

L'Estoire de Griseldis:  
The Relationship between Griseldis and Gautier

In medieval French theater, there is a play which, at least on the surface, is a significant movement away from the religious drama that preceded it. This play, L'Estoire de Griseldis, written in 1395, is a serious drama that concerns secular matters: the testing of a woman by her husband. There are, however, underlying religious tenets coupled with the overriding secular motifs: good versus evil, the triumph of patience, tolerance, and the basic goodness found in every man's soul. Griseldis' saintly patience and tolerance are in direct contrast with Gautier's relentlessly subjecting his wife to continuous trials. Finally, one sees the supremacy of faith and the return of the hierarchical superiority of right over wrong. As in the earlier miracle plays, where the Virgin sends Satan back to Hell, so does Griseldis' unfailing obedience to her husband force Gautier to abandon his callous testing of her in exchange for love and respect.

A simple comparison of recurring religious themes and characteristics found both in miracle plays and in L'Estoire de Griseldis does not satisfactorily explain some of the secular aspects of the latter. In addition to implied religious motifs, others more obviously mundane are worthy of examination. This paper focuses on one of these worldly aspects: namely, the rapport between Griseldis and Gautier, the motives (or lack thereof) behind their actions, the reasons for Gautier's eventual cessation of his churlish behavior, and finally the couple's joyful reunion.

It is important to consider the literary sources which shaped this drama, as these are an integral part of our understanding of the relationship between

husband and wife. There are eight closely related versions in prose and one drama of the Griselda story from the 14th century. In 1373, Petrarch translated into Latin Boccaccio's tale of Griselda. Along with his Latin translations Petrarch sent a letter to Boccaccio in which he wrote:

Ma nel farlo m'attenni a quel precet ta di  
Orazio:

Te troppo fido interprete non stringa  
Dura legge a tradur verbo per verbo.  
La storia è tua: ma le parole son mie: anzi  
qui e qua talvolta qualche parlola mi venne  
o cambiata od aggiunta, e stimai che ciò mi  
fosse da te non che per donato, apposto a  
merito.<sup>1</sup>

According to Elie Golenistcheff-Koutouzoff, however, Petrarch did more than add or change words here and there as he translated Boccaccio's nouvelle:

Pétrarque a profondément transformé l'esprit de la nouvelle qu'il a traduite, dégageant les sens les plus élevés, propres à purifier les âmes humaines. . . . Pétrarque a modifié l'esprit même de la nouvelle de son ami. A la fin de sa traduction, il relève les sens cachés du récit, adressés aux hommes pour qu'ils puissent y reconnaître les voies du salut. . . . C'est la personnalité pathétique de l'héroïne, devenue symbole de fermeté et de patience chrétienne et non pas celle de son cruel époux qui intéressait le traducteur.<sup>2</sup>

According to Koutouzoff, Petrarch makes seven major changes which are not found in Boccaccio's version. Briefly, Petrarch enlivens and embroiders Boccaccio's nouvelle with long descriptions of places and actions, includes many psychological observations, and has some of his characters speak in varying fashion, modifying slightly the chain of events (pp. 30-31). All

these changes, with the exception of the geographic descriptions, are to be found in the two French prose translations. This, for Koutouzoff, is proof that they were derived from Petrarch's Latin version of the Griselda story and not from Boccaccio (p. 32).

One of these two French prose translations is anonymous. The other, written by Philippe de Mézières, is found in Le livre de la vertu et du sacrement de mariage et du reconfort des dames mariées. This latter version, with some changes, is also found in Le Ménagier de Paris (ca. 1393), a collection of moral treatises whose author is unknown.<sup>3</sup> This anonymous author holds up Griseldis as an example for all women:

. . . Non mie pour mouvoir les bonnes dames à avoir patience ès tribulations que leur font leurs maris pour l'amour d'iceulx maris tant seulement, mais . . . pour monstrer que puisque ainsi est que Dieu, l'Eglise et raison veullent qu'elles soient obeissans, . . . toujours le doit-on souffrir patiemment et retourner joindre et rappeler amoureusement et attraïement à l'amour du souverain immortel, éternel et pardurable seigneur, par l'exemple de ceste povre femme née en povreté . . . qui tant souffri pour son mortel ami.<sup>4</sup>

In this work, the notion of the wife's obligatory, unquestioning obedience to her husband is mentioned time after time:

Vous soiez humble et obéissant à celluy qui sera vostre mary . . . vous soiez obéissant . . . à ses commandemens quels qu'ils soient. (pp. 96-97) . . . le commandement de Dieu est que les femmes soient subjectes à leurs maris comme à seigneurs. (pp. 97-98)

Of course there is a benefit to be derived from this

acquiescence:

. . . Car plusieurs femmes ont gaignée par leur obéissance et sont venues à grant honneur. (p. 99)

Koutouzoff points out that, at the end of the 14th century, when Philippe de Mézières was composing his treatise on marriage, a Latin poem of 516 verses concerning Griseldis was circulating in France (pp. 115-16). The author, who entitles his poem "Vita Griseldis metrificata," followed Petrarch quite closely. Koutouzoff notes further that, although this poet leaves out the geographical description at the beginning (as did the authors of the two French versions), he otherwise follows "fidèlement le chemin indiqué par Pétrarque" (p. 118).

