one who values the prey, and tracks and captures it. In late fourteenth century England, hunting was primarily an aristocratic pastime: "Some entertainments were particularly the preserve of the aristocracy. One of these was hunting. In fact, it was generally illegal for commoners to hunt, as the rights to use land for hunting were generally reserved for the aristocratic holders"(Jeffrey L Singman, and Will McLean, *Daily Life in Chaucer's England*. Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995. 183). Therefore, the hunting metaphor succeeds in vitalizing Walter's masculinity as Griselda is feminized by both the imagery of the land and her association with being a prey. Walter is a predator, both sexually and in sport.

exercise”,¹⁹ and therefore, Walter’s fondness for sport can be seen as a way to maintain his mental and physical wellbeing so that he can better serve the public. Essentially, Walter’s affection for hunting can be interpreted as a positive aspect of his political character.

One of the complexities of “The Clerk’s Tale” is that it is possible to imagine conflicting interpretations of almost every point in the narrative. The metaphor of the sexuality of the land relating to the sexuality of Griselda is but one example of a scene susceptible to various understandings.

Considering how Walter treats his subjects as opposed to how he treats Griselda initiates comparison from which other political dimensions emerge.

Walter’s *lust* for the land is what drives him to hunt and play in it, and presumably care for it enough to allow him to reap all its benefits.

Conversely, Walter’s *lust* for Griselda drives him to do nothing of the sort.

Instead, it motivates him to abuse her, take away her freedom, and expose her to a variety of cruel tests to determine if she is worth his keeping. From this perspective, although both the land and Griselda are sexualized and noted by Walter for their fertility, his differing treatment of them reveals that he does not govern consistently between his public and private spaces. It seems that while both Griselda and the land/subjects are equally necessary to Walter’s political stature and success (without his subjects, he would have no one to rule, and without Griselda, his subjects would be unhappy), Chaucer’s Walter is more concerned with pleasing the public than he is with satisfying his wife.

A possible explanation for Walter’s preference for gratifying the public over

¹⁹ Richard Almond, Medieval Hunting. Phoenix: Sutton Publishing, 2003. 13.

his wife is that he may expect a greater degree of reciprocity from his subjects than from Griselda. Henry Orenstein, in his article on a theory he calls *asymmetrical reciprocity*, says that “reciprocity is a moral imperative deeply implicated in many actions and beliefs in all human societies at all times”.²⁰ He also states that “a favor received carries with it an obligation to return a favor”.²¹ The use of Orenstein’s theory as a base for political analysis of Walter’s actions makes it appear as though Walter highly regards the happiness of his polity because he translates *contented* subjects into *obedient* subjects. In other words, in return for Walter’s careful governance over them, the public agrees to be subservient. This scenario is representative of a cooperative government in which both parties benefit from the outcome; Walter is satisfied with the public’s subservience and the subjects are satisfied with their governor. The satisfaction that Walter gets from knowing he has a contented polity may exceed the fulfillment he gets from knowing his wife is happy with their marriage. Another way to look at Walter’s inclination to elevate the public over private is to consider Walter’s dual position in the hierarchy of authority: he is both a Marquis and a husband, but his role as Marquis is ranked higher in the hierarchy than his role as husband and, for that reason, he values his lordship more than his husbandry.²² Ultimately, in

²⁰ Henry Orenstein, “Asymmetrical Reciprocity: A Contribution to the Theory of Political Legitimacy” *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Feb., 1980) 69-91, 70. Orenstein’s theory is not made strictly in response to “The Clerk’s Tale”, but rather he argues for a broad theory of reciprocity in the context of political power in general. Therefore, his argument pertains to Chaucer’s Walter.

²¹ Orenstein, 69.

²² What makes Walter’s decision to ensure political stability over domestic stability more complex in the Griselda story is that although Walter is likely aware of the benefits of having a contented body politic and takes the measure to guarantee their satisfaction, he nevertheless

terms of control, Walter benefits more from public subservience than from private subservience. If Walter may be said to be aware of the role of reciprocity in the power dynamic between a ruler and the ruled, then Walter's neglect for Griselda over his pursuit to please the public can be interpreted as a strategic political move and thus reflective of his prudence.

The hunting metaphor also functions as a critique of Walter and imagines his passion as a fault. The clerk exclaims, "I blame hym thus: that he considered noght/ In tyme comynge what myghte hym bityde,/ But on his lust present was al his thoght,/ As for to hauke and hunte on every syde"(CIT 78-81). Amy Goodwin argues, despite the popularity and acceptance of hunting among medieval aristocracy, that hunting is "an anti-intellectual, trivial, and slothful pursuit" and she juxtaposes "Walter's devotion to hunting with his neglect of other duties and the future".²³ Several lines later in the tale the reader is informed that Walter is, in fact, more absorbed in his hunting games than in taking the steps necessary to ensure the future of his own polity; or, in other words, than in finding a wife and producing an heir. The truth that Walter neglects his duty as Marquis to secure the future of his people and the fact that Walter fails to recognize the political need for an heir can be understood as a critique of Walter's capacity as ruler. In chapter XXXVII of *On the Laws and Governance of England*, Sir John Fortescue promotes the welfare of the people over that of the ruler: "All the power of a king ought to

strives to achieve absolute control in his private sphere; an endeavor that proves excessive, cruel, and unsuccessful.

²³ Amy W Goodwin, "The Griselda Game", *The Chaucer Review* 39:1. Pennsylvania State University, 2004. 41-69.

be applied to the good of his realm, which in effect consists in the defense of it against invasions by foreigners, and the protection of the inhabitants of the realm”,²⁴ and warns governors against letting their passions obstruct their duties: “But if he is so overcome by his own passions or by such poverty that he cannot keep his hands from despoiling his subjects...such a king ought to be called not only impotent, but also impotence itself”.²⁵ Additionally, in Part III of Book II, Giles of Rome writes “And þe prince haþ good entent 3if he desire not his owne profit but þhe comyn profit. Þanne þe lasse þe comyn profit is desired, þe worse is e principate”.²⁶ Walter’s absorption with his own passions and his neglect for public governance is, by definition, a failure of lordship.

The presence of “The Clerk’s Tale” in the marriage section of *The Canterbury Tales* would not be thematically justified if its narrative did not include a discourse on marriage. In the “The Clerk’s Tale” this discourse is initiated by Walter after he is approached by one of his noble men who tries to convince Walter of the necessity of marriage and childbearing to the future of the common profit. This scene is often cited by critics who wish to elaborate on the themes of domesticity and matrimony in the tale, but its contribution to the discussion on politics, specifically to Walter’s relationship to his subjects, should not be overlooked. One nobleman says, on behalf of all the people, “if

²⁴ Sir John Fortescue, “In Praise of the Laws of England”, *On The Laws and Governance of England*. Ed. Shelley Lockwood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. 53.

²⁵ Fortescue, 53.

²⁶ Giles of Rome, *The Governance of Kings and Princes: John Trevisa’s Middle English Translation of the *De Regimine Principum* of Aegidius Romanus*. Ed. David C. Fowler, Charles F. Briggs, and Paul G. Remley. New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997. 328.

it youre wille be,/ That for to been a weeded man yow leste;/ Thanne were
 youre peple in sovereyn hertes reste”(CIT 110-112), while another, more
 animated, cries, “Delivere us out of al this bisy drede/ And taak a wyf, for hye
 Goddes sake!”(CIT 134-5). They also offer to “Chese yow [Walter] a
 wyf...Born of the gentilleste and of the meeste/ Of al this land”(CIT 130-1).
 Walter refuses his nobles’ offer to select his wife for him, but recognizes the
 validity of their pleas and reluctantly agrees to marry. However, he does not
 do so without a passionate argument in favor of his bachelor lifestyle. He
 reasons, “Ye wol, myn owene peple deere,/ To that I nevere erst thoughte
 streyne me./ I me rejoysed of my liberte,/ That seelde tyme is founde in
 marriage;/ Ther I was free, I moot been in servage”(CIT 144-7). Clearly,
 Walter prefers the liberty and freedom that the unwedded life provides him
 and calls attention to the unappealing confinements of marriage. Yet despite
 his hesitations, Walter is persuaded by his noblemen that marriage and an heir
 are the only way to prevent, in the case of his untimely death, “that a straunge
 successour sholde take/ Youre heritage”(CIT 138-9). Michael Hanrahan
 argues that “a ruler is obligated to marry and sire an heir” and that this is “an
 idea that sets the Griselda story in motion”.²⁷ In the same article, Hanrahan
 states that ““The Clerk’s Tale” emphasizes a ruler’s obligation to procreate”,²⁸
 recognizing the tale as a political commentary on the responsibilities of a
 Marquis.

²⁷ Michael Hanrahan, “‘A Strange Successour Sholde Take Youre Heritage:’ *The Clerk’s Tale* and the Crisis of Ricardian Rule”. *The Chaucer Review* 35:4. Pennsylvania State University, 2004. 335-350, 339.

²⁸ Hanrahan, 335.

Walter's admission of the legitimacy of his nobles' marriage request can be interpreted as an indication of his authoritative potential. At first, Walter's failure to acknowledge, independently, his obligation to marry and procreate is an example of poor governance. It is also degrading to his role as a lord that he neglects to recognize that marriage is a preventative measure against usurpation as well as a means to maintain stability within the polity. However, Walter modestly responds to his nobles, "But natheles I se youre trewe entente,/ And truste upon youre wit, and have doon ay;/ Wherfore of my free wyl I wole assente/ To wedde me, as soone as evere I may"(CIT 148-151). Walter's response reveals that he is indeed aware of the importance of preserving a cooperative government in which the Marquis's responsibility is to please and satisfy the needs of the common profit. The editors of Fortescue's political writings put it this way, "The rule of law is a cooperative and corporate matter which must involve the intention, deliberation and consent of all members of the body politic, including the king, but which cannot be manifested as action without the single will of the king".²⁹ Walter admits that he can see the "trewe entente" of his people and, most importantly, that he trusts them, which could indicate that he is conscious of the role that his subordinates have in maintaining a functional, collaborative government. Also, the language that Chaucer uses in Walter's response is suggestive of the fact that although Walter's passion for hunting constructs him as aloof and self-centered, he is also capable of descending the heights of his authority and placing himself on an equal plane with his nobles. One way of understanding

²⁹ Fortescue, xxix.

Walter's reply is that not only does Walter disclose that he *trusts* his subordinates' reasons for choosing to marry; he also openly declares that he "wole assente". The language in this passage is thematically relevant because the word *assente* resonates both politically and volitionally. First of all, it signifies a political system in which the ruler maintains his authority via his *assent* with the people below him, just as they assent to his wishes as well. It also confirms that Walter's style of collaborative politics is deliberate and his decision to assent is perhaps a power tactic. Despite the fact that Walter is insistent on marrying a woman of his choice, and that there is little his subjects can do about it, Walter still considers his subjects' concerns to be legitimate. Regarding the mutuality needed to sustain a cooperative government Fortescue writes:

Wherefore, if it is good for every people to be governed by laws to which they themselves assent, it will be admitted of necessity that the rule of a king who governs his people by such laws, which is called a political government (*regimen politicum*), springs from the power, as it does also from the will of such a king. Wherefore, every such king is powerful, nor can he by reason of such a kind of government be called powerless or not free, seeing that what he wishes, he does, not hindered by any more powerful than himself.³⁰

Fortescue's argument, therefore, validates Walter's response to his subjects' pleas to marry as commendable and proper because he assents to the subordinates who, in turn, assent to Walter's conditions.

As the tale is full of themes, language, and actions that can be interpreted in entirely contradictory ways, it is only appropriate to examine Walter's response to his nobles' request from another perspective. As we

³⁰ Fortescue, 135.

have seen, Walter agrees to marry and says that he can see the “trewe entente” of his people. Previously, this phrase was examined to reveal that Walter trusts his nobles and their judgments regarding the marriage. However, a counter-interpretation, lead by the alternative understanding that Walter is politically inept, is that Walter’s failure lies in the *lack* of trust he has in his nobles, and later, in Griselda. To begin with, it should be noted that although Walter agrees to marry, the constraint he allows his nobles to exercise on his authority is very limited; he immediately refuses their offer to choose a wife for him. Walter’s insistence that he choose his own wife can be comprehended in several ways. First, it gives him back the freedom he loses by agreeing to marry in the first place and reminds his subjects that their political interjections can go only so far. His desire to select his wife independently is indicative of Walter’s anxieties in accepting that his power as a Marquis is not absolute and is, in fact, limited by his subordinates. Secondly, it strongly suggests that Walter does not trust his nobles in their judgment of a woman suitable for the domestic life of a ruler. Finally, it evokes the possibility that Walter already has a marriage plan in mind; perhaps one that will guarantee him not just political dominance but domestic dominance as well. Walter may have premeditated the idea of marrying a peasant like Griselda because she would then have to answer to two authorities, Walter as her Marquis and Walter as her husband.³¹ In this

³¹ Walter asks that his subjects treat his wife “as she an emperoures doghter weere”(168), which implies that Walter most likely knows that she will *not* be. Additionally, Walter’s excessive insistence that his subjects accept whomever he chooses as a wife suggests that he may already know that her origins will be controversial.

situation, Walter sufficiently satiates his need for complete control.³² James Sledd elaborates on the idea of Walter's taking a peasant wife and reasons that "If he [Walter] can demand and get such obedience from his chief subjects, it is hardly improbable that he will demand and get it from his poorest peasants; and if he marries a peasant, his attendant lords will certainly expect behavior which will try their patience".³³ From Sledd's perspective, Griselda's humble upbringing therefore explains Walter's distrust in her virtue and forecasts the trials to come. Walter's lack of trust and his dishonesty is later reaffirmed when he refuses to disclose his motives to the subjects for testing Griselda and for her expulsion from his home. In more than one instance Walter reveals that he does not trust his nobles with the truth, and thus doubts their intelligence as he later doubts Griselda's virtue.³⁴ Jill Mann says that "trust fails and mutuality ceases...Mutuality is swallowed up in the one-sided exercise of his will".³⁵ Manifestly, this understanding of Walter's response to his nobles does not flatter his image as a righteous ruler or a righteous husband. Chaucer's narrative imagines political (and domestic) relationships as healthy and fair only when there is unquestioned trust between the parties.

The hunting metaphor and the discourse on marriage between Walter and his nobles are both valuable in establishing the otherwise domestic tale as

³² Actually, Walter *believes* this will satiate his need for absolute power, but his repetitive testing of Griselda suggests his appetite for power is constantly growing.

³³ Sledd, 236.

³⁴ Concerning Griselda's virtue, Walter's lack of trust is even more prominent. In fact, his distrust and suspicion of the depth of her virtue is what drives the testing plot forward. From the moment Walter demands the entirety of Griselda's trust, he becomes consumed with proving to himself that he has it.

³⁵ Jill Mann, "Suffering Woman, Suffering God", *Feminizing Chaucer*. D.S. Brewer, Cambridge: 2002. 116.

one rich with political allegory. Once the political tone is established through the close reading of these two elements in the first 150 lines of the text, the reader is then able to analyze the remainder of the tale with the anticipation of its political connotations. It is with this foresight that the reader is able to comprehend Walter's choice of wife, as well as his method of selection and "initiation" of her, as another portal into understanding the political discourse proposed by the tale. To begin with, Walter's initial visual encounter with Griselda happens while he is out hunting. The very fact that Walter is hunting at his will while he *unintentionally* sees Griselda reinforces the observation made at the beginning of the tale that physical pleasure is Walter's priority over marriage. Upon seeing Griselda in the woods, Walter vows to "Wedde hire oonly, if evere he wedde sholde"(CIT 245) due to his "commendynge in his herte hir wommanhede,/ And eek hir vertu, passynge any wight/ Of so yong age, as wel in chiere as dede"(CIT 239-41). It is possible to interpret Walter's sudden decision to marry Griselda as indicative of his impulsiveness and rash submission to pleasure as well as suggestive of his incapacity as a Marquis to make a well-contrived decision. However, Carolyn Collette argues against this analysis. She argues that Walter is "able to exercise *prudence*, a quality of being able to plan for future action, a quality that therefore implies exercise of will to control appetite". In other words, "Chaucer initially constructs Walter's character to reflect an ability to exercise prudent restraint and to see through apparent reality [Griselda's poverty] to essentials [her virtue]".³⁶ Collette points out that Walter's aptitude for seeing

³⁶ Carolyn P. Collette, *Species, Phantoms, and Images: Visions and Medieval Psychology in*

beyond superficiality in fellow human beings contributes positively towards his image as an authority figure and allows the reader to imagine Walter as a respectable and capable ruler. However, the key word in her argument is ‘initially’; Walter’s character undergoes a transformation throughout the tale in which his aptitude for prudent and effective governance is infected by his ever-increasing appetite for power, which gradually and ultimately corrupts his political capacity.

When Griselda is first introduced, she is briefly acknowledged for her “vertuous beautee” and for being “oon the faireste under sonne”(CIT 211-212). However, Griselda is most thoroughly depicted by and commended for her loyalty toward her father, her work ethic, her *obeisaunce and diligence*, and her humble regard for her poverty. Walter, “commendynge in his herte hir wommanhede,/ And eek hir vertu, passynge any wight/ Of so yong age, as wel in chiere as dede”(CIT 239-241) is not attracted exclusively to Griselda’s outward appearance, but rather, as Collette points out, recognizes her innate qualities. He is able to observe, without Griselda’s knowing, her humble interactions with Janicula, her perpetual obedience to him, and also her dedication to ensuring his well-being. Chaucer’s version of the tale does not provide a mother for Griselda, and in failing to doing so, allows her to be observed in a patriarchal relationship exclusively with her father and then between her and Walter when she moves from under the control of one

patriarchal figure to another.³⁷ Walter's *prudence* enables him to consider the unfaltering obedience Griselda exhibits within her relationship to her father and to foresee the application of that obedience in a matrimonial relationship with himself. In that sense, Griselda's submission to and compliance with the patriarchal structures enforced by her father are similar if not identical to her obedience to the marital boundaries set by her future husband. Walter's ability to recognize the patriarchal correlation between the two relationships and foresee it as beneficial to his own good is indicative, yet again, of his vigilance.³⁸ Additionally, it can be assumed that if Walter is able to recognize the qualities in Griselda that suggest her nature to be submissive and obedient, then it is likely that Walter can also distinguish these qualities in his subjects and perhaps in the people he chooses to be in his court. Walter's general preference for goodness over outer beauty opens a discourse on not only the desired qualities of a Marquis but also the desired qualities of his female counterpart, his subjects, and even his counselors.