Chaucer, in composing "The Clerk's Tale," translated nearly word for word the introductory geographical passage of Petrarch, which indicates that he, too, worked from the Latin text. However, he also used the anonymous French prose translation, and, as J. Burke Severs notes, actually relied more heavily on the French text than on the Latin version.<sup>5</sup>

In 1395, "L'histoire de la marquise de Saluce miz par personnages et rigné" was the first modern dramatic version of the Griselda story. This drama has usually been attributed to Philippe de Mézières.<sup>6</sup>

In our attempt to find some precedents for the wife-testing motif, it is to Boccaccio's own sources that we now must turn. Many scholars have set forth hypotheses in an attempt to attribute a single source for Boccaccio's Griselda. Comparisons have been suggested between this work and the Calumniated Wife Cycle, the story of Sakuntala from the Mahabharata, and Marie de France's Lai del Frêne. In each instance, however, the comparisons are quite far-reaching and vague. In the Calumniated Wife, the woman is accused of infidelity before her husband and sentenced to exile or death; not so with the Griselda of



Boccaccio. In the second example, Sakuntala is half-goddess, half-mortal and it is never a matter of her being of lowly birth, as is the case with Griselda. Only near the end of Marie's Lai del Frêne is there any indication of a similarity between her lai and Boccaccio's Griselda. In both, a mistress becomes the servant at the wedding feast in honor of the woman who is about to take her place. The ousted mistress is then recognized as the long-lost relative (the mother) of the new bride. Again we see in this lai only one of the many tests Griselda is forced to endure.<sup>7</sup>

The similarities between these three tales and Griselda lie in the loutish behavior of the husband toward the wife and in the happy reconciliation at the conclusion of the tale. In each, the wife is subjected to the incomprehensible demands of her mate. The similarity between these tales, however, ends here. The ways the women are put to the test and their resultant behaviors are very different. I agree with Griffith who finds little to indicate that these tales served as the sources for Boccaccio (pp. 20-22).

I have reservations, nonetheless, about Griffith's subsequent source-hypothesis. He attempts to link Griselda with the Cupid and Psyche tales (pp. 23-24). True, there is the recurring motif of children being taken from their mothers, but there are two major differences between the Cupid and Psyche tales and Griselda which far outweigh this similar child-removal motif. In the Cupid and Psyche tales, the love relationship is between a mortal woman and an other-world man. In Boccaccio's and, one might add, in the French play, we find a nobleman involved with a peasant woman and they are both mortals. Griffith finds a great similarity in comportment between the Marquis and an other-world being. He sees the Marquis as bound by no earthly, conventional laws, and thus as transcending common man, as elevated to an immortal position (cc. 2 and 3). I find this a faulty hypothesis. Machinations of other-world be-

ings have no place in this tale in which patience triumphs over adversity. The Marquis is quite simply the seigneur, feudal lord of all he surveys. He does what he wants, not because he is a god, but because he is lord and master. He does not need to justify his actions, because feudal tradition has accustomed a group of people to be presided over and controlled by one man. In L'Estoire de Griseldis, not only the heroine but all are subject to the Marquis:

Le dit Gautier, soubz qui estoient  
Gouvernez et obeissoient  
De droit tous les autres marquis,  
Barons et chevaliers de pris,  
Escuiers, bourgoiz et marchans.  
Tous lui furent obeissans.<sup>8</sup>

His subjects may indeed have viewed him as possessing the divine right of power, but he was, after all, merely a man. He is much wealthier than Griseldis and controls her life because of the unusual promise of obedience he has exacted from her. He meets her in the woods, not because this is where the gods frequently appeared on earth, but because his favorite pastime is hunting and the forest is his habitual milieu:

La riviere li fu plaisans  
Et le bois au deduit des chiens. (vv. 74-75)

By virtue of being a husband, Gautier exerts supreme authority over his wife, a terrestrial authority commonplace between husband and wife. According to Maurice Valency:

In the domestic circle, presumably, the authority of the husband was paramount beyond dispute: the relation of man and wife was regulated by the Pauline dictum that "the head of every man is Christ and the head of woman is the man." . . . A woman owed her

husband the duty of unquestioning obedience. She had neither the capacity <sup>nor</sup> the right to form a separate opinion. . . . Marriage imposed upon the husband the authority of the patriarch, whether he liked it or not. . . . The theory of marriage was based on the idea of the physical and mental superiority of the male, the fundamental dogma of a paternalistic culture.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the different marital circumstances in the Cupid and Psyche tales (where it is a question of a marital contract between a god and a mortal) and that of Griseldis, one must note another, that of the wife's behavior. In the Cupid and Psyche tales, the wife overtly breaks a tabu that she has been explicitly told to obey. Griseldis, on the other hand, does absolutely nothing for which she could be blamed. Yet, she is "punished" as severely as the women in the Cupid and Psyche tales who deserve to be so treated. If anyone is to be accused of breaking a tabu in L'Estoire de Griseldis, it should be the Marquis. He has broken the cardinal rule of marrying beneath his social position. If he had been the one tested, and this is certainly a moot point, how differently would the story have proceeded! One can imagine the author, depending on his particular point of view, expounding upon the pitfalls or the triumphs of marrying beneath oneself. Instead, however, Griseldis is the one tested and there is quite a different lesson to be learned.

An examination of these disparate literary antecedents provides one with the opportunity to synthesize motifs from several sources. It is pointless to ascribe one, and only one, source to Boccaccio's tale. Medieval audiences, like modern ones, must have had little desire to hear the same story over and over again. By taking bits and pieces from several sources, Boccaccio was able to weave a new story, one in which the motifs were often familiar to

his audience but which still provided much that was interesting and exciting. Petrarch, Philippe de Mézières, and Chaucer likewise embellished Griselda's poignant story, translating it into languages suitable for their particular audiences.

After examining these various sources, it is clear that putting a wife to the test was a quite common folklore motif. The crux of the matter, however, namely the reasons why the wife was put to the test, remains basically inexplicable. As Griffith says:

At no place in the novella is his right to test his wife seriously questioned nor is any reason given for the Marquis' capricious cruelty except that "it entered his mind to test his wife by things unendurable." (p. 69)

The Griselda story in the Decameron shows no particular reason either:

Ma poco appresso, entratogli un nuovo  
pensier nell'animo, cioè di volere con lunga  
esperienza e con cose intollerabili provare  
la pazienza di lei.<sup>10</sup>

Nor does the dramatic version, L'Estoire de Griseldis, provide any reason: "De sa prudence me merueille, / Maiz sa constance esprouveray" (vv. 1333-34). Chaucer provides a shred more insight in "The Clerk's Tale":

This markys in his herte longeth so  
To tempte his wyf, hir sadnesse for to knowe,  
That he ne myghte out of his herte throwe  
This merveillous desir his wif t'assaye;  
Nedelees, God woot, he thoghte hire for  
t'affraye.

He hadde assayed hire ynogh bifore,  
And foond hire evere good; what neded it  
Hire for to tempte, and alwey moore and moore,

Though som men preise it for a subtil wit?<sup>11</sup>

Be it "subtil wit" or not, is there not another purpose?

Barbara Craig believes that "an established folklore tradition would render more acceptable Griselda's vow of obedience and Gautier's testing of his wife" (p. 2). Perhaps to a medieval audience tradition was sufficient reason to explain Gautier's behavior. To a modern-day reader, however, Griseldis' unquestioning acquiescence is as incomprehensible as is Gautier's malfeasance. We seek explanations of this behavior. It matters little if the dénouement happily resolves the question. If plausible reasons are not given for the original conflict, the moral lesson is lost.

In all of the Griselda stories previously mentioned, the Marquis always gives a "valid" reason for each test to which he is about to subject her. Curiously, it is always the same reason. In the play, for example, when he takes their daughter away, he comments on the barons:

Car ilz ont desdaing et despit  
D'avoir dame de si petit  
Estrasse et si basse lignie. (vv. 1352-54)

When the son is taken away, "nostre peuple" are

. . . mal content  
De nous et nostre mariage  
Pour la basseur de ton lignie. (vv. 1605-07)

Finally, when he sends his wife back to her father's house so that he may marry another, he says:

Mes hommes s'efforcent forment,  
. . . . .  
Que une autre femme prendre doye. (vv. 2081-83)

How easy it is for Gautier to place the blame on his

people. For himself, he graciously compliments Griseldis in an obvious attempt to place all the blame on his men, never saying that he is in agreement with them. It is interesting to note that, although he fears censure from his barons when he chooses a peasant bride, none is ever forthcoming. He needlessly and repeatedly exacts promises of silence from his men. Not once do they criticize his bride. Gautier himself receives more criticism than does Griseldis.

Gautier wants to protect the status quo at any cost, and by garbing Griseldis in suitable clothing, giving her the appearance of a grand lady, he convinces everyone, except himself, that she is worthy of the title of Marquise. (It is obvious, of course, that Griseldis possesses some innate character traits which allow her to step gracefully and quite unself-consciously from peasantry to nobility. The evidence of her high moral character has already been seen in her unselfish devotion to her father.)