As in the original source of the Walter and Griselda narrative, Chaucer's version includes two infamous oath scenes. One is between Walter and his nobles, and the other is between Walter and Griselda. The

³⁷ "Medieval England was a very male-dominated society, at least at the level of official structures. In principle, every woman was supposed to be under the authority of a man. A girl was subject to her father until she married, at which time she would become subject to her husband" (Jeffrey L. Sigman and Will McLean, 24).

³⁸ Walter sees Griselda conform to the patriarchal structures of her household, over which her father resides as the head figure. She completes her daily duties without complaint, she cares for him in his age, she looks for his consent to her marriage, and she willfully returns to his care upon her marital exile. Walter likely compares the two relationships (that between Griselda and her father and Griselda and himself) as similar because of Griselda's subordination to a paternal figure in each instance. He seems to imagine that the dominance a father exercises over his daughter is not unlike the dominance a ruler exercises over his subjects.

construction of the oath scenes in “The Clerk’s Tale” invites further consideration of the various methods of governance available to late fourteenth century rulers, as well as a discussion of the abuse of power and the fine line between *dominium regale* and *dominium politicum et regale*.³⁹ Moreover, whereas one of Walter’s oaths in the tale is political and the other is domestic, together they allow for a connection between the way Walter rules his land and the way he rules his household. The first oath scene is at the end of part one when Walter agrees to marriage at the request of his noblemen. Even though Walter agrees to satisfy the demands of his people, he avoids having to sacrifice total control of the situation. Walter not only declines his noblemen’s offer to select him a wife, but he also demands that they accept his choice of the wife. He asks, “Lat me allone in chesyng of my wyf-/ That charge upon my bak I wole endure”(CIT 162-3) and then he proposes the oath; “But I yow preye, and charge upon youre lyf,/ What wyf that I take, ye me assure/ To worshipe hire, whil that hir lyf may dure,/ In word and werk, bothe heere and everywhere,/ As she an emperoures doghter weere”(CIT 163-8). Walter then demands of them “that ye/ Agayn my choys shul neither grucche ne stryve”(CIT 169-70). It is important to notice in this

³⁹ Sir John Fortescue articulates two types of government: a ‘royal dominion’, *dominium regale*, and a ‘political and royal dominion’, *dominium politicum et regale*. He defines them: “And they differ in that the first king may rule his people by such laws as he makes himself and therefore he may set upon them taxes and other impositions, such as he will himself, without their assent. The second king may not rule his people by other laws than such as they assent to and therefore he may set upon them no impositions without their assent” (Fortescue, 83). To exercise both ‘political’ and ‘royal’ dominion, according to Fortescue, would be optimal for a successful kingdom. In the beginning of “The Clerk’s Tale”, Walter practices ‘political and royal dominion’, taking into consideration the needs of his people, which is exemplified by his negotiations about marriage. However, by the end of the tale, his manner of governance undoubtedly shifts to ‘royal’ and his interest is strictly personal.

scene the gradual transfer of control as it shifts from Walter to the nobles, then back to Walter. In the beginning, Walter's decision to remain unmarried is entirely his own; therefore he is in control of both his own condition and that of his polity. However, when he agrees to marry at the nobles' request, Walter sacrifices a portion of his power to those below him. He acknowledges this by saying "For sith I shal forgoon my libertee/ At youre requeste"(CIT 171-2). But it can be understood that Walter's prudence and political awareness are what propel him to propose the oath as a way to reclaim the power he forfeits with his agreement to marry. In other words, the control he loses by agreeing to marry is therefore regained when he forces his subordinates to "sworn and assenten" to his choice of bride.⁴⁰ Walter's recognition of the importance that he maintain the control in the situation is not necessarily a fault, yet when his desire for complete sovereignty over his land and subjects becomes an obsession, and when his method of regaining that control is at the expense of his nobles' autonomy (Walter leaves his nobles believing that they have some involvement and input in the future of the polity), Walter crosses the line between a ruler and an abuser of power. Not only is Walter's manipulative method of repossessing control made apparent by his insistence on the oath, but the reality of his contriving manner of government is reinforced by the final element of the oath in which he

⁴⁰ Jill Mann believes that "the process of negotiation by which the marriage is agreed on is thus a classic example of the combination of 'lordshipe' and 'servage'. Each of the parties involved yields in one respect in order to assert their will in another" and that "it also shows the trust that embodies a willingness to hazard the self to the control of others"(Mann, 115). It is true that the political oath scene can be interpreted as an example of cooperative government; however, Walter soon neglects this practice of government once his subjects agree to the oath.

demands that his nobles accept his wife “As she an emperoures doghter weere”(CIT 168). As we have already seen, Walter’s request that his wife be treated *as if* she were of the highest estate indicates that he already knows that she is *not*. Therefore, before Griselda is even introduced in the text and before Walter announces his marriage, he may already have considered Griselda to be a possible wife, though he fails to be honest with his nobles about his plan.

Griselda’s obedience, loyalty, and virtue are only noticed and revealed by Walter in contexts dominated by patriarchal figures. Though not entirely relevant to the political discussion of this essay, this observation offers substantial commentary on female agency in the middle ages. Also, although Walter praises Griselda for her attributes unrelated to beauty, one can not ignore the language Chaucer uses in her description that alludes to her other desired female qualities; sexuality and fertility. While the text reads, “No likerous lust was thurgh hire herte yronne”(CIT 214), which suggests that Griselda lacks sexuality or is perhaps asexual, the passage is saturated with a sexual vocabulary not unlike that used to describe the landscape in the beginning of the tale. To start with, Griselda is referred to as a “mayde tendre”(CIT 218) which undoubtedly implies youth, fertility, and sexual availability. Also, there is allusion to her *virginitie* which, although it implies a lack of sexual experience, actually functions as a way to draw attention *to* her sexuality. In other words, mentioning Griselda’s virginity reminds the reader of her undeveloped sexual potential. Furthermore, in her heart she has a “rype and sad corage”(CIT 220); a description which, according to the text’s

footnote, means “mature and steadfast”. However, the word *rype* also insinuates fertility and sexuality both literally and figuratively. Literally, it means physically ready to reproduce, and figuratively it may be understood to mean reproduction in the sense of Adam and Eve, whose consumption of the ripe, forbidden fruit is a metaphor for sex and procreation. And finally, Chaucer uses the word *bountee* six times in his tale, four of which are in direct reference to Griselda. The text reads “he considered ful right/ Hir *bountee*”(CIT 243-4), “she was encrested in swich excellence/ Of thewes goode, yset in heigh *bountee*”(CIT 408-9), “Noote oonly of Saluces in the toun/ Publices was the *bountee* of hir name,/ But eek biside in many a regioun”(CIT 414-6), and “So spradde of hire heighe *bountee* the fame/ That men and wommen, as wel yonge as olde,/ Goon to Saluce upon hire to biholde”(CIT 418-20). Bounty has more than one definition which allows the passages to be interpreted in two ways. The word means goodness, which is an appropriate way to depict Griselda because she epitomizes virtue, morality, and honor. Yet it also means “a gift, reward”.⁴¹ The alternate meaning of the word implies the *value* that Griselda holds, whether it be in her sexuality, her ability to bear a child, or in her political astuteness that she demonstrates later in the tale. The language Chaucer uses to describe Griselda is intentionally sexual, which suggests that Walter is very much aware of her fertility and potential to bear him a child and the people an heir. To say that Walter’s observation of Griselda is limited to the *inherent* qualities of her nature is

⁴¹ *Middle English Dictionary Vol. I.* Ed. Hans Kurath. Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1954.

inaccurate (though not entirely unfavorable) because Chaucer intentionally insinuates that Walter is conscious of her qualities that anticipate her potential contribution to the political stability of the land.

Walter's decision to marry a woman from a lower social rank is not exactly representative of the ideal fourteenth century royal marriage. In the twelfth chapter of Book II of *The Governance of Kings and Princes*, Giles of Rome advises, "Þanne for bytwene a noble man and noble womman is þew companye, kynges and princes, þat ben of noble blood, for wedloc is iodeyned for þew and worthy companye, sholde take wifes of noble blood".⁴² While the implications of Griselda's lowly social rank are frequently addressed in a domestic context, they are equally important to understanding the various political interpretations of the tale. Instead of reading the situation with a focus on Walter's *descent* to Griselda, it is interesting to concentrate on what it means that Griselda is *ascending* to Walter. Henry Orenstein considers the motivations for raising one's position to one of higher social status, saying, "the constituency, having elevated one of its members to a position of political eminence, may now hold him in its debt for that honor, a debt that he can never fully discharge as long as he remains in office: hence he must comply (or appear to comply) with their demands for goods and/or services".⁴³ Although Orenstein is referring to political practices in general, his theory opens up the possibility that Walter's marriage to Griselda is politically constructed. If Walter is as prudent as some evidence suggests, then it would

⁴² Orenstein, 187.

⁴³ Orenstein, 70.

be a valid assumption that his decision to marry below his rank is actually a political tactic to guarantee that his wife live in a hypothetical debt to him. In Griselda's case, her virtue and patience eradicate her marriage debt in the end, but her triumphant outcome in the marriage doesn't necessarily free Walter from the charge that he may have had mixed intentions or may have expected a different ending. Moreover, the fact that Walter reveals the possibility, through his marriage to Griselda, that he is willing to raise a wife's social status so as to place her strategically in his debt, exposes his desired method of political governance: absolute power.

In the second oath scene, Walter demands that Griselda agree to a contract of submission and unity of will before they marry. He orders, "To al my lust, and that I frely may,/ As me best thynketh, do yow laughe or smerte,/ And nevere ye to grucche it, nyght ne day?...And eek whan I sey 'ye,' ne sey nat 'nay'/ Neither by word ne frowning contenance?/ Swere this, and heere I swere oure alliance"(CIT 352-7).⁴⁴ At this point, Walter has already stated his belief that marriage will take away his freedom and *libertee*. Therefore, as with the motive behind his contracting a political oath of acquiescence with

⁴⁴ The marriage oath that Walter proposes to Griselda is similar to the marriage service, the *Sarum Missal* ("Sarum Missal: The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony", Chaucer: Sources and Backgrounds, Ed. Robert P. Miller. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977. 374-384), the traditional medieval wedding vow which uses comparable language of unity between man and wife. Similar to Walter's proposal that Griselda yield to him, the *Sarum Missal* also implies that the woman should sacrifice her will to the man. It intends "to join together two bodies, to wit, those of this man and this woman, that henceforth they may be one body"(Sarum Missal, 374). What is most striking about the mutual vow that husband and wife have to take is the difference in articulated marital expectations of the male and female: The priest asks of the husband, "Wilt thou love her, and honour her, keep her and guard her?" whereas the woman is asked, "Wilt thou obey him, and serve him, love, honour, and keep him?"(375) The oaths suggest that the wife must promise to forfeit her will to her husband who, in return, demands her obedience. Walter proposes the same conditions to Griselda, yet he even demands that she control her emotions (as referred to by 'frowning contenance').

his subjects, Walter attempts to regain his *libertee* and domestic authority by demanding that Griselda yield her will to him. Subsequently, Griselda responds to Walter's proposition wholeheartedly: "And heere I swere that nevere willingly,/ In werk ne thought, I nyl yow disobeye,/ For to be deed though me were looth to deye"(CIT 362-4).⁴⁵ Although Walter asks Griselda for her submission and she appears willing to give it, the marriage oath scene is slightly more complex than an agreement to a peaceful marriage; it offers, like many of the other domestic scenes, valuable insight into the tale's political interpretations. First of all, even though Walter proposes the oath in a way that makes it seem as if Griselda has a choice, the reader knows in advance that Walter will only accept one answer. Walter admits his intention of having a fully submissive wife before he even asks for Griselda's hand. He says," For I wol axe if it hire wille be/ To be my wyf and reule hire after

⁴⁵ Interestingly, scholars have had just as much critical reply to Griselda's answer as they do to Walter's question. On a basic level, Griselda's compliance can be explained by her upbringing; growing up in a humble household in which she has always patiently and quietly performed her duties leaves her with little experience of rebellion or refusal. With this explanation, Griselda's agreement to sacrifice her will, though incomprehensibly naive, is not necessarily indicative of an organic character flaw. However, J. Allan Mitchell, in his chapter "Griselda and the Question of Ethical Monstrosity" (Ethics and Exemplary Narrative in Chaucer and Gower. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004) asserts an opposing analysis of Griselda's reply. He notes that Griselda's response is not only to Walter's specified conditions, but that she actually *alters* the terms of the oath and makes them even more demanding than before. Walter's marriage prerequisite is that she not resist his authority 'neither by word ne frowning contenance', and Griselda extends those demands offering up her *thoughts* as well. Mitchell explains that "Of course, in principle female submission meets the formal demands of Christian marriage, and she probably could not have hoped to bargain for better terms and conditions" and then he asks, "but did she need to bargain for worse?" (Mitchell, 126) Allan further condemns Walter for not loving his wife the way he should, but effectively adds; "But that Griselda voluntarily submits to her husband's excessive demands may not be a credit to her character either, insofar as she voluntarily and indeed eagerly submits to an extent he does not actually require." The various interpretations of Griselda's reply and agreement to Walter's oath contribute much to the diversity of sympathy readers feel for Griselda at the end of the tale. An alternate interpretation of Griselda's agreement to the marriage oath is that she is making a promise to herself to obey herself. And because she promises to herself that she will obey her own will, her resilience to Walter's testing is not indicative of her obedience to Walter but rather her obedience to her self.

me”(CIT 326-7). This sort of manipulative speech is similar to how Walter interacts with his nobles at their request that he marry: he agrees to their proposition, as if to insinuate that his subjects have some choice over the matter, but he is quick to disclose that he has his own purposes in mind. Moreover, Walter precedes his marriage proposal with a confession that he has already essentially confirmed the marriage agreement with Griselda’s father. He says, “ye shal wel understonde/ It liketh to youre fader and to me/ That I yow wedde, and eek it may so stoned,/ As I suppose, ye wol that it so be”(CIT 344-6). It appears that Walter has every expectation that Griselda will not refuse his proposal, especially if the marriage is also the wish of her father. Therefore, it is possible to say that although Griselda gives her consent to be married, Walter handles the situation in such a way that he maintains complete control. This scene raises the question of the boundaries of Walter’s authority because it demonstrates one of the ways in which Walter is determined to press the limits of cooperative government. It seems that Walter takes his political authority for granted because he expects that his marriage proposal will be obeyed with as much energy and in the same manner as if he were to ask a favor of his nobles. A parallel can thus be drawn between the way in which Walter acquires dominance over his people and the way he is able to control Griselda. Walter’s contracts, both marital and political, indicate his need for sovereignty in the home and the state as well as his need for a unity of will between the governed and the governor. In Medieval England, obedience to political authority was fundamental to the

stability of a commonality and “Government’s role was to force mankind to live in harmony”.⁴⁶ The text implies that Walter is aware of the necessity of social unity and harmony yet his method for achieving it is manipulative and his application of this political theory to his marriage is highly suggestive of his growing obsession with control.⁴⁷

Walter’s unrelenting and insatiable need for control over his people and the will of his subjects is crucial to understanding the quality of his governance. His need for comparable control over his wife helps underscore the connection between marriage and governance in the tale. Walter’s longing for power propels him to insist on Griselda’s and his subjects’ agreement to similar oaths and to go forth with testing Griselda. Michaela Grudin suggests that, “the particular questions raised by *The Clerk’s Tale* about the psychological and spiritual appropriateness of the testing of Griselda are central to the medieval controversy about political unity, especially in

⁴⁶ Michael Hicks, English Political Culture in the Fifteenth Century. London and New York: Routledge, 2002. 23.

⁴⁷ The marriage oath between Walter and Griselda also deals very much with sex. We have seen how from the beginning of the tale, Griselda is sexualized in the same way the land is. Griselda is further sexualized by the implications of the marriage oath because, according to Marie Nelson in her article about marriage debts in Chaucer’s work, “Like a monetary debt, the marriage debt was something that was owed by one person to another. But, according to canon law, unlike a monetary debt, the marriage debt was a mutual obligation owed by spouses to one another by virtue of the sacrament of marriage and not by virtue of some exchange for value” (Marie Nelson, “‘Biheste is dette’: Marriage Promises in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*”. *Papers on Language and Literature*. Spring 2002 Vol. 38 i2. 167). By demanding, as he does from his subjects, that Griselda yield her will, Walter is taking control of Griselda’s sexuality; therefore, securing himself an heir. By planning for an heir, Walter is thus guaranteeing that his inheritance, both political and territorial, not be usurped. The marriage oath, then, is not only useful to the domestic understanding of the tale, but also to the political implications because of the oath’s relevance to Orenstein’s political theory of reciprocity.

fourteenth-century Italy”.⁴⁸ She also states, “The obedience and unity of will which lie philosophically at the very heart of political unity may, if pushed to the extreme in practice, conflict irrevocably with the value of the individual”.⁴⁹ Grudin’s reasoning is entirely applicable to Walter’s manner of governance because he clearly pushes the concept of *unity of will* “to the extreme in practice” in both political and domestic contexts. Using manipulative tactics such as the oaths, Walter succeeds in acquiring his subjects’ total obedience throughout all the trials he makes of Griselda. Consequently, the subjects’ individuality is reduced to that of Walter’s; but Griselda, exposed to the same pressures to unify her will with Walter’s, is able to reclaim her autonomy in the end. Grudin’s argument, then, enables one to understand more vividly Chaucer’s tale as one that assumes political tactics as inapplicable to the marriage construction.