Why cannot Gautier believe that Griseldis is worthy of his respect and his love? Let us not forget that the idea to wed was not his own. He marries to please his barons, never expecting that he might also enjoy the benefits of matrimony. In the drama, we are provided little insight into Gautier's thoughts other than those he verbalizes. In the prose versions, however, we learn that he has some opinions about Griselda before he weds her. In "The Clerk's Tale," Chaucer writes:

And whan it fil that he myghte hire espye,  
.....  
Upon hir chiere he wolde hym ofte avyse,

Commendynge in his herte hir wommanhede,  
And eek hir vertu, passynge any wight  
.....  
. . . and disposed that he wolde  
Wedde hire oonly, if evere he wedde sholde.  
(vv. 235-45)

Until he is persuaded to marry, Gautier has been occupied with his two non-human loves: hunting and hawking. There seems to have been little place in his life for women:

Seulement se voutt deporter  
En oyseaux wt en chiens chassans.  
. . . . .  
Maiz point ne lui plot li liens  
Ne li estas de mariaige.  
Souffrir n'en vouloit le servaige  
Ne n'en vouloit oïr parler. (vv. 72-79)

For Gautier, a husband is certainly worthy of sainthood:

Me voulez vous dont martirer  
En moy liant en mariaige? (vv. 346-47)

He goes on to expound upon the pitfalls of marriage:

Car puis que je seray liez,  
Petit auray de bon plaisir  
Franchement vif sanz desplaisir,  
Joyeux de cuer et sanz soussy,  
Et dés que j'auray fait cecy  
Penser et paine me sourdra. (vv. 356-61)

Gautier believes that when a man marries, joyous and carefree life changes to pain and distress. Marriage does not seem to be worth the trouble:

Si pesant m'en semble le faiz  
Que ne le pourroye porter,  
Car je ne me quier deporter  
Fors en ma franche liberté. (vv. 372-75)

Although it is nowhere explicitly stated in the text, I believe that Gautier chooses Griseldis as a bride because of her lowly birth. When he sees her,

he obviously realizes she is of humble origin. No noble woman would be tending a flock:

Je l'ay veüe moult souvent  
Gardant brebis parmi ces champs. (vv. 780-81)

He does not, however, fall madly in love with her. His dispassionate enumeration of her qualities is certainly not the speech of a man inflamed with love. What is important to Gautier is Griseldis' demeanor and character:

Maiz sa maniere est bien plaisans;  
Dieu la vueille en bonté parfaire,  
Et tant qu'elle puisse a Dieu plaire  
Car simple semble et sanz orgueil.  
(vv. 782-85)

Griseldis' character is of fundamental importance to Gautier, because these same qualities of simplicity and obedience are exactly those which he seeks in order to create a meek and acquiescent wife.

Gautier's eloquent speech on the pitfalls of marriage demonstrates clearly his lack of desire to wed. Yet, he does concede that his marriage will soon occur: "A ceste prouchain Penthecouste" (v. 617). Thus, he has little time in which to search for a suitable bride. But a plan must be brewing somewhere in a corner of his mind, or why would he agree so easily and with such dispatch? Immediately after agreeing to wed, he stumbles once again upon Griseldis. His plan has now taken definite shape, for he commands his barons to leave in order to:

. . . faire faciez  
Pour noz noces ce qu'il fauldra.  
(vv. 788-89)

The possessive adjective, "noz," would seem to indicate that he has now made a decision and wishes his men to prepare for "our" wedding (Gautier's and his



bride's), not "my." Gautier is not making use here of the "royal we" since normally, when referring to himself alone, he uses the pronoun "je." What has happened between agreeing to seek a bride and subsequently seeing Griseldis? Nothing. It appears that the sight of her in her humble and subservient position is all that Gautier needs in order to reach a decision. By choosing a woman of lesser social position than his, he will be more likely to awe her into subservience, thus allowing him to continue his customary life-style. He seems to have chosen correctly, for when he sends Griseldis back to her father, she has nothing but thanks and praise for Gautier:

Et morray com vesve eüreuse,  
Qui ay esté femme et espeuse  
De tel et si noble seigneur. (vv. 2123-25)

In spite of all the pain which he has inflicted upon her, she is grateful to him and graciously takes her leave.

A second benefit for a man of noble birth marrying a woman of inferior rank is its social impact upon the reader. It is more morally uplifting to see, as one reads in "The Clerk's Tale," that "under low degree / Was ofte vertu hid," (vv. 425-26) and that:

Che si potrà dir qui, se non che anche nelle  
povere case piocono dal cielo de' divini spi-  
riti, come nelle reali de quegli che sarien  
più degni du guardar porci che d'avere sopra  
uomini signoria? (II, 659)

What a gratifying promise for those of low birth.

Another possible reason for Gautier's inhumane treatment of his wife has been suggested by Donald Maddox in his two articles, "Early Secular Courtly Drama in France: L'Estoire de Griseldis" and "The Hunting Scenes in L'Estoire de Griseldis."<sup>12</sup> Maddox, in an attempt to rationalize Gautier's seemingly bar-

baric character, has set forth cogent analogies between the hunting strategies of Gautier and his behavior towards Griseldis. Not only has Gautier inherent tendencies to treat his wife as prey, but, Maddox suggests, the Marquis also seeks to resolve the conflict between prowess and marital devotion:

Gautier's pre-marital fear of becoming effeminate in marriage . . . causes him to test Griseldis in order to reassure himself of his own masculinity, for as long as Griseldis impassively obeys even the most outrageous of his whims, he is able to preserve a positive masculine self-concept.<sup>13</sup>

It is this same conflict which is so clearly demonstrated in the works of Chrétien de Troyes. An examination of one of Chrétien's own likely sources, which in turn may have influenced Philippe de Mézières, could provide us with additional insight into Gautier's behavior. In De Amore, Andreas Capellanus, a contemporary of Chrétien de Troyes, presents a thorough system of rules and regulations governing "courtly love." According to John Jay Parry, Andreas' work "was a sort of parody on the technical treatise of Ovid's day-- a bit of fooling which should never have been taken seriously, but often was."<sup>14</sup> Speaking of courtly love, Parry says:

This developed in the twelfth century among the troubadours of southern France, but soon spread into the neighboring countries and in one way or another colored the literature of most of western Europe for centuries. (p. 3)

It is relatively easy to associate some of Andreas' rules with Gautier's behavior and set forth additional reasons for the latter's conduct. Thus, Rule XVIII: "Probitas sola quemque dignum facit amore."<sup>15</sup> We are well aware of Gautier's outstanding moral character; his subjects love and respect him and he

is very anxious to make them happy. Rule VIII: "Nemo sine rationis excessu suo debet amore privari." There is no apparent reason why such a marvelous lord should go without the total fulfillment that only love can provide. True, he does not know Griseldis well, but her beauty as well as her lowly position in life attract him to her. Through his delight in her quick, unquestioning acquiescence to all his demands, he comes to respect and love her. He professes his love for her often, generally prior to inflicting new pain upon her. His protestations of love do not prevent him from continuing to abuse Griseldis' loyalty, however, and no sooner are avowals of adoration offered than a new tribulation is pronounced: "O Griseldis, que tant amay, / Ay amee, et aim de present" (vv. 1335-36). In private he proclaims his love but in public he is forced to hide it, for there is, unfortunately, an obstacle to surmount, Rule XI: "Non decet amare, quarum pudor est nuptias affectare." Gautier is much too concerned with what others might think about his unseemly union with Griseldis. After all, he never mentions her identity until she is ready to accept his name. The marriage is nearly accomplished before the identity of the bride is known.

To Gautier Griseldis is perfect, but as Rule XX says: "Amorosus semper est timorosus." Gautier seeks to test Griseldis to convince himself of her worthiness to receive his love and to demonstrate this loyalty to others. Only when Griseldis successfully passes the ultimate humiliation and torment of seemingly losing her children and her husband does Gautier realize that Griseldis will always passively accept any evil he could ever inflict upon her. As Maddox writes: "He is won over by the steadfast love exhibited by his prey [Griseldis]."<sup>16</sup>

Gautier finally comes to terms with himself and his love for Griseldis. A partial explanation for his reticence is perhaps Rule XIV: "Facilis perceptio contemptibilem reddit amorem, difficilis eum carum facit haberi." Gautier, of course, is fully aware of Griseldis' love for him, manifested so clear-

ly by her unflagging devotion. Yet, it is not her love that is difficult to comprehend but rather his own feelings for her.

It is interesting to consider why Gautier sends Griseldis back to her father since it would have been much easier to torment her at his castle. He obviously does not vindictively seek to torture her; he always hurries away from her after announcing his latest intention, lest she see how much he is bothered by his own actions. Moreover, before he sends her to Janicola's, Gautier gives Griseldis a small bit of hope to take with her, a veiled indication that the worst is nearly over:

Preng dont fort cuer, et je t'en pry,  
Et en appaise ton corage.

. . . . .  
Car nul sort n'est perpetuel  
A homme n'a feme; s'est bel  
De s'en deporter bonnement. (vv. 2086-93)

He beseeches her to stand firm, the end of her suffering being close at hand. Gautier can not bear to watch Griseldis' anxious suffering: he knows full well that he will continue to increase her torment until he can come to terms with his own pride. No reason is given for sending Griseldis back to her father but, in order to have his forthcoming marriage appear plausible, Gautier must make room for his new bride. Nonetheless, the ultimate humiliation for Griseldis is to be sent back to the hut from which she has come. This stepping-aside, as a new woman is about to take Griseldis' place, is the last and severest of Gautier's tests.

I do not here propose that the "rules of courtly love" of Andreas Capellanus were the primary source for Philippe de Mézières. There are many rules which would certainly not apply without some considerable stretching. For example, the twenty-fifth rule states that, "Verus amans nil bonum cre-

dit nisi quod cogitat coamanti placere." Gautier's every act succeeds in placing obstacles in the path of love. He sees the pain he causes Griseldis; yet he persists. It could be argued, however, that he is not a "true lover," and this would definitely seem to be the case. His concern for what others think precludes his total submission to loving a woman of humble birth. Until he can satisfactorily resolve the conflict within himself, he cannot become an indulgent "verus amans."