It can be argued that Griselda’s passing of Walter’s tests actually enables her to regain her will and repossess control over her husband. At the end of the tale, Walter declares, “I have thy feith and thy benygnytee,/ As wel as evere woman was, assayed,/ In greet estaat and povreliche arrayed,/ Now knowe I, dere wyf, thy stedfastnesse”(CIT 1053-56). Once Walter acknowledges Griselda’s virtue, he no longer assumes that role of tyrant, his unmerited testing ceases, and “ful many a yeer in heigh prosperitee/ Lyven thise two in concord and in reste”(CIT 1128-9). Some critics assert that when

⁴⁸ Michaela Paasche Grudin, “Chaucer’s *The Clerk’s Tale* as Political Paradox”. *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* Vol. 11. Ed. Thomas J. Hefferman. University of Notre Dame Press, 1989. 63-92, 65.

⁴⁹ Grudin, 65.

Griselda takes the marriage oath, she is voluntarily giving up her will, which signifies that she is acting upon her *own* will as she stays true to her word throughout her husband's mistreatment. From this perspective, Griselda is not only praised for her ability to withstand Walter's trials with patience and humility, but she is also eulogized for her apparently superhuman ability to stay constant and faithful to her own word. Many literary critics understand Griselda to reveal religious qualities characteristic to no woman but the Virgin Mary, or even to Christ himself. Abundant religious references in "The Clerk's Tale" portray Griselda in such a way, including the biblical image of her in the ox's stall, when she silently suffers from Walter's behavior, and when she is described as "from hevене sent was, as men wende,/ Peple to save and every wrong t'amende"(CIT 440-1), which portrays her not only as a religious figure but also as an astute political character. Priscilla Martin maintains that "Griselda is a saint and a martyr and imitation of Christ"⁵⁰ and Jill Mann sees Griselda's Christ-like patience as the means by which she is ultimately able to reverse her marriage role. Mann states, "the story does not simply illustrate the virtue of patience; it shows that patience *conquers*".⁵¹ Essentially, according to Mann, Griselda's suffering functions as her route to power. Although the tale invokes in its readers feelings of sympathy, disbelief, and frustration over Griselda's passivity, Walter's mistreatment of her is often justified at the end of the narrative by Griselda's apparent happiness, the restoration of her family and what seems to be the beginning of

⁵⁰ Priscilla Martin, Chaucer's Women: Nuns, Wives, & Amazons. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1990. 145.

⁵¹ Mann, 119.

the point in Griselda's marriage where her patience leads to her domestic dominance.

Griselda's remarkable suffering is a protean element of the Griselda story. For that reason, her suffering is also a common subject of debate. From a humanistic perspective, her treatment is frequently labeled as unbearable, unjustified, and abusive. From a religious perspective, Griselda's suffering, while far from ideal, is considered noble and Christ-like. Although Chaucer credits Petrarch as his source for the Clerk's story, saying, "I wol yow telle a tale which that I/ Lerned at Padowe of a worthy clerk,/ As preved by his wordes and his werk/...Fraunceys Petrak, the lauriat poete"(CIT 26-31), Chaucer deviates from his source in several places. Even though Griselda still suffers immensely in Petrarch's version, Chaucer amplifies the extent of her daily suffering in *The Canterbury Tales*, which effectively intensifies the development of Walter's tyranny. James Sledd contends that Chaucer's "chief contribution seems to have been a heightening and intensification of the contrasts' which the story offered, so that Walter becomes 'more unfeeling' and Griselda 'more submissive'".⁵² Chaucer maintains the same fundamental plot sequence as does his predecessor, but the fact that he intensifies the extreme behaviors and feelings of his characters leads many to ponder his motive in doing so. Essentially, both narratives portray human suffering at the hands of arbitrary authority, so why would Chaucer go the extra mile to intensify Griselda's suffering and submissiveness and Walter's 'unfeelingness'? There are many valid answers to this question: one is that

⁵² James Sledd, 231.

the exaggerated drama evoked by the tale is Chaucer's way of separating the tale's messages from his own thoughts and prompting readers to see the tale as simply "what it seems to be to the pilgrim audience: a story about male sovereignty, an answer to the Wife of Bath's prologue and story about female sovereignty".⁵³ James Sledd, on the other hand, argues that the tale should be considered in a larger context as an *exemplum* and that Griselda's exaggerated goodness is deliberate so that it may be recognized and practiced. However, while these two interpretations are legitimate and convincing, neither one recognizes the *political exemplum* that emanates from Chaucer's dramatic amplification of Walter's tyranny. In the same way that Griselda's virtue may serve as an example to women and wives, Walter's mis-governance can be perceived as a behavior to avoid. Chaucer seems to deliberately magnify the 'good' and 'bad' extremes in his tale, both domestically and politically, which accordingly draws attention to them. There is no explicit answer to the question of why Chaucer makes his characters behave so dramatically, but it is important to look at the consequences from not only a domestic/marriage perspective, but from a political authoritative perspective as well.⁵⁴

⁵³ Bronfman, 24.

⁵⁴ Many have written about the domestic and marriage discourse proposed by "The Clerk's Tale" without mentioning the politics. However, a discussion of Walter's manner of governance is almost impossible, and surely incomplete, without at least a minor discussion on the domestic issues. Some critics interpret Chaucer's tale as "a story about power, here exercised within a marriage, which is an emblem for society" and that "if Griselda were to be *impatient*, to challenge Walter's authority, it would risk a fundamental disruption of the social order" (Bronfman, 44). In other words, Walter's attempt to master Griselda is understood by some as analogous to a ruler's obligation to achieve social order and stability in his land. According to this theory that the two relationships are analogous, if Griselda were to defy Walter, their marriage would be unstable and would thus imply the jeopardizing of the common good. Consequently, it is often argued by some that Walter's tests are justified and actually strategic because the end result is stability throughout both the land and his household. However, this theory leads one to wonder what message the story would generate

The end of the tale almost always leaves new readers with their brows furrowed in confusion over how such an apparently sweet ending could be reached by an accumulation of such appalling events. But it is the reader or critic that has read “The Clerk’s Tale” multiple times who begins to examine Walter’s actions more closely and question just how sweet the ending really is. Chaucer’s tale can not be looked at from a single perspective; it imagines Walter as a tyrannous brute at the same time that his quiet lamentations for testing Griselda suggest his humaneness; it credits Walter with the prudence and foresight necessary to be a noble ruler as it simultaneously depicts his authoritative insufficiency by questioning his ability to control his desires and pleasures. Furthermore, there are instances that commend Walter for recognizing the importance of public obedience to social stability, while at the same time his method of achieving that obedience is morally debatable. Despite these contradictions, complexities, idiosyncrasies, and ambiguities in the interpretations of Walter’s character, the point remains that the tale’s popular function as an exemplum of domesticity and marriage often unfairly overshadows its utility as a vehicle for a literary exploration of medieval politics and governance.

if in the end, Griselda were *not* happy and if her and Walter’s marriage was *not* restored. In this case, it is difficult to rationalize Walter’s treatment of her even if he does succeed in ruling his people. Therefore, it can be said that in general, Walter’s quality as a person and the ethical justification for his behavior are dependent on Griselda’s fate and her state at the end of the tale. This understanding thus suggests that although political and domestic affairs may be related in terms of their subjection to authority, the dynamics of the two relationships are quite disparate.

CHAPTER TWO

WALTER AT HOME:
 POWER RELATIONSHIPS, PATRIARCHY, AND FAMILY IN THE
 SIXTEENTH CENTURY WALTERS OF THOMAS DEKKER AND JOHN
 PHILLIP

Although not all literature offers an accurate reflection of the society in which it is written and received, it is impossible to dismiss the political events of English rule in the late sixteenth century when attempting to understand the works of John Phillip's *The Commoditye of Pacient and Meeke Grissill* and Thomas Dekker's *The Pleasant Comodie of Pacient Grissill*. Both plays are written in England under the reign of Queen Elizabeth (1558-1603), which was, on a certain level, a politically problematic era in part due to Elizabeth's unwedded status.⁵⁵ Her advisors, like Walter's nobles, articulate to her many times the importance of a royal marriage to the stability of the state, but Elizabeth fervently expresses two responses; one, a preference for single life, which she considers a pious and moral position to be in; and two, the difficulty of narrowing down her endless suitors to someone worthy of kingship. In February of 1559, Elizabeth is presented with a parliamentary

⁵⁵ Although Queen Elizabeth entertained many suitors qualified to be her husband and King of England, she was never satisfied enough to be married. Eventually, "the problem of her succession had become more acute in 1561" (Susan Doran, "Juno versus Diana: The Treatment of Elizabeth I's Marriage in Plays and Entertainments, 1561-1581". *The Historical Journal* Vol. 38, No. 2 [Jun., 1995] 257-254, 260). However, "as Elizabeth entered her forties and was approaching the menopause, interest diminished in a marriage to produce an heir" (Doran, 266).

petition requesting that she marry, to which she responds, “it may please God to encline my harte to an other kynd of life”, assuring also that if she is to marry, “ye may well assure your selves my meaninge is not to do or determine anie thing wherewith the realme may or shall have juste cause to be discontented”.⁵⁶ With little effort, one can see the parallel between the marriage theme of the *Griselda* story and the political situation of the era in which the plays are written. However, neither of the authors draws a direct allegorical connection between their work and Elizabeth’s condition likely because of the fact that candid political and religious reference in theatre was prohibited in 1559. Doran states that “In these circumstances, public productions had to be deliberately general in their subject-matter and obscure in their allusions in order to avoid governmental censorship”.⁵⁷ Neither Dekker nor Phillip claims their play as political propaganda or critique, and nor would they be permitted to make such a claim, but nonetheless their plays function as a means to open political discourse on their own Queen’s marital situation. Dekker’s version of the *Griselda* story makes the most changes, a fact which subsequently lends his play the greater political resonance. Phillip’s play, while still rich with political undertones, is more determined to imagine Walter’s dominance over *Griselda* as analogous to God’s dominance over the people and to a father’s over his family.

Both plays are also *domestic plays*, a genre of theatre that emerged during Queen Elizabeth’s reign. The plays’ classification as *domestic plays*

⁵⁶ T.E. Hartley, *Proceedings in the parliaments of Elizabeth I, 1558-1581*. Leicester, 1981. 45, as cited from Doran, 258.

⁵⁷ Doran, 257-8.

underscores their function as commentaries on familiar obligations. Moreover, sixteenth century *domestic plays* characteristically tend to offer deliberately conflicting messages regarding the relationship between political and domestic spheres, a feature which helps explain why, as with “The Clerk’s Tale”, the validity of the sixteenth-century Walter’s reasoning is often questioned and susceptible to various readings. Viviana Comensoli writes that “although their didacticism serves politically conservative interests, [domestic plays] are often riddled with inconsistencies and contradictions, the authorial perspectives varying with the kinds of readers who are being addressed”.⁵⁸ She also explains that “the genre’s discontinuous and divergent emphases indicate that playwrights by no means respond uniformly to the ideologies and institutions which entrench the hierarchies of class, gender, and status”.⁵⁹ Comensoli’s observations do not attempt to iron out the plays’ discrepancies, but they suggest that most interpretations of conflicting messages are valid.

Conceptually, it is easy to imagine that the household is the fundamental unit of a kingdom. It can also be examined as a microcosm of a kingdom. Therefore, many critics of sixteenth century literature have attempted to parallel domestic governance with political governance using a patriarchal framework as a common denominator. Robert Cleaver and John Dod state that “a household is as it were a little common-wealth” in which the husband or father is “not only a ruler but as it were a little King, and Lord of

⁵⁸ Viviana Comensoli, *‘Household Business’: Domestic Plays of Early Modern England*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press Inc., 1996. 11.

⁵⁹ Comensoli, 11.

all”,⁶⁰ and Constance Jordan supplements the argument by saying, “Domestic possibilities become the basis for discussing civil government”.⁶¹ Phillip’s play is unique in that it creates a domestic space in which a paternal hierarchy is perfectly correlated with the hierarchy that leads to the common profit. Griselda is unfalteringly dedicated to her father who in turn, recognizes his own right to be served by his child. Jordan writes, “A child lacked any authority before its father; governed only by his sense of duty, a father typically got no counsel or check from his child”.⁶² Gordon Schochet also adds that parents are “entitled to the obedience of their children because God has made them His substitutes and agents”.⁶³ Jordan’s and Schochet’s words faithfully reflect Janicle and Griselda’s relationship because of Griselda’s acknowledgement that God would punish her if she were to defy her father. If the patriarchal hierarchy of a household is defined as being sanctioned by God, and a household is a microcosm of the kingdom, then it can be argued that a lord’s power is also sanctioned by God. Schochet contends that patriarchal ideology of the period held that all people of power, “whether they be parents, princes, magistrates, or other superiors, whatsoever they be, have all their power and authority; because by these it has pleased God to rule and

⁶⁰ Robert Cleaver and John Dod, A Godlie Forme of Householde Government. London: 1612, as cited from Constance Jordan’s “The Household and the State: Transformation in the Representation of an Analogy from Aristotle to James I”, *Modern Language Quarterly* Vol. 54:3. 1993. 307-326, 316-7.

⁶¹ Constance Jordan, “The Household and the State: Transformation in the Representation of an Analogy from Aristotle to James I” *Modern Language Quarterly* 54:3. (Sep. 1993) 307-326, 313.

⁶² Jordan, 309.

⁶³ Gordon J. Schochet, Patriarchalism in Political Thought: The Authoritarian Family and Political Speculation and Attitudes Especially in Seventeenth-Century England. New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1975. 39.

govern the world”.⁶⁴ Additionally, the Fifth Commandment, which states “Honour thy father and thy mother” (Exodus 20:12) was frequently used as a contention in this debate, and some sixteenth century political and religious theorists even understand the ‘father’ and ‘mother’ to be political references. In the context of Phillip’s play, then, Walter’s identification and appreciation of Griselda’s obedience to her father suggests that he is aware of the household/State comparison and may anticipate Griselda’s transfer of subordination from her father to himself, especially so because according to theory God has sanctioned both forms of patriarchal power.

Whereas most points of discussion in the Griselda stories are contestable, there are also a variety of contrasting interpretations of the association between household and political patriarchies, as well as their origin. Aristotle’s writings about household and polity, well-known in sixteenth century England, offered a different way of thinking about subordination and the correspondence of household to government. Aristotle disputes the correlation between the two governments. He does this by addressing slaves, women, and children as all subjects of the master/husband/father but *different types* of subjects in that they “partak[e] of virtue, not in the same way, but as much as is required by each to perform his function”.⁶⁵ Aristotle proposes that while the paternal power is always the dominant force, whether in state or home, the subjects are distinct in quality of

⁶⁴ Schochet, 46. (He cites from Alexander Nowell’s A Catechism Written in Latin [1563] trans. Rhomas Norton [1570], Ed. G.E. Corrie. Cambridge: 1853. 130-1).

⁶⁵ Aristotle, Aristotle’s Politics. Trans. Hippocrates G. Apostle and Lloyd P. Gerson. Grinnell, Iowa: The Peripatetic Press, 1986. 35.

virtue. Therefore, the bond between king and subject differs from the bond between father and child. From Aristotle's perspective, Griselda's obedience to her father is not related to the subjects' obedience to Walter because the relationships are based on different principles. However, while Griselda is Walter's wife, she is also his subject, and therefore her obedience to Walter in the political hierarchy would be similar to the subordination of Walter's other subjects. While Aristotle's theory attempts to distinguish political rule from domestic rule, the sixteenth century Walter endeavors to amalgamate the two powers.

In this two-part chapter, I will be concerned with the political reverberations of Dekker's *The Pleasant Comodie of Pacient Grissill* in part I, and with the political, religious, and familiar themes in Phillip's *The Comedy of Pacient and Meek Grissill* in part II. Although the two plays are closely related because of the proximity of the years in which they were written, they are unique enough in their thematic content that I discuss the dramas separately.

I

COOPERATIVE GOVERNMENT AND THE PUBLIC-PRIVATE
CONNECTION
THOMAS DEKKER

As in “The Clerk’s Tale”, the opening scene of Dekker’s version of the Griselda story is essential to instituting a thematic framework. Dekker, though, succeeds in doing something very different from the way his predecessors work the opening lines. First, he has Walter articulate the landscape imagery in a brilliant yet elusive way by not describing the land itself, but rather by stressing the capacity for transformation within it. He observes “Looke how yon one-ey’d wagoner of heaven,/ Hath by his horses fiery winged hoofes,/ Burst ope the melancholy Iayle of Night,/ And with his gilt beames cunning *Alchemy*,/ Turn’d al these cloudes to gold”(I.i.6-10). The concept of transformation appears later in the play as well when Walter relays the intention of his marriage; “By loves most wondrous Metamorphosis,/ To turne this Maide into your Brothers wife”(I.ii.234-5). Interestingly enough, although the allusions of transformation are in reference to Griselda, by the end of the tale it is Walter who changes (owing to Griselda’s proven virtue) and Griselda who is celebrated for her steadfastness.⁶⁶ The terminology

⁶⁶ Walter appears to change in two ways throughout the story, one being positive and the other negative. One change is evident in the cessation of his desires to test Griselda; a transformation which suggests that her proven virtue is more powerful than Walter’s desires. However, another transformation that Walter undergoes, which is evident in all four versions of the story studied in this paper, is Walter’s change from wanting a little control to desiring

related to change and metamorphosis used throughout the tale has two functions. The first purpose it serves is as a reminder that Walter is human, and that humans evolve and learn. Thus, the reader enters the text conscious of the fact that although Walter's actions are abominable, there is a possibility that he may change. In addition, change resonates *power*, thus calling attention to Walter's political capacity.

Unlike Chaucer or Phillip, Dekker gives Walter an extensive metaphoric speech in which hunting for beasts is overtly paralleled with hunting for a bride. In previous versions, this correlation is pointed out by neither the author nor a character, but is instead left to the reader to discover. The implications of this change in Dekker's work are significant because it stresses the importance of recognizing and acknowledging, right away, the association between a husband and a hunter; a hunter is almost always a male, who in turn is a patriarchal figure, and ultimately a political dignitary. Walter epitomizes this hypothetical progression when he says, "hunting is a sport for Emperors"(I.i.14). After his subjects identify Walter's poor choice in "hunt[ing] poore deere when [he] should seeke a Bride"(I.i.28), Walter responds metaphorically: "How much your judgemens erre: who gets a wife/ Must like a huntsman beate untrodden pathes,/ To gaine the flying presence of his loue"(I.i.35-37). Walter ends his speech with the rhetorical question, "Then can you blame me to be hunter like,/ When I must get a wife? But be content"(I.i.53-54). Essentially, these words solidify Walter's notion he can

absolute control in all aspects of his life. As the plot progresses, Walter becomes more and more obsessed with absolute power. The two changes in Walter arise from different interpretations of the story because clearly, the two changes contradict one another.

apply his political power to just about anything, including domestic relations. Also, Walter's confidence in delivering his lengthy speech on hunting emphasizes his masculinity to an even higher degree than Chaucer's Walter. The magnification of Walter's passion for hunting not only accentuates his masculinity and thus, political authority, but it simultaneously brings to the forefront his tendency toward tyranny.

Walter's language in his hunting speech suggests, even more strongly than in Phillip's and Chaucer's works, that Walter is aware of his political obligations to his subjects long before his people mention their concerns, and that his delay in marriage has been deliberate and strategic. If this is the case, then Walter demonstrates a level of prudence not present in his earlier portrayals. The opening of Dekker's play is also original in that it does not begin with the nobles asking Walter to marry. Instead, it is *implied* that they have already requested, at an earlier date, that he find a wife. More interestingly, the day the scene opens is the day that Walter has agreed to celebrate his marriage, but as an alternative, he spends the day hunting. His nobles respectfully express their anxieties and disappointment about the wedding delay, saying, "How swift youths Bias runs to catch delights,/ To me it is not unknowne: no brother *Gualther*,/ When you were woo'd by us to choose a wife,/ This day you vowed to wed: but now I see,/ Your promises turne all to mockerie"(I.i.17-21). The time lapse between when Walter is asked to marry and the day of the opening scene presents two contradicting descriptions of Walter's character, which, although expressed in reference to

his manner of domestic governance, simultaneously offer valuable insight into how he governs his people. In one way, the time lapse functions as a critique of Walter's ability to rule because it suggests that Walter has frivolously allowed his pastimes to interfere with his political duties. King James I argues that a tyrant "thinketh his people ordeined for him, a prey to his passions and inordinate appetites, as the frutes of his magnanimitie",⁶⁷ a definition which would classify Walter as a neglectful and a tyrannous ruler. On the other hand, the time delay can also be interpreted as praise of Walter's political strategy. In other versions of the story, the nobles ask Walter to marry, he sees Griselda in the woods, and immediately asks for her hand in marriage. However, it appears that Dekker's Walter may purposely delay his marriage so that he may ensure that the woman he chooses to marry is the right one. It is even made certain, unlike "The Clerk's Tale" which is more ambiguous, that Walter has encountered Griselda on prior occasions. Griselda reveals this in a conversation with her father: "Although the *Marquesse* sometimes visit us,/ Yet all his words and deedes are like his birth,/ Steept in true honor"(I.ii.68-70). Walter even confesses to the effort he goes through to make sure Griselda is worthy; "I have wooed the virgin long, oh manie an houre,/ Have I bin glad to steale from all your eyes,/ To come disguis'd to her: I sweare to you,/ Beautie first made me love, and virtue woe"(I.ii.252-5). If Walter does indeed delay his marriage on purpose, he is displaying high levels of vigilance and deliberation. Therefore, the relationship that exists between

⁶⁷ King James I, *Basilicon Doran*. *King James VI and I: Political Writings*. Ed., Johann P. Sommerville. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. 20.

Griselda and Walter before the play even begins is indicative of Walter's strategic manner of governance and imagines a good ruler as one who plans and prepares.

The opening scene of Dekker's play not only expands the hunting metaphor and the importance of the land to insinuate that the text is highly political, but it also constructs the political framework in an original way; it introduces a discourse on public and private space. As Harry Keyishian observes, the language of the first scene is one of light and dark, day and night. He notes that Walter is characterized by sun/light imagery and that he "associates himself with vigorous activity", while "Grissil, on the other hand, is portrayed in terms of shrinking and passivity".⁶⁸ However, even though Keyishian's observation ends here, the light/dark significance is actually much more profound than what he proposes. Griselda tells her father "I could be more content to worke within"(I.ii.28), a confession which literally means she prefers to reside in the household but figuratively suggests that she represents the *private* sphere, often correlated with the domestic and the feminine. On the other hand, Walter loves to spend his time outside, thus representing the *public* sphere, which is almost always dominated by the male. The text is saturated with language that exposes Walter's desire for complete, unquestioned authority over his subjects, and thus, his marriage could be interpreted as Walter's attempt not to *unite* the public and private spheres, but rather an attempt to conquer the one social space that is not appropriate for

⁶⁸ Harry Keyishian, "Griselda on the Elizabethan Stage: The Patient Grissil of Chettle, Dekker, and Haughton". *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* Vol. 16, No. 2, Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama, (Spring, 1976) 253-261, 255.

him: the domestic. Walter's repetitive testing of Griselda has always been understood as a method to confirm her virtue but it is possible that he tests Griselda to prove her *immoral* or flawed, thus granting himself the right to extend his power from the public into the private sphere. What is most interesting is that Griselda not only proves herself over-qualified to succeed at domesticity, but the fact that Walter's nobles discretely respect and honor her proves her capable of functioning in the public realm as well. Moreover, the fact that Griselda survives the testing, is able to maintain the stability of her domestic space, and ultimately control Walter with her virtue, suggests that there are limitations to patriarchal power.

One of Dekker's most interesting and effective changes to the traditional wife-testing plot is providing Griselda with a family unit. In Boccaccio, Petrarch, and Chaucer versions, Griselda's only family member is her father, whose function in the text is minimal. However, Dekker gives Griselda a father, Janicola; a brother, Laureo; and a servant, Babulo, who all play a definite role in the drama. The addition of Griselda's family allows for several things to happen. First, it creates an opportunity for the inappropriateness of Walter's obsession with control to be emphasized and establishes a setting in which Walter's subjects can honestly and candidly reflect on Walter's manner of governance; second, it creates a new social space in which a subject's responsibility to his patriarchal authority, or lord, can be examined; and lastly, it provides an opportunity to consider Walter's status in the overall hierarchy of paternal powers.

The addition of Griselda's family allows Dekker to examine the inappropriateness of Walter's desire to test and control Griselda. In previous works, Griselda is described as being loyal to her father, but in Dekker's and Phillip's plays where the family scene is tremendously extended, Griselda's steadfastness, patience, and diligence is consequently dramatized. Before she even commits to submission under Walter's command, Griselda demonstrates the capacity for obedience and assent at the demands of her other paternal figures; her father and brother. She is ordered, "Fetch water from the spring to seeth our fish"(I.ii.153), "*Grissill* make hast, run and kindle fire"(I.ii.157), and "*Grissill* spin us yearne to cloath our backs,/ Thou shalt reade doctrine to us for the soule"(I.ii.165-6). Although her father's demands are not morally violating in the way that Walter's are often interpreted to be, they equally demonstrate that Griselda is either virtuous by nature or is brought up to obey paternal instruction. Joel T. Rosenthal writes that the worth of patriarchy "was exalted to the point where it largely governed the definition of the family, and thence it controlled function and interaction. Each person's role within the patrilineal and the patriarchal drama also became a critical factor in the molding of his or her individual conception of self- of what we refer to as ego identity".⁶⁹ For that reason, the expression of Griselda's virtue before she enters marriage discredits Walter as being the one who controls her because essentially her actions define her as a virtuous woman with or without him. If Walter is not, therefore, the authority that controls and shapes Griselda, the

⁶⁹ Joel T. Rosenthal, *Patriarchy and Families of Privilege in Fifteenth Century England*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991. 57.

cruelty of his tests is intensified because they are not justified or necessary in any way. Thus, the display of Griselda's premarital virtue draws attention to Walter's unrelenting need to achieve and exercise control as well as his inability to recognize when excessive control is not needed. If Walter is not able to identify the point where the execution of authority becomes excessive and abusive in his own household, it is unlikely that he will be able to manage his power properly and appropriately in public office.

Janicola and Laureo are not only paternal figures to Griselda; they are also subjects to Walter. Therefore, in giving Janicola and Laureo more impressive roles in the play, Dekker provides an opportunity to further examine the relationship between Walter and his subjects. In the earlier versions of the wife-testing plot, the only stated opinion of Walter's governing tactics comes from his nobles and is otherwise left to the interpretation of the reader. However, Janicola and Laureo both have their own views, though conflicting, of the way Walter uses/abuses his authority. Janicola, who is Griselda's paternal figure until she is married, and then again when she is banished from court, fully understands the patriarchal role and does not condemn Walter for his actions. And, although he is the patriarchal figure of his own household, he maintains his position of subordination to his lord, Walter. Using words similar to Griselda's, he says "What to my Lord seemes best to me seemes so"(I.ii.260) and excuses Walter's behavior with "And let's forget these wrongs as never done"(IV.ii.91). Therefore, Janicola not only emulates Griselda's virtue and patience, but he also respects Walter's

superiority and power that allows him to manage a wife in the way he manages his state. In other words, Janicola is what Walter would consider an ideal subject. Johann P. Sommerville writes that during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century “Subjects might suspect that the ruler is exceeding his traditional powers, but they cannot challenge him, for it is sedition to dispute his prerogative”.⁷⁰ Accordingly, Janicola accepts the significance of his subordination, which is that his will is Walter’s will and that he is in no social position to question Walter. It should be noted, also, that while Janicola endures Walter’s governing strategy, Janicola’s household is actually the epitome of the ideal patriarchal construction. His household functions so well not only because Janicola has control over Griselda and Laureo, but also because his children respect their father. Although Dekker’s play is an early modern drama, Rosenthal’s comments on fifteenth century writings on the late medieval household express an idea applicable to the sixteenth century Walter. He explains, “there was an element of reciprocity, of mutuality. In many ways the father needed his son and heir, and some sort of two-way dynamic often existed”.⁷¹ Laureo, on the other hand, does not share the same view as his father and feels no shame in accusing Walter of abusing his authority. As a frustrated scholar, Laureo enters the play having returned home from the University unsatisfied with the monetary benefits of his education. Although he is a male and theoretically a patriarchal figure to Griselda, Laureo is not as forgiving of Walter’s treatment of his sister and is

⁷⁰ Johann P. Sommerville, *King James VI and I: Political Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. xxvi.

⁷¹ Rosenthal, 60.

unable to justify Walter's expectation that Griselda obey him to the degree that his subjects do. He angrily professes "Then hast thou no true soule, for I would curse/ From the Sunnes arising to his westerne fall,/ The *Marquesse* and his flattering minions"(IV.ii.69-71). While both father and son are the dominant figures of their own household as well as subordinate figures within their community, they each view Walter's manner of governance differently. Janicola, upset at his son's impatience, even tries to persuade him into forgiveness. He advises, "Peace my sonne,/ I thought by learning thou hadst been made wise,/ But I perceive it puffeth up thy soule... Those that doe strive to justle with the great,/ Are certaine to be bruz'd, or soone to breake"(IV.ii.7-9, 17-18). Their contradiction in judgment is perhaps reflective of the existence of a wide range of public sentiment regarding dedication and acquiescence to political authority. Moreover, Janicola's attempt to quiet his son's blasphemy against Walter reiterates the responsibility that a subject has to his lord.

The addition of Laureo and the more extensive role of Janicola in Dekker's play help Dekker to imagine a universal patriarchal order. Rosenthal states that "Patriarchy was an idea, an ideal type that crystallized into a major component of the social system, with a set of values created to explain, control, and perpetuate the hierarchal pyramid".⁷² The application of patriarchy to the 'hierarchal pyramid' can be examined, primarily, through Laureo's open disagreement with Walter's treatment of Griselda, despite his father's and sister's request that he remain patient and submissive to his lord.

⁷² Rosenthal, 57.

However, when Walter returns Griselda's children and reveals his true intentions in the final scenes, Laureo retracts his previous argument and indignant sentiment against Walter and succumbs to Walter's rule. He pleads, "Pardon me my gracious Lord, for now I see,/ That scholars with weake eyes, pore on their bookes,/ But want true soules to judge on Majestie:/ None else but Kings can know the hearts of Kings"(V.ii.215-18). This scene reveals the extent of Walter's power because he is finally able to convince the most obstinate of his subjects that his will is absolute. Moreover, the irony created by Laureo's political "blindness" despite his scholarly background delivers the message that a sovereign's word is more valuable, according to the social hierarchy, than the academic word. Laureo's transformation is repeated by Griselda who dedicates all of her energy to devotedly pleasing her father before she is married. Yet, once she is married, her duty changes from Janicola to Walter, therefore requiring that her devotion change as well. Griselda recognizes this inevitable shift and states, "As her olde Father yeeldes to your dread will,/ So she her fathers pleasure must fulfill./ If olde *Janicola* make *Grissill* yours,/ *Grissill* must not deny"(I.ii.267-270). In this scene, Griselda's surrender and assent to paternal figures shifts from her father to her husband, who is also her lord. Ultimately, with this transfer of owed submission and with Laureo's closing apology, Dekker suggests a patriarchal hierarchy that places the lord above the husband, who is in turn above the father. Neither Chaucer nor Phillip extensively develop the characters of

Griselda's family and therefore do not so strongly put forth such suggestive commentaries on patriarchal politics.

The political overtones in Dekker's play are amplified in the scene where Walter chooses Griselda as his wife at her house in the woods. The nobles have taken an oath not to question Walter's marriage partner, but they can not help protest when they realize that he intends to marry poor Griselda. They reason, "This meane choice, will distaine your noblenes"(I.ii.274) and ask "What will the world say when the trump of fame/ Shall sound your high birth with a beggers name?" (I.ii.279-280) The subjects' hesitancy about Griselda's qualifications suggests, from one perspective, that they do not possess the same prudence as Walter and are unable to see past Griselda's cloak of poverty into her inner beauty. In this case, it is clear that the subjects are in need of a patriarchal figure to make decisions and maintain order in the kingdom. Hence, the measures Walter takes to ensure their obedience are justified. Moreover, the subjects' protests represent the voices of the kingdom and the general public's potential discontent with Walter's choice. Comensoli concludes that, "[t]he courtiers' persistent taunts evoke in the marquess feelings of anger, doubt, and shame, which lead to a sudden 'burn[ing]...desire' (II.ii.20) to mortify his wife".⁷³ Although he claims he is pretending, Walter even blames Griselda for the public anxieties about his marriage. He tells her, "Yea die to doe thee good, but that my subjects/ Upbraid me with thy birth, and call it base,/ And grieve to see thy Father and thy Brother/ Heav'de up to dignities"(II.ii.116-9). While readers know that

⁷³ Comensoli, 56.

Walter is lying about the public discontent as part of Griselda's test, his remarks still highlight the very real problem of satisfying both public and private spheres. Comensoli writes, "Sensitive to the public outcry, the marquess blames Grissil for his dishonour, bitterly regretting the joy he had found in marriage" and that "his defence against public dishonour is a source of personal anguish".⁷⁴ Comensoli seems to imply that there may be some truth to Walter's pretend anxieties. It may be true that Walter genuinely doubts his marriage decision based on his nobles' original resistance to Griselda's class and that his 'pretending' actually represents his true apprehensions. His solution to the political dilemma is, though arguably inappropriate, to test Griselda to prove to the public her worthiness and thus to confirm the aptness of Walter's own judgment. Eventually, Walter confesses, "I grieve/ To see you grieve that I have wrong'd my state,/ By loving one whose baseness now I hate"(II.ii.133-135). Walter's confession reveals two things. First, with 'state' meaning Walter's polity, it discloses that Walter acknowledges that his principal priority as lord is to please his people, even at the expense of his own wife's wellbeing. Second, with 'state' meaning Walter's rank in the hierarchy of power, the confession suggests that Walter indeed fears his decision to marry Griselda was a poor one and that it has the potential to affect his lordship.

The nobles' passionate protests at Walter's decision to marry Griselda are intertwined with historical politics. Queen Elizabeth, as does Walter, also entertains a potential marriage partner who is not well received by the public.

⁷⁴ Comensoli, 56.

Susan Doran writes that Elizabeth's possible marriage to the duke of Anjou "was feared and opposed by many within the political nation",⁷⁵ which is almost analogous to the situation that Walter finds himself in. However, unlike Walter, Elizabeth listens to the public outcries and is "forced to accept that marriage to Anjou would alienate her from most of her councilors and protestant subjects".⁷⁶ Moreover, her subjects are so anxious about the marriage that as a preventative measure, they begin to celebrate her chastity and nobly name her the 'Virgin Queen'. In Elizabeth's case, she follows the advice of her people, "regain[s] the initiative and manage[s] to reap political benefit from the idealization of her chastity",⁷⁷ and both political and domestic needs are met. Walter, on the other hand, while he recognizes that his subjects object to his marrying Griselda, proceeds with the marriage. And, instead of avoiding the marriage altogether, like Queen Elizabeth, Walter chooses to satisfy his nobles by proving their anxieties baseless. This situation confirms that Walter is stubborn and unwilling to compromise and participate in a cooperative government. What is interesting in the end is that in Walter's case, as in Elizabeth's, both his political and domestic needs are met. The fact that Elizabeth and Walter both reach political and domestic harmony via divergent paths is an occurrence worthy of note because it allows Dekker to imagine the lord's political decisions to be almost entirely isolated from the opinions of his subjects whether or not he asks them their advice.