Another example of discrepancy between Philippe de Mézières and Andreas Capellanus is found in their notions of love. According to Andreas, love between husband and wife is impossible. His De Amore deals with a code of love for lovers, not for husband and wife. The "pure love" of Andreas is beyond the bonds of marriage, reserved for a woman and her lover:

. . . quum liquide constet inter virum et  
uxorem amorem sibi locum vindicare non posse.  
(p. 72)

Maurice Valency notes this when he writes that "Medieval man married for all sorts of reasons, but not often for love" (p. 63). This is true of Gautier. He does not marry for love and professes to love only at the end of the play, after he has finished with Griseldis' testing. Nonetheless, he does confess to loving his wife, a sentiment which Andrea Capellanus believed impossible. Even if there be a few points communs between Andreas and Philippe de Mézières, indicating that Philippe borrowed certain motifs from Andreas, it is clear that Philippe adapted them to suit his own purposes, ultimately arriving at the more uncommon theme of conjugal love.

Gautier is obviously the villain in this play, but his fervent need to test Griseldis is as incomprehensible to him as it is to us, the readers. In "The Clerk's Tale," Chaucer speaks of Gautier's sadness: "Al drery was his cheere and his lookyng, / Whan that he sholde out of the chambre go" (vv. 514-

15) and ". . . forth he goth with drery contenance" (v. 671). In L'Estoire, Griseldis, obliged to return "son riche habit" to Gautier, asks whether she may keep "une chemise" (v. 2173). The stage directions describe him as "larmoiant et tornant sa face de pitie" (after v. 2177). Near the end of the play, Gautier gives a moving speech wherein he indicates his deep love and respect for Griseldis:

O Griseldis! asses! souffist!  
Ta vraye foy et loyauté,  
La constance et l'umilité  
Et l'amour qu'a moi as eüe  
Ay par esprouver coigneüe,  
Et ta parfaitte obedience  
Ay trouvé par experience.  
Et croy que soubz le ciel n'ait homme  
Qui par tant d'experimens comme  
Je t'ay ferme et constant trouvee  
Ait en autre femme esprouvee  
La bonne amour de mariage. (vv. 2452-63)

We quite readily sympathize with Griseldis and, just as quickly, we are appalled at Gautier and his vileness. Perhaps taking into consideration the various reasons for his actions which I have mentioned above, we can find some small shred of sympathy toward Gautier as well. After all, he does not truly kill their children nor marry another woman. Gautier is driven by an uncontrollable urge to prove to his own satisfaction that his wife is worthy of his love, if not by birth, then by character. His continuous testing serves to demonstrate the virtues he knew Griseldis possessed the day he married her.

The reason for Griseldis' passive acceptance of her husband's unscrupulous behavior is equally open to speculation. She cannot possibly believe that Gautier's people are forcing him into such actions. The crowd is obviously in her favor. In "The Clerk's Tale" Chaucer writes:

To every wight she woxen is so deere  
And worshipful that folk ther she was bore,  
And from hire birthe knewe hire yeer by yeere,  
Unnethe trowed they,--but dorste han swore--  
That to Janicle, of which I spak bifore,  
She doghter were, for, as by conjicure,  
Hem thoughte she was another creature.

(vv. 400-06)

When Gautier sends Griselda back to her father's house, "The fok hire folwe, wepynge in hir weye, / And Fortune ay they cursen as they goon" (vv. 897-98). In L'Estoire we learn "comment les chevaliers s'esbahyssoient de la prudence Griseldis" (after v. 1235).

Griseldis, unlike her husband, seems to be influenced not in the least by the people. Amid the laments of the lords and ladies she placidly says:

Messeigneurs, il est convenable  
Que le marquis tout a son gré  
Face de moy sa volenté,  
Et pour ce me plaist que m'en voise.

(vv. 2200-03)

The mental anguish to which Griseldis is subjected increases as she awaits her subsequent trial, knowing that, no matter how horrible it is, she must unflinchingly bear the weight. Griseldis is a remarkable woman. She possesses a much stronger character than does Gautier, for she cares little about the opinions of others. Her life centers around pleasing her husband and she will attain this goal no matter what the cost to her well-being and happiness. Gautier, on the other hand, cares so much about the opinions of others that he risks losing that about which he cares most, his wife and children. His preoccupations with what others think control his thoughts and actions and, although his people give no outward indication that they disapprove of Griseldis (quite

the contrary), Gautier is convinced that they do. He will not cease his testing until he can look at Griseldis and see radiating from her the patience, tolerance, and loyalty that would replace the one flaw that worries him the most: her lowly social position.