⁷⁵ Doran, 272.

⁷⁶ Doran, 273.

⁷⁷ Doran, 274.

The repetitive assurance of Griselda's virtue lessens the critique of Walter's actions because it demonstrates that he knows something about Griselda's nature that is worth proving to the public.⁷⁸ Thus, as an alternative interpretation, Walter's disregard for his nobles' objections can be translated into an act of prudence and good sense, while his testing of Griselda can be understood as a means for Walter to prove his wife's virtue to his kingdom and to affirm that she does, in fact, deserve deference. In this respect, Walter's domestic trials are actually imagined to be a political move, which therefore suggests, contrary to the previous analysis, an existing connection between domestic power relations and patriarchal structures in politics.

Walter's attempts to govern his wife in the same manner he governs his people suggests that he perceives his relationship with his subjects as equivalent to (on some level) his relationship with his wife. By default, this perception launches a discussion regarding the *necessity* of control over an individual or a group of people. A common perception of marriage during the early modern years was often viewed as a means of containing the female; her will, her individuality, and especially her sexuality. Regarding the need to control female sexuality in sixteenth century England, Anthony Fletcher writes that "as a will thus resigned to reason and just authority is felicity all rational natures should aspire to, so especially the feminine sex, whose

⁷⁸ Each version of the Griselda story promises, by virtue of being a Griselda story, contradictions. Hence, the repetitive assertion of Griselda's goodness can be understood in two different ways. As explained in the body of this text, the repetition of her integrity and purity justifies Walter's reasons for testing her because it provides him with the excuse of wanting to show the public her noble qualities. On the other hand, the frequent mention of her virtue also *discredits* Walter's reason for testing her because if her goodness is so obvious throughout the text, then Walter really has no justification for making her suffer the painful trials. From this perspective, Walter's cruelty is manifested.

passions being naturally the more impetuous ought to be more strictly guarded and kept under the severe discipline of reason”.⁷⁹ And Comensoli defines marriage as “the blending of two identities into one, namely the husband’s”.⁸⁰ Although Griselda shows no character flaws in any of the texts that would indicate a need to be contained, Walter attempts to control her nevertheless. On the other hand, as we have seen, Walter’s people behave in a manner that indicates their incompetence in governing themselves and their need to be governed by a more capable individual. For example, even though they recognize Walter’s need to marry in order to guarantee a future for the kingdom, Walter’s demand that they agree to the social contract to ensure their acceptance of his chosen wife suggests Walter’s knowledge of the limitation of the citizens’ self-governance. Also, their hasty, unquestioned change of loyalty from Griselda to Walter’s “new wife” in all three texts also implies that the people can be irrational and inconsistent, unlike Griselda. Finally, as previously stated, Walter’s ability to see virtue through superficiality, while “the people have no greet insight/ In vertu” (CIT 242-3) is a strong indication that the kingdom needs to be governed. Michaela Grudin states, of Chaucer’s version, “Not only is Walter able to recognize virtue, but the people explicitly lack this ability. Contrasted with Griselda, the diversity and changeability of the crowd becomes a powerful argument for the need for authority, a need which, in its turn, again creates the potential for paradox”.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England 1500-1800*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995. 386.

⁸⁰ Comensoli, 23.

⁸¹ Grudin, 81.

Clearly, Walter's desire for absolute control over Griselda is unnecessary and unfounded; while on the other hand, Walter's people need governance and guidance. Dekker's characters object the most vociferously to Walter's decision to marry Griselda, and they are also the most apologetic when they realize her virtue. Their fluctuation in opinion, mood, and loyalty portrays them to be most needy of leadership, while Griselda remains virtually immune to the need for governance. This originality in Dekker's text further emphasizes the difficulty that exists in trying to imagine a wife with the same need for patriarchal dominance as the subjects of a kingdom. But even more importantly, while the play discredits public intelligence, it reiterates the importance of a lord to his subjects and his role in maintaining order and peace.

Unlike Chaucer, Dekker expands the role of Walter's nobles in the play which consequently permits the text to explore the function of the court and Walter's relation to them. According to King James I, the purpose of the king's court, or his *councilors*, is "to consult and deliberate upon matters of difficulty which appertain to the king; and then upon the matters of the policy of the realm".⁸² And he assures that "if the king should have such a council as is before specified, his land shall not only be rich and wealthy...but also his highness shall be mighty, and of power to subdue his enemies, and all others upon whom he shall wish to reign".⁸³ In Dekker's play, more so than in any other version, Walter frequently seeks the advice of his council. He beckons

⁸² King James I, 116.

⁸³ King James I, 117.

to Mario, “Nay come *Mario* your opinion too,/ H’ad neede of ten men’s wit that goes to woe”(I.i.30) and asks Lepido, “Tis well; but counsell me whats best to doe,/ How shall I please my subjects?”(II.ii.166-7) What needs to be noted, however, is that although Walter continues to request his nobles’ thoughts regarding his actions and decisions, and although his constant need for assurance that he is doing the right thing suggests insecurity and weakness, Walter reveals that he is astute enough to recognize the superficiality and flattery in his nobles’ responses. On the other hand, Walter’s nobles admit, in asides, that their flattery and superficiality is fueled by their obligation to obey their king. In one conversation among Walter, Mario, and Lepido, the two nobles dramatically agree with every word Walter utters, even though they feel internally conflicted about doing so. Walter, in recognition of their flattery, cries, “They both confesse my *Grissils* innocence,/ They both admire her wondrous patience,/ Yet in their malice and to flatter me,/ Head-long they run to this impiety”(III.i.153-6). The third noble, Furio, abstains from flattery but struggles with finding a balance between advising his king properly and remaining obedient. In one scene with Walter, Mario, and Furio, where Walter asks them their opinion on his baby, Mario’s responses are inconsistent and fluctuating, whereas Furio stays truthful and constant. Walter immediately makes the comparison between Furio and Mario and scolds, “Run flatterie,/ Because I did blaspheme and cal it browne,/ This Parrasite cride (like an Eccho) browne”(IV.i.32-4) King James I makes a strong argument against flattery in the king’s court and warns, “be at warre with your

owne inward flatterer φιλαυτία, how much more should ye be at war with outward flatterers, who are nothing so sib to you, as your selfe is".⁸⁴ Walter's recognition of the insincerity of his nobles' advice reflects a desirable quality in him as a lord, and distinguishes him as being far more politically conscious than he is portrayed to be in other versions. So why does Walter continue to ask for his nobles' opinions? He desires to test their obedience in the same way that he is testing Griselda. He even admits, "If thou abide unblemisht, then I sweare,/ I have found two wonders that are sildome rife,/ A trusty servant, and a patient wife"(IV.i.238-40). Dekker's work is entirely original in its double-trial structure which adds profound political commentary to his play regarding the trust that must exist between a lord and his councilors in order for a polity to be optimally successful.

Dekker imagines Walter to possess many of the ideal qualities of a lord: prudence, intelligence, authoritativeness, and a clear vision for the future of his polity. However, throughout the play Walter's quest for power, both political and domestic, escalates to the point where it becomes excessive and counterproductive. Walter attempts to justify his double testing by saying it is to prove Griselda worthy of her position and to test the genuineness of his councilors. But, as the trials become extreme and Walter becomes more intent to prove his power, the tests become more unnecessary and cruel. The subjects, though they are flatterers, are by no means malicious, and Griselda clearly does not need to be proven virtuous because her virtue is eminent before she meets Walter; hence it is clear that Walter's pursuit of power and

⁸⁴ King James I, 37.

domination is driven by no force but his own desire and obsession. The power this 'force' has to propel Walter into cruel behavior is indicative of a character flaw, potentially dangerous to the welfare of the public. As his quest for power continues, the line separating his private space from his public space seems to fade in Walter's attempt to command them both.

II

LORDSHIP, OBLIGATION, AND PATRIARCHAL HIERARCHIES
JOHN PHILLIP

It is not clear when exactly John Phillip wrote *The Comedy of Patient and Meek Grissill*, but his play probably dates between 1565 and 1569. His version of the Walter and Griselda story is a morality play that is rich with religious, allegorical language. As with the other versions of the tale, the dynamics of the relationship between Phillip's Walter and Griselda is the focus of the majority of published literary criticism on the play. However, also as with the other texts studied in this thesis, Phillip's rendition of the wife-testing plot can be examined from a political perspective regarding Walter's relationship with his subjects and his methods of political governance. Phillip's play is unique in the fact that it uses the importance of mankind's obedience to God to buttress its argument about the importance of the public's acquiescence to their lord. Furthermore, Phillip's changes produce a play in which Walter's actions are noticeably more forgivable than are the other Walters' actions and his political decisions also seem less tyrannous. He is not entirely, though, immune to critique.

The opening scene of Phillip's play, though very different from Dekker's, allows for a direct observation of Walter's character and his political aptitude. To begin with, his hunting is not described in terms of

excess or obsession, nor is it allegorized with searching for woman. Walter's nobles do not blame him for allowing his sport to interfere with his responsibilities; in fact, Walter reveals that he is very much aware of the appropriate use of hunting. He says, "To noble states the venal game of hunting doth pertain,/ To recreate their tristy minds and make them joy again./ So we, which long in secret close have kept the walled town,/ Did judge it mete the chase to sue, thereby to win renown"(lines 62-65). Unlike Chaucer's and Dekker's Walter, Phillip's Walter is not critiqued by his nobles for his tyrannous pursuit of hunting. Instead, Walter acknowledges that he uses the sport as a way to clear his mind so that, presumably, he may return to his duties with a refreshed perspective. Walter's appropriate use of hunting is therefore complementary to his lordship and suggestive of his acute awareness of his political responsibilities. Moreover, Walter's nobles do not approach him with their concerns, as they do in the other versions. Rather, Walter is the one who asks his nobles what is troubling them. He offers, "Speak on, my knightly knights, each one show forth your mind,/ If that in us, through ruling state, once faulty ye us find"(lines 72-3). The idea that Walter does not wait until his habits or marital status become matters of concern but that he instead anticipates a confrontation with his nobles is an indication of his creditable governance skills. Walter's performance is commendable in Phillip's version because he takes the initiative to inquire about his subjects' welfare and does it in a way that is genuine and honorable.

Observing the nobles' reactions to Walter is a reliable way to try to understand Walter's relationship to them. Their words indicate that they maintain a high level of respect for Walter and that they recognize the importance of voicing their opinions without being discourteous to their lord. As in the earlier versions, the nobles emphasize the longevity of their concerns before they articulate what their concerns are. They say, "Long time have we your servants heard the commons' muttering voice,/ Long time have we concealed the cause why they cannot rejoice./ Long time have we, in secret close, gushed forth our bitter tears"(lines 128-130). Finally, Sobriety discloses the reason for their anxieties, "This is the cause that anguish doth our solace banish quite,/ That you in single state abide, and marriage do refrain"(151-5). The nobles' confession that they have remained quiet and suffering for so long suggests that they have been dealing with an internal conflict between their duty to their lord to advise him and their obligation to the oath of unquestioned obedience they have implicitly taken as councilors. Moreover, Walter's nobles not only display their advisory capabilities in this scene, but they also show high levels of intelligence. Their intelligence is revealed in the following scenario: Walter, as in the other versions, defends his unmarried status. In Phillip's play, he accomplishes this by supporting his argument with a biblical reference: "My friends, full friendly I reply, with protestation due,/ That single life preferred is in sacred scripture true/... Twice happier are the single ones, St. Paul doth plainly prove./ For such as lead a virgin's life, and sinful lust expel,/ In heaven above the ethereal skies with

Christ, their Lord shall dwell”(167-173). Here, Walter not only says that it is noble to be single, but he is also attempting to reinforce his power to remain single by arguing that it is what God prefers. However, Walter’s subjects match his intelligible reasoning in their reply by acknowledging the scripture Walter alludes to and refuting it with their own reasons. Fidence respects Walter’s statement by saying, “We grant that scripture doth extol Vesta’s savory flower,/ And happy are the continent, which rest within her bower”(line173-4), then he states, “For where there is no issue left, the wise man saith plain,/ That every man in lordly state, doth covet for to reign”(lines 177-8). The fact that the nobles are able to repudiate their king’s excuses using their own knowledge and logic, while maintaining their dichotomous role as subordinates and advisors, suggests several things. First, it implies that they are intelligent and politically astute to recognize the importance of the common good over the private good of their ruler; second, that Walter is prudent enough to choose capable men as his nobles; and third, that their relationship is built on honesty, cooperation, and obligation.

Phillip’s play is laden with political discourse that is articulated with religious language and imagery. This reality creates an association between God and Walter in the sense that they are both patriarchal authorities over a body of people. God is often considered the ‘King of Heaven’ and the Father of order on earth, and his is word, the scripture, is the agent through which that order is achieved and maintained via the preaching of morals through exempla. Scripture even suggests that humankind would be wicked and

chaotic without the structure provided by the word of God. Phillip's text stresses the importance of God's power over man, and in doing so, imagines Walter's dominance over his people to be validated in the name of God. Additionally, the text insinuates that humankind needs God's wisdom and guidance to live in peace and order in the same way that Walter's kingdom needs his governance.

Phillip's play is unique in that it is a morality play, with an appropriate cast of characters named Fidence, Sobriety, Indigence, Reason, Diligence, and Constance, who simultaneously serve Walter in his court and represent the common people of the land. A foil for these characters is the vice character, Politic Persuasion, who appears at the beginning of the play without a history, and disappears without a grand exit. However, his role is highly influential to realizing the play as one of great political resonance. In the other versions of the Griselda story, Walter admits to an overwhelming feeling of desire to test Griselda, and throughout each text, he fails to resist that temptation. Conversely, in Phillip's play Walter is not tempted from within, but he is persuaded from without by Politic Persuasion. The depth of Politic's malevolence is revealed when he declares, "I will frequent through policy another mean,/ Wherewith I will molest and destroy her clean./ I will try her patience another kind of way-"(lines 944-6). Soon after, Politic entices Walter to follow his plan, coaxing, "If your wife be so virtuous, as now ye import,/ Surely, surely, she is worthy commendation./...But hark, my lord...Try her that way and, by mine honesty, I swear,/ You shall see her

decline from virtues so rife,/ And alter topsy-turvy her saintish life”(lines 976-982). With the maliciousness of the plan to test Griselda originating from an external source, Phillip’s Walter is imagined to be less immoral and even more forgivable than other versions of him. Viviana Comensoli states that “by stressing the Vice’s public role, Phillip evades the unsettling possibility that the Marquess’s cruelty stems from within”.⁸⁵ By holding Politic Persuasion responsible for the cruel testing, it could be interpreted that Walter possesses no evil. But, while Phillip’s Walter is the only one to be tempted from without, Griselda still remains with no vices and exhibits no need to be tested. Therefore, Walter’s trials are entirely unjustifiable. Also, Politic’s primary function in the play is to tempt Walter, and although Walter’s susceptibility to temptation is a weakness, it also portrays him as an emotional human. Walter even acknowledges the power Politic has over him when he says, “Following the motions of Politic Persuasion,/ Against her stoutly, I will make invasion”(lines 1568-9). Walter’s emotional capacity is constantly reinstated throughout the play when he exhibits regret for his actions and remorse for the pain he is causing Griselda. Thus, the texts suggests he is compassionate and empathetic, two qualities that are most desirable in a political figure. Walters displays these qualities in the beginning scene as well, when he responds to his nobles’ requests with genuineness and consideration. The reappearance of Walter’s virtuous emotions in more than one context is evocative of the fact that they are inherent and not superficial or temporary.

⁸⁵ Comensoli, 55.

Politic Persuasion's position in the lord's court is not validated or authorized by anyone besides himself, yet he remains one of its most influential members. It is worthy of note, however, that his relationship with Walter is quite different from the other nobles' relationships with Walter. These differences consequently expose the desired and undesired features of the members of a political court, and envision a disordered polity when nobles lack morality and authenticity. Politic Persuasion, although able to successfully manipulate Walter, is not the traditional courtier; he does not unconditionally obey Walter, he does not always speak the truth, and he clearly does not have the people's best interest in mind when he advises Walter. To begin with, Politic Persuasion avoids obeying Walter several times in the most explicit ways, and his defiance is always juxtaposed to the other nobles' conformity. Walter begs, "Well now, let us depart this place"(line 209), to which his nobles dutifully respond, "We will wait upon you, by God's grace"(210). Politic Persuasion, on the other hand, ever so subtly rejects Walter's authority by answering, "Nay, I will follow after as fast as I can"(line 211), instead of going along with the others. This sort of interaction plays out again when Walter asks, "Come on, let us depart with speediness"(line 462), to which his nobles reply, "To do as you will us, we be in a readiness"(line 463). Politic though, literally denies Walter's authority by exclaiming, "Nay, fare ye well, God be your speed,/ I tell you, I come after as fast as I can"(line 465). Politic also has a habit of saying one thing under his breath, then changing his words when Walter asks him to repeat himself. For

instance, Politic mutters, “I beseech God.../That your tongue, her nose, and my tail may be joined together”(lines 205-6), yet when asked to say his words again, he plays with the sounds of the language and replies, “God grant that in love ye may continue together”(line 208). It is interesting to observe that while Politic cleverly rejects Walter’s power and is blatantly dishonest with his own lord, he is also the one who causes the most trouble and who induces Walter to mistreat his wife. It is evident, then, that Phillip’s play entertains the idea that faulty advisors lead to faulty government.

In all of the versions of the wife-testing plot, Walter marries in order to please his people. In *The Canterbury Tales* and Dekker’s *The Pleasant Comodie of Pacient Grissill*, the common people protest Walter’s marriage to a peasant woman. Phillip’s play is the only one in which the common people *do not* criticize Walter’s choice of a bride. The only person who is sincerely discontented by Griselda’s position is Politic Persuasion, and he is the character who convinces Walter that his people are unhappy. It is unfavorable to Walter’s political image that he allows himself to be convinced of a false public disapproval because it suggests that he is not in touch with his people. Walter’s susceptibility to persuasion can be interpreted as a weakness. In the introduction to Sir John Fortescue’s *On the Laws and Governance of England*, Shelley Lockwood states that “a chronically weak king was as much of a threat as a tyrant because he would lack that constant and perpetual will to justice which was the sworn duty of his office”.⁸⁶ It is not entirely fair to say

⁸⁶ Shelley Lockwood, Sir John Fortescue: On the Laws and Governance of England. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. xvii.

that Walter is *chronically* weak (though he does repetitively yield to Politic's malicious advice) because the only area in which his weakness comes forth is in regard to testing Griselda. However, Lockwood's connection between a weak king and a tyrant encourages the reader/audience to envision the play as a warning of what could happen if a ruler were ineffectual. Moreover, not only is Politic's report of public opinion erroneous, but his untruthful account of the people's alleged discontent draws attention to the reality that they are, contrary to his report, pleased with Walter's decision to marry below his status. Louis B. Wright, who argues that the play "simply uses an incident in an old story in such a fashion that it had contemporary political meaning",⁸⁷ relates Walter's decision to marry below his rank to Queen Elizabeth's contemplation of the same matter. Wright writes:

The commoners particularly were pressing Elizabeth to marry a native Englishman. In 1559 and for the next year or two gossip mentioned both the Earl of Arundel and Sir William Pickering as the possible husbands of the Queen. The latter, whom Hume describes as an unpleasant swashbuckler, was not of high birth but made an appeal to the popular imagination.⁸⁸

Wright points out that Queen Elizabeth's subjects had no objection to a non-traditional royal marriage partner in the same way that Walter's subjects abstain from protesting Griselda's poverty. The play seems to imagine that the most superior subjects are those who resist the temptation to remonstrate their ruler's political decisions or judgments, and the fact that Walter's resolve

⁸⁷ Louis B Wright, "A Political Reflection in Phillip's Patient Grissell", *The Review of English Studies*; Vol. 4, No. 16 (Oct., 1928). 424-8, 426-7.

⁸⁸ Wright, 427.

to marry Griselda ends up being a wise decision and results in public harmony and satisfaction only strengthens this point.

Politic Persuasion's role in dramatizing the political messages of Phillip's play is one of the most prominent of all the nobles; it is also one of the most convoluted. To begin with, it is intriguing that his unmerited position in the lord's court seems to bear no effect on the extent to which he is able to influence Walter. But, that Politic's manipulative way of commanding Walter reaches a limit when the time comes to execute what Politic stipulates merits even more attention. Throughout the play, Politic succeeds in controlling Walter's behavior by providing him with false premises and untruths. His purpose is to convince Walter to try his wife's patience and ultimately, prove her unworthiness. However, even though Politic is able to persuade Walter with more conviction than anyone else, and although Politic does not fulfill the traditional subservient role of noble, it seems that certain political limitations still apply to him. For instance, Politic's power only extends far enough to *convince* Walter to follow his plan, but without Walter's approval, Politic is incompetent. It appears that the vice character recognizes that despite his ability to mold Walter, he has no authority beyond his own words, which in turn suggests that Politic acknowledges the cooperative dynamic of political policy. Fortescue writes that "the subjects themselves cannot make laws without the authority of the king, and the kingdom, being subject to the king's dignity, is possessed by kings...in such a manner as no

dominions are possessed which are only politically regulated".⁸⁹ Fortescue's observation offers valuable insight into the relationship between Walter and his nobles. Clearly, their job is limited to counseling and supporting their lord, and therefore, Politic is powerless to carry out his malicious plan independently. Phillip's play and Politic's role in it are essentially a means to explore the contemporary framework of the lord's court and how policy is executed cooperatively.

Walter's relentless quest for absolute power, whether over a private or public polity, is a reoccurring theme that is manifest in Phillip's play and in other versions of the Griselda story. In Chaucer's and Dekker's renditions, Walter's obsession with power classifies him as a tyrant because he allows his pursuit of that power to interfere with his political responsibilities. However, in Phillip's play, Walter assumes a much less compulsive relationship with authority. For example, the fact that he is driven by Politic to test Griselda and is not propelled by his own lust for control is demonstrative of his more relaxed approach to authority. Furthermore, although Walter still requires Griselda to consent to a marriage oath in which she forfeits her will, the oath scene in Phillip's play is staged much differently from how Chaucer and Dekker arrange it; the oath is executed through a song sung by both Walter and Griselda. Walter respectfully invites Griselda to join him in song with the introduction: "And in token of victory, some song I will sing,/ Which to perform, lady, I must have your helping"(lines 821-2). The song that follows is a melodic discourse in which Walter declares his love and Griselda echoes

⁸⁹ Fortescue, 129.

that nothing “shall cause me shrink from duty due” and “I am thine own, while death do part”(lines 844, 848). The fact that Griselda’s marriage oath is verbalized through a song structured for two people and the fact that Walter truthfully admits that he needs her help in singing it, suggests that although Walter is the dominant patriarchal figure, his power can only exist if Griselda agrees on her own to sacrifice her will to him. Phillip’s play is the only text in which Walter openly acknowledges the necessity of mutual agreement, even if it is an agreement to be subordinate, in order to guarantee the most successful paternally powered relationship. James Daley, reflecting the political theory of Sir Robert Filmer, states that there is a “vital interest in consent as a factor in political theory, and its ramifications have never been far from the centre of any enquiry into the nature of political obligation”.⁹⁰ Walter’s recognition of this reality indicates, yet again, that he is cognizant of the need for solidarity and cooperation in governance. His insight is an insight that Chaucer’s and Dekker’s Walter does not possess; their Walter presupposes that he will naturally and unquestionably assume the patriarchal position in his marriage and does not consider the importance of collaboration. The use of a song as opposed to an exclusive verbal contract (Dekker, Chaucer) to solidify Walter’s sovereignty portrays Phillip’s Walter as a more divine character than Dekker and Chaucer make him out to be. And, subsequently, Walter’s actions seem more justified because Griselda has actively participated in her own contract of submission.

⁹⁰ James Daley, Sir Robert Filmer and English political thought. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979. 82.

Phillip's Walter appears to be a less violent and more emotional ruler than he is in other versions of the story. Evidence of his milder demeanor abounds. First of all, Walter's frequent interactions with his nobles indicate that he is accessible and responsive. His subjects do not fear him, they respect him, and his approachability suggests that he is qualified for governance. Secondly, an even more compelling argument is that Walter tends to react to violent situations with emotion and a vociferous aversion to the violence on several occasions. While Walter orders the murder of his own daughter, he refuses to execute the deed himself. And in the moment when Diligence is about to kill the baby, Walter interrupts: "Nay, stay thy hand, good friend! Convey her out of place,/ For nature will not let me see her slain before my face"(lines 1167-8). And when Diligence leaves, he does not kill the baby but brings her to Walter's sister, the Countess, to be reared. He defends Walter, stating, "Your brother Gautier, my lord most honorable,/ Doth wish your health with quiet rest and peace,/ Whose love to the world shall never cease./ He hath sent you here his daughter young to cherish,/ Which he, with Diligence, doth trust you will nourish"(lines 1241-5). Walter's behavior in Griselda's presence is superficially violent and the fact that he sends his child to be safely raised by his own sister suggests there is a softness to his otherwise power-driven character. Giles of Rome's *The Governance of Kings and Princes*, warns against the use of violence in the medieval political arena. He writes:

For he þat wol make men and naciouns soget to hum by cyuyl myzt and strengthe wol be prince and lord by violens, and violens is nouzt perpetual,

and violent thinges duret nouzt longge. Soche principate may nouzt longge dure. Bote as þe fure is by kind hote and worcheth kyndelich whanne it heteth, so whanne a man is set kyndelich in fre wille, þanne he hath kynde lordschip of men, whanne he is prince ouer hym frelich and by gode wille... þanne a kyng schal nouzt trowe þat he is in welþe and in felicite zif he is a lord by violens and by cyuyle myzt and strenghte. For soche lordschipe is violent and azens kynde and may nouzt longge dure.⁹¹

Giles of Rome alerts the book's audience, most likely readers of nobility, of the dangers of ruling with violence. Although he advises that *medieval* government ruled by kindness has a longer duration than one ruled by cruelty or malice, his political theories represent a general truth applicable to all governments, including early modern. Therefore, Walter's avoidance of violence, despite the façade of brutality he exhibits for Griselda, is demonstrative of his suitability for public governance.

The structure of the play as a morality play affects the political messages it transmits. Faith Gildenhuis writes that "the grafting of the morality structure onto the Griselda story creates a distinct shift in interpretation away from the victimization and patience of Griselda to the problematic redemption of her husband".⁹² With the morality structure drawing attention away from Griselda's virtue to Walter's redemption, it is easy to narrow the focus on Walter's politics. Traditionally, critics apply the *exemplum* element of the Griselda story to Griselda and what it means to be an ideal wife. But, as Gildenhuis suggests, it may be possible to shift the application of the *exemplum* element to Walter. Characters whose names are literal representations of virtues, such as Diligence, Reason, Sobriety, Fidence,

⁹¹ Giles of Rome, 25.

⁹² A Gathering of Griseldas: Three Sixteenth Century Texts. Ed. Faith Gildenhuis. Ottawa, Canada: Dovehouse Editions, Inc., 1996. 47-8.

and Constance, have been previously understood as statements of prototypical femininity. However, the mentioned virtues are entirely applicable to a political context which would include a both a lord and his nobles. The text seems to imply that subjects who display diligence in their actions, reason enough to advise their lords, and constancy in their obedience, are essential to the success of a polity. The subjects in Phillip's play exhibit these values more abundantly than do the characters in Dekker's text who submit to flattery instead. Additionally, Phillip's play also imagines the success of a polity as dependent on the sobriety, diligence, and good sense of its lord.

The Comedy of Patient and Meek Grissill, as does Dekker's play, examines patriarchal hierarchies. Phillip and Dekker each produce texts which envision domestic and political spheres to be dominated by paternal powers, and between those spheres exists a patriarchal hierarchy in which a lord is superior to the father. Both writers succeed in establishing this hierarchy by elaborating on Griselda's relationship to her family (this is more obvious in Dekker's text in which Griselda is surrounded by several family members) and illustrating her shift in duty from her father to Walter. In Phillip's play, however, a new element is introduced into the discourse on patriarchal social structures: God. The play imagines, as the others do, that as a paternal figure, a lord is superior to a father, and it ranks God as superior to both. Evidence of this hierarchy lies in the particular language Walter uses to imply his marriage is sanctioned by God, as well as in the way Walter judges Griselda's virtue. In Chaucer's and Dekker's versions, Walter recognizes and

praises Griselda for her willingness to serve her father, whereas Phillip's Walter commends her for her notable subservience to God. He states, "She feareth God, she dreads his name, she leads a godly life,/ And daily seeks for to subdue contention and strife./ She will, as duty binds, her spoused mate obey,/ From husband's hests at no time she, for any cause, will stray"(line 387-390). Here, Walter is emphasizing the importance of one's assent to God, foremost, and then secondly to a lord and father. In a historical context, the theoretical placement of God and king in the paternal hierarchy was frequently interchanged in English culture. After years of tension, the order was reversed legally in 1559, not long before Phillip wrote his play, by the Act of Supremacy which "required all holders of office in church and state to take an oath acknowledging the queen's headship" and "conferred upon the crown the powers of the supreme head".⁹³ In other words, Queen Elizabeth declared herself the head of the Church.⁹⁴ However, the Counter-Reformation, which began in approximately 1555 by the papacy and lasted several decades, challenged the position of the Queen above the Church and sought to end the subservience of the Church to the State. Phillip's play seems to reflect this political transformation and envision an England in which the State, or Walter, is superior to the people but inferior to God. Walter's recognition of Griselda in religious terms and the praise he gives her for her meek service to God implicitly suggest that even he acknowledges the eminence of religion.

⁹³ Lunt, 368.

⁹⁴ The first Act of Supremacy was passed in 1534 by Elizabeth's father, King Henry VIII, as he attempted to divorce Katharine of Aragon.

The theory of patriarchal obligation and its relevance to the household and the State was not thoroughly developed before 1603, according to Gordon J. Schochet. Until that point, “obedience was due to the reigning king simply because he was in power”,⁹⁵ and neither that power nor a subject’s obedience to it had ever been challenged. Phillip’s play, as previously argued, is a fine example of a text that raises such questions about the origin and order of that hierarchy in government, and it also, as does Dekker, addresses the issue of patriarchy in the household. Phillip’s addition of Griselda’s family has a different effect on the play than does Dekker’s addition because Phillip more dramatically accentuates the need for children’s obedience to their parents. In Griselda’s song, she preaches, “Let children to their parents give/ Obedience due, as they are taught/... Though Aetas on my parents here/ By crooked shape have shown his power,/ Yet I am bound to dread and fear/ Them, tide and time and every hour/... The stubborn child, the Lord doth treat/ In Hell to chaste with torments great”(lines 222-243). Griselda’s actions, even more so than the lyrics to her song, reveal that she is wholly subservient to her parents, and especially to her father.

In all, Phillip’s play proposes many of the same political arguments as Dekker’s play does. It imagines an ideal ruler to be free from violence, tyranny, and obsessive desires for absolute control, while rich in virtue, prudence, and a moderate conception of power. It also envisions the prototype subject as one who does not indulge in flattery nor disrespect, but rather courtesy and honesty. Additionally, the sixteenth-century household is

⁹⁵ Schochet, 37.

portrayed, in one respect, as a possible microcosm of the kingdom which would essentially allow for an analogy to be made between the governance of the two realms. Phillip's transformation of the Griselda story into a morality play allows him the flexibility to use the play as a multi-layered *exemplum*; the result is that it is not only a domestic *exemplum* (for both children and wives) but also a political one (for both subjects and rulers) and a religious one. Despite the numerous and varying interpretations of Walter's behavior and his motivation, Phillip's Walter seems to be less tyrannous and obsessive than Dekker's version of him, partly due to the highly influential role of Politic Persuasion and the fact that once Politic exits the play, harmony and justice are restored to Walter's family and kingdom. And finally, Phillip's play is abundant in religious language and imagery that valuably contributes to the text's discourse on the order of paternal power and the role of God in the social, political, and religious hierarchy.

CHAPTER THREE

THE WORST WALTER:
 TYRANNY AND DISORDER IN WILLIAM FORREST'S
THE HISTORY OF GRISILD THE SECOND

William Forrest's poem, *The History of Grisild the Second*, is structurally very different from the texts of Chaucer, Dekker, and Phillip. Forrest veers from the traditional Walter-Griselda plot and rather than use the generic story for his poem, Forrest chooses to exploit the implications of the characters' names to tell his own story about the King and Queen of England. Forrest distinguishes the infamous literary Griselda and Walter from his own characters by naming Queen Katherine "Grisild the Second" and by associating the characters with an explicit articulation of their relation in the body of his text. After a thorough description of the Queen, Forrest writes, "Her I heere lyken to *Grysilde* the goode,/ as well I so maye, for her great patience"(5) and referring to Henry VIII he writes, "By name of *Walter* I dooe hym expresse"(5). This chapter will focus not on the 'Great Divorce' but rather on Walter's relationship to his subjects, his methods of governance and their effects on his kingdom, as well as how the dramatic ordeal of his domestic life interferes with his ability to rule his people. It will argue that Walter seems to undergo a transformation over the course of the poem which is made evident in his 'swapping' Grisild for Anne Bullayne; a change from a man of self control to one who cannot restrain his desires. Essentially, the

pursuit of Walter's desires (Anne Bullayne) leads to the collapse of his domestic space and ultimately infects the stability of his kingdom. This chapter will also explore the role of courtiers and subjects and their influence on the success or failure of public government. Forrest's Walter is similar to Chaucer's, Dekker's, and Phillip's Walter in many ways, but his role in *The History of Grisild the Second* is distinct in that Walter overtly more violent, volatile, tyrannous, irrational, and obsessed with power.

Forrest's text differs almost entirely from the conventional structure of the Griselda story. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that there is no opening scene with an elaborate hunting metaphor as there is in the versions by Chaucer, Dekker, and Phillip. Additionally, Grisild does not come from a working class family; rather she is of royal Spanish blood herself. Immediately this distinction precludes any discussion of interclass marriage like those apparent in the other adaptations.⁹⁶ But what is most striking about Grisild's introduction to the poem is that she, for once, is not chosen deliberately or exclusively by Walter. In fact, Grisild first marries Walter's younger brother, Arthur, and only marries Walter at the arrangement of Walter's father, Second Salomon,⁹⁷ after Arthur's death. Walter does not fall in love with Grisild's virtue or her beauty as he does in the other texts, but instead, Second Salomon, "of witt and wisdom not dull"(71), hears of her

⁹⁶ King James I advises against nobility marrying below their rank: "And if hee Marie first basely beneath his ranke, he will ever be the lesse accounted of thereafter"(King James I, 41). In making the marriage arrangement, Second Salomon is likely aware of the political impact of marrying his sons to a woman of lower social status.