Since, contrary to Gautier's insistence, it is not the barons who object, what then is the reason for his persistent testing? Is it more than a psychological condition? Griffith writes:

No reasons are given by the superior-being for imposing the tabu because giving reasons or explaining the tabu as a test for the mortal would lessen its value as an indication of unquestioning loyalty. The tabu must be accepted willingly by the mortal and maintained because of devotion to the other-world being. (p. 88)

Griffith again evokes the relationship between an other-world being and a mortal. He sees the immortal as bestowing supernatural powers upon his mortal bride: "The worshipful love for the superior-being makes possible the endurance of tests which no mortal could undergo" (p. 93). I hesitate to attribute the qualities of an immortal-being to Griseldis, however. I believe that there are three very simple, very mortal reasons for her unquestioning devotion: 1. Prior to the marriage, she promises to tolerate any behavior no matter how severe and, despite her pain, she has every intention of keeping her word. 2. She would never have felt it her place to complain, even if her promise had not been given. She is a peasant girl and Gautier is her lord and master after as well as before their marriage. 3. She was in love with and in awe of her husband. As we may recall from Andreas' Rule XXVI: "Amor nil posset amori denegare" and her love for Gautier prevented her from rebelling against him. Moreover, medieval woman was at the



mercy of her husband, for she had nowhere else to turn. Her own family gave up any prior claim to their daughter when she married.<sup>17</sup> Griseldis was certainly not an independent-spirited woman and she never entertained the notion of leaving Gautier. The powerful tradition of female obedience to the domination of the male is much in evidence here and explains in great part Griseldis' seemingly tolerant, unquestioning acceptance. She does everything in her power to please Gautier and is "rewarded" by the removal of her two children and the feigned intention to annul her marriage. One thing, however, which is not in her power to change is her lowly social origin. Griseldis sees her constant torment as being only what is rightfully due her. Although "elevated" to the position of Marquise, she never forgets her humble birth and never once believes that her life with Gautier is to be permanent:

N'onques ne me reputay digne  
D'estre seulement ta meschine,  
Ne t'espeuse en quelque maniere.  
(vv. 2103-05)

Despite his behavior, she thanks Gautier for those few, precious years that she lived with him: "Dieu et toy, sire, regracie" (v. 2115).

Even though Griseldis leaves Gautier with no outward show of emotion other than gratitude for all that he gave her, not mentioning all that he took from her, one cannot help but wonder if she does not also leave with a great sense of relief. She knows that returning to her father will put an end to her trials and that:

Ma viellesce y trespasseyay  
Comme ma jeunesse y usay. (vv. 2121-22)

With the exception of the single "chemise" which the Marquis allows her to keep (vv. 2178-79), Griseldis returns to Janicola "Nüe de trestous biens mondains"

(v. 2157).-- She almost completely divorces herself from the objects which could remind her of the abused life she led while under the domination of Gautier.

What is being examined in this drama is Griseldis' complete and selfless devotion to her husband. One finds that it is her quiet tolerance in the face of incomprehensible adversity that provides the audience with the moral lesson. Patience rewards Griseldis with the return of her children and her reinstatement as Marquise. Her acquiescence to Gautier's every demand has made her the ideal wife. Since her subservience and unqualified devotion to her husband have resulted in a loving familial reconciliation, she knows that the perpetuation of her happiness rests on her continued yielding to the domination of her husband. For this reason, Griseldis never once complains about her spouse's loutish behavior. After being reunited with her family she tearfully embraces her children saying:

Ha! mes doulz enfans, ne puis rire,  
Mais de joye pleure et souspir,  
Car tant ay joye que souffrir  
Ne me puis de vous faire feste. (vv. 2484-87)

Her first words to Gautier indicate that her obedience will not end with the return of the status-quo: "puisqu'il vous plaist a commander, / Tres liement le feray, sire" (vv. 2504-05). She will continue to do all that he wishes her to do.

Thus, it is extremely possible that Gautier's fiendish behavior toward his wife can be attributed to his unfamiliarity with women and how they should be treated. He only marries in order to please his subjects and it would seem that up to this point in his life, he has not been concerned with the usual desire to perpetuate his name by taking a wife and fathering a legitimate heir. Rather, his desire to participate in the exclusively male pastimes of hunting and hawking makes him less than eager to be tied down to a wife. He seems to take a dim view of

changing his carefree bachelorhood for the ties of marriage. His sense of duty to his people overcomes his own reservations, however, and he quickly becomes a husband, but not to a woman his equal in social position. Although he knows little about Griseldis, he is aware both of her humble background and of her virtues. It is for this reason that he chooses her as his bride. Her lowly origin places her in deep awe of and unquestioning obedience to her husband. Thus, Gautier is able to treat her as he desires. He fears that such a woman will satisfy his needs but will undoubtedly not be acceptable to his subjects. Not wishing to lose any respect from his people, he forces Griseldis to undergo repeated tests of loyalty and subservience in an attempt to increase her worth, replacing her one flaw (lowly birth) with outstanding character traits and making her the perfect wife.

In truth, Gautier soon comes to love Griseldis but, as with some of the heroes in Chrétien de Troyes' works, he must not let his love overcome his masculine prowess. Griseldis, like a hunted animal, is baited, cornered, and trapped. Gautier, the great hunter, must maintain his virile stature and only by riding rough-shod over Griseldis can he retain his manly self-image.

For love to be meaningful, one must not sacrifice all else to the total exclusion of love. As Andreas Capellanus tells us in his Rule XIV:

Facilis perceptio contemptibilem reddit amorem,  
difficilis eum carum facit haberi.