⁹⁷ Second Salomon, Walter's father, is Forrest's fictional name for King Henry VII, whose reign in England was successful although his legitimacy as legal heir to the throne was frequently questioned.

admirable reputation all the way from Spain and it is he who considers Grisild worthy of queenship. Forrest writes, “This prudent kinge in Spayne that tyme herde tell/ To bee this ladye, fayre *Grysilidis*,/ Withe pryncely vertues howe she did excell,/ That towardys her his mynde occupied is”(31). Furthermore, when Arthur dies, Walter’s father is conscious of Grisild’s goodness and political value to such an extent that in order to avoid ‘wasting’ her potential, he marries her to Walter. Second Salomon’s role in the marriage arrangement suggests that he, not Walter, is the prudent ruler who is able to perceive and judge inherent character traits. On the contrary, when Walter finally does choose his own bride, Anne Bullayne, he makes his selection solely on Anne’s outer appearance and inconsequential talents and not on her inner qualities. To suggest that Walter is only capable of recognizing superficial attributes, Forrest uses a language that evokes the notion of sight. He writes:

In the Cowrte (newe entred) theare dyd frequent
 A fresche younge damoyzell, that cowlde trippe and go,
 To syng and to daunce passinge excellent,
 No tatches shee lacked of loves allurement;
 She cowlde speake Frenche ornatly and playne,
 ...on her dyd *Walter* ofte caste his frayle iye,
 Oute of his presence he cowlde suffre her sace. (53-4)

The description of Anne is dramatically different from that of Grisild; Grisild is portrayed by her inner virtue whereas Anne is only recognized for her appearance and trivial talents such as dancing and singing. The striking difference in the way Second Salomon chooses a woman and the way in which Walter chooses a woman suggests that Second Salomon is far more

prudent and intelligent than his son. He is also more aware of what qualities are necessary for a Queen to possess in order to be politically and domestically successful: honesty, devotion, virtue, patience, practicality, self-control, and selflessness. Walter's inability to identify and value such characteristics in a woman hints at his own lack of such qualities.

Walter's incapacity to appropriately judge worthy human characteristics has significant political and domestic repercussions. Those repercussions are made most evident once he divorces Grisild and marries Anne. Forrest does not imply that Anne is *bad* by any means, but the text certainly implies that Anne's virtue is not comparable to Grisild's and that Walter's first marriage is far more successful than his second. It is important to note that when Walter's marriage is stable, his kingdom is equally successful, but when his marriage crumbles, so does England. Chaucer, Dekker, and Phillip propose various ideas on the relationship between domestic and public space and how the governance of one is linked to the governance of the other. Forrest's poem opens a similar discourse on the connection between the role of patriarchal authority in the domestic and political spheres but it takes the discussion a step further in showing what happens to public governance when domestic stability is impaired. In other words, his poem depicts a collapse in the order of English politics (which entails an economic and social demise as well) in response to Walter's tumultuous marriage and divorce. As early as the Prologue, Forrest puts forth the idea that while Grisild is married to Walter, all aspects of England thrive:

“For, while [Grisild] was in digne estymation,/ [England] florischt in wealthe, and all abundaunce”(4). Forrest further parallels the well being of the marriage to the welfare of the State when he writes, “By longe tyme after *Walter and Grysilde*/ Their lyves they ledde in highe felicitee;/ His will (moste gladly) she alwayes fulfidle,/ By all that laye in her possybylytee./ In Brytayne that tyme was muche tranquyllytee”(45). During their marriage the economy is stable, the public is happy, Grisild is well liked and respected, and England is a nation of power. Soon, though, “the cursed Enemye, sower of dyscord,/ Began to sue his accustomed trace,/ Goode *Grysilidis* estate for to difface,/ Moste wickedlye that anye can discusse”(49). And once Walter destroys his marriage with Grisild and marries Anne, England answers with its own destruction. For three pages, Forrest writes of the ruin of English society, politics, and religion while Anne is Queen. He describes, “Then of the Churche began thaffliction,/ Then entred Heresies cursed and nought,/...Entred in the Royalme suche innovation/ (To the pooare mannys utter destruction),/ Raysinge of Rentes in wondreful fashion/...Downe went the Crosses in eaverye countraye/...But to this ende I have rehersed this,/ What came by exchange of good *Grisilidis*”(79-81). Still, the poem does not blame Anne for the chaos that ensues in England, more accurately the poem imagines the collapse to be a result of the failed marriage between Walter and Grisild. Essentially, the poem suggests that an unsuccessful domestic sphere equals an unsuccessful public sphere. The text implies that Walter allows his private life to interfere with his public life and that the cause of his kingdom’s

downfall is his neglect of responsibility and the pursuit of his (sexual) passions.

Forrest's poem, as does Phillip's play, focuses on familial relationships. The poem opens with a Prologue, directed to Queen Mary, in which Forrest makes an overt statement about the importance of proper parenting. He emphasizes the parental obligation to set good examples for their children so that the children grow up to be loving, devoted parents themselves. He writes, "What more renowne to childe redounde maye,/ Then as to reade or heere, by recomptinge,/ Howe his parentys in their lvyngge daye/ Had heere God in highe reverencinge"(2). Forrest then personalizes his address and states, in reference to Queen Katherine of Aragon, "Howe muche (O noble and excellent Queene!)/ Maye then delyte youre domynation/ Your Mothers meeke life of youe to bee seene"(3). The opening lines of the first chapter continue the description of Grisild's early life in Spain, where "in literate knowledge entred shee was"(26), and where she is also well educated in God and the gospel. As Dekker and Phillip do, Forrest draws attention to the role of a child's obedience to his/her parents in the creation of a stable household. The attention to domestic stability in the Prologue establishes an important framework for the rest of the poem and anticipates the reoccurrence of the theme later in the narrative in the context of Walter's own household.

Forrest's discussion on the importance of functional relationships between parents and children extends beyond Grisild's upbringing; it applies directly to Walter's own household and his futile attempts to rule it. Giles of

Rome states, “For he that wol be wise and kunnyng to governe and rule oBer schal be wise and kinnyng to governe and to rule hymself”.⁹⁸ Giles’ theory is helpful in understanding the cause of the deterioration of Walter’s ability to govern. For the first third of the poem, the State and Walter’s home are thriving and stable, yet by the end of the poem, both have collapsed under mis-governance. According to the above theory, Walter’s failure to properly manage his kingdom is due to the fact that he can’t manage his own household, which is ultimately a result of his inability to govern himself. Evidence of Walter’s declining capacity to rule himself accumulates rapidly throughout the poem; it begins in Chapter Five when “The cursed Enemye, sower of dyscorde, Began to sue his accustomed trace” in Walter and once he considers replacing Grisild with Anne, “This motion mucche laye in his memoryall,/ Sore occupied thearin bothe daye and nyght,/ For mucche it was pleasinge to his appetyte”(49). Unlike Phillip’s play, there is no ‘Politic Persuasion’ in *The History of Grisild the Second* who is responsible for Walter’s sudden evil tendency; he is more like Dekker’s Walter within whom the propensity for wickedness and unjustness originates.

Throughout the poem, Walter gradually loses his self control. The idea that the ‘Enemye’ stems from within implies that only Walter is to blame for his degeneration. To further prove the weakening of Walter’s ability to control himself, Forrest writes of the “False Cupydo [that] so stonge hym to the harte”(54) and of the fact that “Hee had in hym a lyttle sensuall luste/ Whiche withe younge ware hee neadys accomplische muste”(55); these lines

⁹⁸ Giles of Rome, 8.

effectively magnify Walter's transformation and the decline of his ability to contain his passions because they describe the way that Walter's logic and reason is blurred by his sexual desire for Anne. But not only does Walter lose his ability to control his sexual desires, he also loses his capacity to restrict his political desires; when it is suggested that he take over the Church in order to annul his marriage, Walter seizes the opportunity and propels himself on an obsessive quest for more power. The irony of the matter lies in the fact that the more Walter endeavors to obtain control over the will of others, the more evident the loss of control over his own will becomes. And the more Walter fails at governing himself, the more he fails at governing his household and kingdom. Grisild, morally unable to blame her husband for any misbehavior, attributes his change of character to some external temptation, although nevertheless, she still recognizes a drastic transformation in the way he conducts himself. Grisild reasons, "I deeme evyl counsell dothe leade hym in this;/ God sende hym better! I can nomore saye;/ So noble a man great pytee it is/ That so seduced shoulde wandre a straye"(99). Although Grisild is very much aware of and affected by Walter's unjust behavior, she copes with the mistreatment by remaining silent and only praying to God. Her increasing practice of self control is juxtaposed with Walter's loss of it; this comparison serves to accentuate the descent of Walter's private and public government.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ There are many instances in the poem where Grisild exhibits behavior that presents her as a more qualified governor than Walter. First of all, she is unbreakably steadfast as demonstrated by her refusal to rupture her marriage vow and her refusal to forfeit her crown: a sacrifice which would represent a break of the political vow she has with her kingdom to be their Queen. Grisild's devotion to God also prevents her from breaching her marriage and political vow because according to her faith, both contracts are sanctioned by God. In fact, "Shee (beeinge a woman of great prudencye)/ Consydered, in her Deposition laye/ Daungers

Walter's loss of self control as a result of his quest for *more* control is also represented by his gradual denial of Grisild's agency. He begins his pursuit of absolute power by demanding a divorce from his wife. The divorce can be seen as a way for Walter to deny Grisild the female authority often associated with wifedom.¹⁰⁰ Next, he insists that Grisild forfeit her crown. This action can be interpreted as Walter's way of stripping his wife of any and all political agency. As Walter's obsession with power grows, he forbids Grisild to have contact with her daughter (as does Dekker), which is an explicit act of denying Grisild her motherhood. Finally, "Her Offycers, that longe withe her did dwell,/ Weare her avoyded for certayne entente,/ And

occulted, open to her iye,/ Destruction of Christys Sanctuare/ Withe hundred other calamiteis mo,/ If shee her Estate rejected weare fro"(92), so clearly she is able to predict the political and social repercussions of breaking her vows better than Walter is able to. Also, Grisild is mindful of the welfare of all people, poor and rich, and does everything in her power to care for them. Before she is married, "her life shee heere ledde muche charitably,/ To what goode deade that anyman woulde/...As she was cheerful to creatures all"(28) and after she becomes the Queen of England, "She wolde (secreatlye) sende to goe see/ To knowe where neaded her almes to convaye;/ Some shurtys, some smockes, some certaigne monaye,/ Or what thyng els was thought they dyd neede"(46). Walter, on the other hand, pays no regard to the needs of his people because he is too occupied with satisfying his own needs. Additionally, Grisild invests in the future of her country by taking the measures to adequately educate her daughter, Mary, so that she is intellectually prepared to handle the thrown. Further evidence that suggests Grisild is better qualified as a governor is the good relationship she has with her servants. When Walter takes Grisild's servants away from her, Grisild's expression of grief over the loss of her "servauntes moste trustie"(97) is indicative of the positive and sincere relation she maintains with them. Walter's servants, on the other hand, speak in whispers behind his back and fear Walter's violent reaction if they were to speak honestly to him. Overall, all of the Griselda's in this study appear to be more capable rulers than their husbands, but Forrest's Grisild is by far the most resistant to unjustness as well as the most politically productive.

¹⁰⁰ Although women frequently reported feeling confined and limited once they were married, quoting Margaret J. M. Ezell, ([The Patriarch's Wife: Literary Evidence and the History of the Family](#), Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1987. 161, 163), Viviana Comensoli reports that "Wives thus 'wielded considerable power, whether acknowledges in theory or not,' but it was a form of power that was exerted largely in the private sphere, 'not through the public institutions'"(Comensoli, 19). Barbara J. Harris writes that substantial evidence "demonstrates that aristocratic women gained wealth, authority, and power as they managed their husbands' property and households"([English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550: Marriage and Family, Property and Careers](#). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. 6).

newe assigned at Walter's comaundement"(96). By taking away Grisild's servants who had for so long served their lady with diligence and love, Walter is asserting that his authority is so great that he can even rob Grisild of the people below her whose position reinforces Grisild's last remaining bit of agency. Ultimately, Walter's progressive recalling of Grisild's wifedom, queen-ship, motherhood, and finally her claim to mastery over her own servants, leaves Grisild without any clear place in the domestic, social, or political spheres where she was once so competent. The fact that Walter is able to disinvest Grisild of all her agency without any moral hesitation is demonstrative of the drastic change for the worse that his character undergoes. It also illustrates the extent to which he indulges in abuse of power, irrational behavior, and complete disregard for the well being of others. Irrefutably, Walter is not qualified to govern a kingdom or a household because he can not properly manage himself.

Although Forrest does not directly assert that the governance of a domestic sphere is an unequivocal analogy for the governance of a public sphere, his poem certainly evokes the sense that they are similar and both susceptible to the same failures.¹⁰¹ This association is explained by viewing Walter as the paternal figure of both spheres who abandons his public and

¹⁰¹ The notion of the governance of a household being similar to the governance of a State was an idea commonly acknowledged in the sixteenth century. Their connection lies in their dependence on the patriarchal structure for stability. Anthony Fletcher states that "The crucial importance of the patriarchal family as the bedrock of social order in early modern England had long been recognized"(Gender, Sex, and Subordination in England 1500-1800. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995. 204) and Susan Dwyer Amussen writes that "The analogy between the household and the state was available to all those interested in authority and the enforcement of order in early modern England." She cautions, "It must be understood as an analogy, however, not an equation"(An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988. 37).

private responsibilities and thus disregards the well-being of those he is supposed to care for. Consider, for example, Walter's behavior in his private life: Walter fails as a husband because he breaks his marriage vow, he neglects his wife, banishes her from the castle, and he is unfaithful before his divorce is validated. Walter fails as a father because he deprives his daughter of her mother, he attempts to deny Mary of her royal title, and he does not partake, at all, in her rearing. Growing up with an absent father makes it difficult for a child to practice obedience and loyalty, which are two fundamental elements to the success of a parent/child relationship. Gordon J. Schochet writes:

Religious and conceptual changes in English society after the Reformation called attention to the family and altered the way it was perceived as well as its actual role in society. Through this new awareness, the household became more relevant to political discourse, and this new symbolization perhaps provided some added insight into the kinds of relationship that were being alleged as the prototype of all social ties.¹⁰²

Walter is an inadequate paternal figure in his home and due to his incompetence, his marriage and family life breaks down. This correlation supports what Schochet theorizes; that the condition of a household is relevant to the condition of a kingdom. In that sense, Walter fails his kingdom, too. First of all, he is dishonest, which is made evident when he arranges the theft of the University's seal to validate his divorce. The scene where the seal is stolen also reveals the extent to which Walter ignores his subjects' pleas and the power Walter exercises over the will of his courtiers. The text reads:

¹⁰² Schochet, 63.

But yeat for all that the Fyve foresaide Clarkes,
 Withe moste of the Regent Maisters, that tyde,
 For all the threatnynges that flaterers bakes
 From that was the right they wolde nowhit slyde.
 The *Bushoppe Langelande* dyd thus then provyde,
 A convocation of certayne to call,
 And gote the Seale as consented of all (78).

Not only is Walter dishonest in his methods of attaining a divorce, but the poem suggests that he threatens his inferiors into yielding their will to his. The lines above expose the moral hesitations of the ‘Fyve foresaide Clarkes’, who are then persuaded/threatened into political assent.¹⁰³ Walter is also politically inept because he sets a poor example for his people when he divorces Grisild; Forrest says, “Of weddelocke joynynge farewell then, adue!/
 This example, if it thorowly frame,/ Shall other ensense to practice the same”(71). The extent to which his (mis)behaviors influence the (mis)behavior of his subjects is manifest when, after Walter challenges God’s authority, his subjects adopt the same ideology and “Of His holye lawe some makynge but light”(54). Moreover, Walter spends so much time hunting down the necessary powers to annul his marriage that he allows the economic and social stability of his kingdom to crumble. The parallel between Walter’s failure as a king and his failure as a husband/father is obvious, and his

¹⁰³ In this scene, Walter forsakes all hope of practicing a cooperative government. He fails to consider, even for a moment, that his inferiors are experiencing moral hesitations and that perhaps their initial resistance is in response to his immoral and tyrannical behavior. Though the ‘Fyve foresaide Clarkes clearly find ethical conflict arising from Walter’s demands, they are helpless to defy him. King James I writes that if “a king be resolute to be a tyrant, all you can do will not hinder him”(King James I, xxvi). Walters appears to takes advantage of his inferiors; he knows they have no political voice (though they would in an ideal cooperative government) and he therefore demands from them things which he likely knows are inappropriate.

insufficiencies in government are what lead to the decline of both his public and private space.

Forrest's poem not only portrays Walter as an incapable ruler and husband but it also suggests that he is a poor servant to God. From the beginning, the text implies that Walter's marriage to Grisild is sanctioned by God and that their daughter, Mary, is a gift sent from heaven. The poem reads, "Wheare God remembred his servaunte *Walter*,/ Sendynge by Grisilde a fayre newe encrease,/ A goodlye younge thinge, a Prynmesse pearlesse"(42). Grisild even acknowledges the religious sanctioning of their marriage when she mourns, "Farewell, deere Husbonde, to whome I was heere knytt/ In lawefull spousayle, as God ordayne can,/ By His holye Churche, I playne confesse itt"(104). Therefore, in terminating the marriage and casting away his wife and daughter, Walter deliberately defies God and His authority. Moreover, when the Church refuses to annul his marriage, Walter, unsatisfied, declares himself the head of the Church so that he can grant himself his own divorce. In doing so, Walter reveals his appetite for power and repudiates all limits on his authority. Walter's greed for power is illustrated in the scene where it is suggested to him to take over the Church. The unidentified speaker speaks in a way that appeals to Walter's inner desire for absolute authority and he successfully captures Walter's will with his tempting words about potential power. He says, "Yee, takyng on youe the Supreamacye/ As headde of the Churche over all Brytayne/... Yee maye (at pleasure) then althinges ordayne/... Whoe is that dare denye youre enterprise?"(74). Later,

Forrest writes vividly of the religious disaster that follows Walter's domination of the Church, describing how "holye Virgyns, of no lyttle some,/ Weare Concubynes to the Bushoppe of Rome" and "the gloryous perpetuall Virgyn *Marye*/ No better esteemed then an other woman"(80). In Phillip's play, a hierarchy of power is established where God is supreme, a lord is secondary, and a husband and father follow next. Forrest's play works with the same concept of hierarchy, but also demonstrates with dramatic clarity what happens when that 'natural' order is rearranged. Walter, in declaring himself the head of the Church, is replacing God as the superior paternal power and as a result, the Church becomes unstable, disorganized, and immoral.¹⁰⁴ The concept of chaos erupting from the corruption of a 'natural' hierarchy is applicable to the domestic sphere as well because when Walter disregards his duties as the paternal figure of his household, he also meets with disaster.

The conspicuous presence of a narrative voice in *The History of Grisild the Second* makes the poem different from the work of Chaucer, Dekker, and Phillip.¹⁰⁵ In "The Clerk's Tale" and in the two sixteenth century

¹⁰⁴ Although Forrest's *Grisild* is the only one of the four *Griseldas* in this study who is not restored to her rightful position by the end of the text, she is by far the most resilient and outspoken. She voices her objections to Walter's governance, she refuses to return her crown, and she maintains her dignity until her death. Most commendable, though, is her refusal to acknowledge the new patriarchal hierarchy that Walter constructs when he becomes the head of the Church. Her resistance is demonstrated silently through her prayer and eternal obedience to God. Mary, too, continues to recognize God as the supreme power after Walter takes control of the Church. Before *Grisild* assents the marriage oath with Walter, she presumably takes a religious oath of obedience to God, and therefore, in serving God before Walter she is staying true to her own word while simultaneously refuting Walter's.

¹⁰⁵ It is plausible to justify the narrative voice in *The History of Grisild the Second* because William Forrest wrote the poem for Queen Mary and there would be no need for him to mask his authorial voice because the poem speaks highly of Mary's mother. Forrest resided in the king's court as well, so his personal remarks seem authorized by his presence during the

plays, it is difficult and mostly impossible to distinguish the author's voice from the text, but in *The History of Grisild the Second*, Forrest's interjections are purposely distinctive. One of the benefits of this type of writing is that the authorial opinions make it easier for the reader to interpret the message of the text. However, sometimes the potency of the author's opinions and biases affect the reader's liberty to interpret the text according to her own liking. In reading *The History of Grisild the Second*, the reader is already aware that the tale is formatted as an eye-witness account from the author's perspective, but there are certain instances in which Forrest makes his attitudes and beliefs especially clear. One of his most passionate commentaries regards the king's court and courtiers and Walter's relation to them. Remarks on the king's courtiers are also present in the other versions of the Griselda story, especially on the subject of flattery, but Forrest's delivery is by far the most convincing and zealous. Forrest eases into his critical discussion of courtly politics by telling how and why the councilors advise the king; after being asked for their advice, the councilors "Condescended to his purpose anon:/ They durste not (contrary) speake their reason,/ He was ofte tymes so rageinge furyous"(50).

Immediately, the reader is informed that the councilors are not honest due to

events about which he writes. Matthew C. Hansen recognizes "Forrest's likely hopes for this manuscript to serve as a means of self-promotion" as well as the probability of his intentions to entertain and satisfy the Tudor audience, especially "one interested in celebrating England's history and the nobility of English monarchs" ("And a Queen of England, Too": The 'Englishing' of Catherine of Aragon in Sixteenth-Century English Literary and Chronicle History", *High and Mighty Queens of Early Modern England: Realities and Representations*, Ed. C. Levin, J.E. Carney, D. Barrett-Graves. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. 79-101, 82). In using his authorial voice to criticize the counselors, Hansen claims that Walter (King Henry) is less to blame. I believe, as I argue in this chapter, that despite the ineptness of the counselors, Walter's character is still portrayed as an independently incompetent governor.

their fear of Walter, and their fear is highly indicative of Walter's violent temper "Whiche, in a Prynce, was tomuche pyteous"(50). In the next stanza, Forrest's voice dramatically exclaims, "Halasse! that Counsellours in any case/ Shoulde shrynke oughtis their headys to speake in the right!/. . . Whoe so that shrynkethe the truthe to recyte/ When eaver hee bee demaunded his mynd/ Is but a flaterer in vearye kynde"(50). Forrest then questions the need for a council at all if its members never speak the truth and then compares previous councils with Walter's. He writes, "Whye are they choase of the aunicyent sorte/ But for their wisedome and godly prudence?"(51), a comparison that reminds the reader of the change in governance tactics from Second Saloman's reign to Walter's and also implicitly critiques Walter's ability to elect capable advisors and treat them well. To emphasize the failed function of the court, Forrest's tone shifts from one of protest and anger to one of satiric sarcasm when he says "So now the Kynge withe his Counsellis consent/ Hathe fullye determynd in this case"(51). After describing for five stanzas the lack of validity in the councilors' advice, Forrest's reference to Walter acting with his councilors' *consent* simply reiterates the corruption that exists in Walter's court and the violent control Walter maintains over his advisors as a means to secure their support.

The change in the effectiveness of Walter's governance is correlated with his growing fascination with Anne Bullayne. Writing of a later time, but expressing an aphorism, Mark S. Cladis suggests that there is a "seemingly innate human proclivity to neglect public duties in the face of the personal

interests that adhere to the more private spheres”.¹⁰⁶ Cladis’ conclusion is certainly applicable to Walter because he fails to properly manage his kingdom while he is pursuing Anne and seeking a divorce from Grisild. However, it is not only Walter’s management skills that change, but his subjects’ attitudes are also affected by his negligence. Initially, when Walter is happily married and his kingdom is stable, the subjects are content and Forrest makes no complaint of them. But, once England’s political condition deteriorates, the subjects divide themselves according to their position on the political matter- prompting Forrest to critique them with the same tone he uses to criticize the courtiers. Forrest comments on the people’s various opinions of Anne’s usurpation of Grisild, stating, “Of whiche manye light braynes weare joyous and glad,/ But oother godlye moste ynwardelye sad”(51) and “Thoughe light kyttische wyttys lysted to saye so,/ Olde prouydent, sobre, wise and dyscreete,/ They wyste it sholde breede mucche ymmynent woe/ If so goode *Grysilde* weare caste undre feete,/ Depryved her Crowne”(52). Forrest especially criticizes those whose attitudes oscillate like the courtiers’ according to Walter’s word. By referring to the subjects who switch loyalties from Grisild to Anne as “light braynes”, “younkers”, “lackwyttys” and “light kyttische wyttys”, Forrest draws attention to the decay of the legitimacy of public support on political matters.¹⁰⁷ Further on in the poem, the narrative

¹⁰⁶ Cladis, Mark. S. Public Vision, Private Lives: Rousseau, Religion, and 21st Century Democracy. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. 145.

¹⁰⁷ Matthew C. Hansen writes that “Satan is a prevalent force throughout Forrest’s account and his agents-notably bad, unnamed counselors- ply on the fleshy appetites and desires of an all too human king”. He blames Walter’s poor governance on his counselors, arguing that “The King in Forrest’s presentation is the unfortunately malleable patsy caught in the middle of corrupt counselors” (Hansen, 82-3).

voice employs the same tone of passionate resistance as when it critiques Walter's council. Forrest declares, "This worlde is bothe blynde and phantasticall,/ Fycle and false in all his practycinges,/ Inconstante, muche prave, and perylous withe all"(90). Forrest then clarifies that "The Worlde is the People/...Geaven to perverse and wrongful dealinge/...To lye, to sclaunder, to gawde, and to sporte"(91). Forrest drives home his point by associating Walter with the Devil: "Takinge to name *Worlde* of the People so,/ Bycause all worldelye their fashions dothe frame,/ Of whiche said "Worlde the Dyvyl (our mortall foe)/ Is cheif Capytayne"(91). In this scene, Forrest illustrates the danger of having an ignorant and misinformed public. The 'Worlde', as he describes, is blindly following Walter and supporting his political decisions because their ignorance of the true political situation prohibits them from protesting against Walter's poor judgment. Forrest's striking emphasis on the subjects' ignorance functions as a warning to the reader not to view the public's agreement with Walter as an indication of his righteousness or rectitude. Moreover, the exaggerated emphasis on the subjects' lack of awareness implies that there are no open lines of communication between Walter and his people and that he makes no effort to publicly clarify the confusion of his private matters even though they greatly affect his governance.

While many subjects openly support Walter, there are those who secretly do not. They privately cry, "Wee, (poore Subjectes) maye it in nowise let,/ But feele it wee shall, by althynges bee doone;/ Rasche recheles

lust his race will neadys roone,/ Like cowlte unbrydeled, reason depryved,/ Throughe shame (in syne) moste straungely disguised”(72). The fact that “suche, of the rude and pooare Comynaltee,/ Was (secreatlye) their tawlke and whisperinge”(72) is yet again indicative of the lack of communication that exists between Walter and his people. Clearly, there are many who object to Walter’s behavior and the text even suggests that they, rather than Walter, anticipate the destruction of their polity. They intelligently question, “What shall become of that pryncely Flowre/ That all the Royalme hathe joyed so longe yn?”(72). However, despite the possibility that a portion of the subjects oppose Walter’s judgment, they have no agency to speak out with their objections. The fact that Walter’s subjects have to object silently, either in fear of punishment or out of the knowledge that their requests are regularly ignored, insinuates that Walter abuses his power and dictates the political and social policy without recognizing the needs of his people.

The poem puts forth many overtly unfavorable judgments on Walter’s ability to govern. In addition to being misled by his passions, being known for his violent temper, and his role in the creation of a new patriarchal hierarchy in the reformed church as a result of his obsession with power, Walter is also depicted as one who acts on impulse. In almost every case, his impetuosity results in disorder and injustice. To emphasize Walter’s lack of prudence, Forrest uses a vocabulary suggestive of speed and hastiness. For example, Walter falls for Anne the moment he sees her and has no reservation about ending his current, successful marriage so that he may have her. Also,

Walter fails to consider the consequences of divorcing Grisild, pursues the cardinal with “great velocity” in order to expedite his divorce, and eventually leads his family and kingdom into a state of chaos. Ralph Houlbrooke writes that “Divorce from bed and board, with the hope of ultimate reconciliation was granted on account of infidelity, cruelty, and inability to live together because of continual quarrels”.¹⁰⁸ But, in Walter’s case, there is no account of infidelity or cruelty on Grisild’s part and Walter certainly has no intention of ‘ultimate reconciliation’. His request for annulment, therefore, is baseless and selfish. Additionally, when Grisild first refuses to forfeit her crown, Walter’s reaction is impulsive and irrational; “Yeat neadys (withe speede) he wolde have her put downe” and “Immedyatlye then ensuyng all this/ A Cowrte he assigned at *Dunstaple*,/ To whiche was summoned goode *Grysilidis*”(89). And finally, right when “His mynde setteled on Anne in this wise”, immediately “She was advaunced *Merquese of Penbrooke*”(55). The language is evocative of haste and spontaneity and it suggests that Walter lacks the prudence necessary to be a good ruler. Phillip’s Walter demonstrates a certain level of prudence when he takes a significant amount of time to choose Griselda as his wife (which is made evident when the play begins when his counselors approach him for the *second* time about marriage). In contrast, the Walter in *The History of Grisild*

¹⁰⁸ Ralph A Houlbrooke, Church Courts and the People During the English Reformation, 1520-1570. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1979. 68-9: as cited by Comensoli, 20. The idea that Walter has no justifiable reason to divorce Grisild not only implies that it is a rash decision, but it also sheds more light on the cruelty of Walter’s character. Furthermore, Forrest’s Walter is the only Walter who does not take Grisild back as his wife at the end of the story. He leaves her suffering, separated from her daughter, and with nothing of her own besides her faith in God. By never reconciling with his wife, Forrest’s Walter is undoubtedly the cruelest Walter of all the Walters in this study.

the Second allows for no such contemplation before he acts, and instead, his decisions are irrational and based solely on his immediate desires.

As do Chaucer, Dekker, and Phillip, Forrest uses the malleable story of Walter and Griselda in such a way that proposes many valid ideas and questions about political and domestic power. And, like the text's of Chaucer, Dekker, and Phillip, Forrest's poem offers a substantial commentary on what it takes to be a successful ruler in the private and public sphere as well as what qualities are necessary in subjects and counselors in order to sustain a cooperative working government. But as much as Forrest's poem has in common with the other versions of the Walter and Griselda story, *The History of Grisild the Second* is valuably unique. First, its originality lies in its being a fairly accurate historical account of Henry VIII's infamous divorce of Katharine of Aragon. But more importantly, the poem goes further than any of the other three versions in its exploration of the dramatic and extensive consequences of the abuse of political power. Forrest not only writes that Walter is violent, but he also describes how his subjects and councilors are so afraid of Walter that they abstain from advising him truthfully. Also, while Forrest writes of Walter's failure as a paternal figure, he also illustrates in great detail how his failure as a paternal figure throws the religious, political, and domestic patriarchal hierarchies into disorder as he imagines himself in a new hierarchy. Additionally, Forrest lucidly conveys how irrational and uncontrolled Walter is and takes the extra measure to confirm Walter's lack of prudence by juxtaposing it with and comparing it to Second Salomon's and

Grisild's righteous and responsible behavior. Essentially, Forrest succeeds in molding the Walter and Griselda story into a highly charged literary discussion of sixteenth century governance in the public and private spheres. And, despite the fact that Walter shows a small degree of sympathy and an even smaller degree of remorse at Grisild's funeral, Forrest's Walter is nothing short of a dishonest, tyrannous, self-serving abuser of authority who manages to destroy all embodiments of stability and order.

CONCLUSION

My first encounter with the Griselda story was with Chaucer's "Clerk's Tale", and like Lee Bliss, I was fascinated. As do so many other readers, I initially understood the tale as a discussion of female ideals, abusive marriage, and obedient suffering. My attention was focused entirely on Griselda and the message her behavior was transmitting and Walter's character essentially remained inconsequential in my understanding of the tale. I found myself unable to figure out exactly what the story "meant"- whether we were supposed to sympathize with Griselda or reprimand her for her passivity. It was only after I read Thomas Dekker's *The Comodie of Pacient Grissill* that my analysis of the Griselda story deepened and my attention shifted to Walter.

As I read the two sixteenth century dramas, and later, William Forrest's poem, I gradually became more and more aware of the role of "the people". I began to pay closer attention to Walter's *public* persona and I was more observant of his interactions with characters other than Griselda. Eventually, scenes, scenarios, and characters that I had once considered irrelevant or resonant of domestic themes became crucial to my discussion of polity and power, such as Walter's hunting, the oaths, the public mutterings, Griselda's family, Politic Persuasion, and Griselda's faith in God. It became

clearer as I read that the Griselda story was just as much about politics as it has been said to be about domesticity. Literary criticism on Walter's exercise of marital power fuelled my curiosity to understand Walter's use of his political power, and I turned to his relationships with his subjects and courtiers to better appreciate Walter as a political figure. I was captivated by Walter's attempts rule his polity in the same manner he ruled Griselda and I was appalled by what seemed to be his increasing appetite for power. I was then able to correlate his appetite for power with his gradual loss of self control. And, from all four versions of the story discussed in this thesis, I identified Walter's behavior as tyrannical.

William Forrest's *History of Grisild the Second* contributed greatly to my political interest in the Griselda story. His poem added an historical element to my investigation that solidified my determination to see the wife testing plot as one that explored power relationships, cooperative governments, and patriarchal hierarchies. Forrest's articulation that his poem was intended to narrate the divorce between King Henry VIII and Katherine of Aragon called to my attention the political implications of the text before its domestic themes, naturally, because King Henry's divorce was so eminent in the political arena. Forrest's use of authorial commentary on the dangers of easily manipulated councilors and an ignorant public encouraged me to return to the texts of Chaucer, Dekker, and Phillip with an acute awareness of similar, though less explicit, messages.

I chose to include the two sixteenth century dramas in my thesis because of the unique discussions on familial obligations and religion that I hoped they could add to my investigation of patriarchy. Dekker's and Phillip's plays allowed me to examine other patriarchal figures besides Walter, such as fathers and God, and to then locate him in the hierarchy of powers. I found that my understanding of Walter as an authority figure was more profound when I was able to compare him to Griselda's father, her brother, and to God, and the sixteenth century plays provided me that opportunity. Understanding Walter's position in the hierarchy of powers in Dekker's and Phillip's plays also prepared me to better understand his construction of a new hierarchy in Forrest's play.

Chaucer's "Clerk's Tale" conveys the most contradictions in its meaning. I felt myself being able to challenge each argument I made with a different interpretation and I realized its complexity is essentially part of its lure. As there is no definite interpretation of Griselda's patience, there is just as little certainty about what the tale is saying about Walter's governance. He is prudent at the same time he is rational, and he participates in cooperative government at the same time his rule is tyrannical. At first I found all the tale's contradictions to be frustrating and inconclusive, but then I saw that its inconsistencies allowed for freer interpretations and I embraced them as part of the text's uniqueness. Still, despite the lack of a single, definite meaning of "The Clerk's Tale", my argument remains that it is a highly politicized text that examines medieval governance from a dimensional perspective.

The translation of the Griselda story into so many languages, as well as its reproduction into a vast array of literary forms, is not only highly indicative of its appeal, but it is also indicative of its malleability. Chaucer, Dekker, Phillip, and Forrest each use the same generic format of the wife testing plot but they all produce their own fresh and unique versions that contribute distinctively to the political interpretation of the story. Together, however, the four texts all entertain the conflict of reconciling private and public governance and portray a Walter that is obsessed with authority. Thus, I link the four versions together in my study by their capacity to be appreciated for their discourse on polity, power, and obedience.

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