(p. 160)

Only when Gautier conquers his innate fear of criticism and of disrespect from his people and realizes that his subjects are pleased with his choice of a bride can he stop his testing of Griseldis; only then can he appreciate and love her openly. It is very likely that Chrétien and, to a lesser degree, Andreas Capellanus influenced Philippe de Mézières' L'Estoire de Griseldis.

Griseldis' character is not as clearly defined nor as complicated as her husband's. Her passivity stems from her promise to abide by her husband's desires, her inferior social position, her deep love for her husband, and her traditional role as subservient wife. Quite simply, she really has no choice in the matter at all.

In conclusion, aside from the secular milieu and characters, the overriding theme of the play, and of all the versions of the Griselda story for that matter, is essentially a didactic one with a universal message for all. As Chaucer writes at the end of "The Clerk's Tale":

And suffreth us, as for oure excercise,  
With sharpe scourges of adversitee  
Ful ofte to be bete in sondry wise;  
Nat for to knowe oure wyl, for certes he,  
Er we were born, knew al oure freletee;  
And for oure beste is al his governaunce.  
Lat us thanne lyve in vertuous suffraunce.  
(vv. 1156-62)

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Francesco Petrarca, Lettere Senili di Francesco Petrarca, a cura di Giuseppe Francassetti (Firenze: Successori le Monnier, 1892), II, 543 (Libro XVII, Lettera 3).

<sup>2</sup> Elei Golenistcheff-Koutouzoff, L'Histoire de Griseldis en France au XIV<sup>e</sup> et au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1975; réimpression de l'édition de Paris, 1933), p. 28-30.

<sup>3</sup> See Barbara M. Craig, ed., L'Estoire de Griseldis, University of Kansas Humanistic Studies, No. 31 (Lawrence: The University of Kansas Press, 1954), p. 3. Three manuscripts of the anonymous version known as traduction B have dates of 1422, 1436, and 1476. See Koutouzoff, pp. 53, 82, and 87-114. According to Koutouzoff, traduction B is "plus sobre, plus 'impersonnelle' que celle de Philippe de Mézières. Le style en est moins lourd; le nouveau traducteur cherche à éviter le verbalisme" (p. 83).

<sup>4</sup> Le Ménagier de Paris: Traité de Morale et d'Economie domestique composé vers 1393 par un bourgeois Parisien, éd. Jérôme Pichon (Genève; Slatkine Reprints, 1966), I, 124-25. See also the introduction by Pichon written in 1847. In his footnote 2 on pages xxv-xxvi, Pichon attempts to name an author but reaches no satisfactory conclusion.

<sup>5</sup> J. Burke Severs, "The Clerk's Tale," in Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales", eds. W. F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941), p. 289.

<sup>6</sup> See Grace Frank, "The Authorship of Le Mystère de Griseldis," Modern Language Notes, LI (1936), 217-22.

<sup>7</sup> See Dudley David Griffith, The Origin of the Griselda Story, University of Washington Publications in Language and Literature, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1931), pp. 1-120.

<sup>8</sup> L'Estoire de Griseldis, ed. Barbara M. Craig, University of Kansas Humanistic Studies, No. 31 (Lawrence: The University of Kansas Press, 1954), vv. 55-60. All references to L'Estoire de Griseldis are from this edition.

<sup>9</sup> Maurice Valency, In Praise of Love: An Introduction to the Love Poetry of the Renaissance (New

York: Macmillan, 1958), p. 62.

<sup>10</sup> Giovanni Boccaccio, Decameron, a cura di Vit-tore Branca (Firenze: Felice le Monnier, 1952), II, 649-50. All references to the Decameron are from this edition.

<sup>11</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Clerk's Tale," The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. F. N. Robinson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), vv. 450-59. All references to "The Clerk's Tale" are from this edition.

<sup>12</sup> Donald Maddox, "Early Secular Courtly Drama in France: L'Estoire de Griseldis" in The Expansion and Transformations of Courtly Literature, eds. Nathaniel B. Smith and Joseph T. Snow (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1980), pp. 156-70, and "The Hunting Scenes in L'Estoire de Griseldis" in Voices of Conscience: Essays in Medieval and Modern French Literature in Memory of James D. Powell and Rosemary Hodgins, ed. Raymond J. Cormier (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1977), pp. 78-94.

<sup>13</sup> Maddox, "The Hunting Scenes," pp. 91-92.

<sup>14</sup> John Jay Parry, trans. and introd., Andreas Capellanus, The Art of Courtly Love (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Andreas Capellanus, Andreae Capellani regii Francorum De Amore libri tres, éd. Amadeo Pagès (Castellón de la Plana: Sociedad Castellonense de Cultura, 1929), p. 160. All references to De Amore are from this edition.

<sup>16</sup> Maddox, "Early Secular Courtly Drama," p. 163.

<sup>17</sup> See Frances and Joseph Gies, Women in the Middle Ages (New York: Thomas Crowell, 1978), chs. 2 and 3.