

**PATIENT GRISSIL:
A COMEDY**

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Patient Grissil: A Comedy by Thomas Dekker & Henry Chettle & William Haughton

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THOMAS DEKKER & HENRY CHETTLER & WILLIAM HAUGHTON

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A Comedy

BY

THOMAS DEKKER, HENRY CHETTLE, AND
WILLIAM HAUGHTON.

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WITH AN

INTRODUCTION AND NOTES.



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INTRODUCTION.

The French lay claim to the original of the story of Griselda; and the Abbé de Sade (Mem. de Petrarch, iii, 797) asserts that it is found in a manuscript called *Le Parement des Dames*. Mr. Campbell, in his "Life of Petrarch," follows the authority of de Sade upon this point; but it seems that the French manuscript, containing the novel of Griselda, was the work of Olivier de la Marche, who was not born till considerably after the death of Boccaccio. (Tyrwhitt's *Intro. to Cant. Tales*, i. cxcv. edit. 1830, 8vo.) Whencesoever, therefore, Boccaccio derived his materials, we know of no earlier version than that which he has left us in his *Decameron*, of which it forms the tenth novel of the last day. In a note at the end of the table to the Giolito edition of Boccaccio, 12mo., 1552, it is said, "*Il Petrarca tradusse la presente Novella in lingua Latina, e mandolla al Boccaccio*," which we know to be the fact, because the letter from Petrarch to Boccaccio, transmitting the translation of it, is still extant; (*Op. Petrarch.* edit. Basil, 1581, 540.) and Petrarch adds that "he had heard the story many years before." It is very possible, therefore, that Boccaccio was originally indebted to Petrarch for the incidents which he subsequently

wove into a narrative, which gave so much delight to the poet of Vaucluse. Chaucer, too, in the prologue to his "Clerk of Oxenford's Tale," informs us that he (speaking in the person of the narrator) had heard the substance of it from Petrarch himself at Padua, and makes no allusion to Boccaccio. It may not be easy at this time to fix with certainty the date when Chaucer visited Petrarch at Padua, but there seems no ground for altogether discrediting his testimony on the point.

As far as can now be ascertained, the French were the first to bring the subject on the stage: *Le Mystere de Griselidis* was represented in Paris as early as 1393, (Warton's Hist. Engl. Poetry, ii. 251, edit. 8vo. 1824.) and more than a century afterwards it was printed by Jehan Bonfons in Paris, under the title of *Le Mystere de Griselidis de Saluces, par personnages*. A re-impression of this edition was made by Pinard, and published by Silvestre, as recently as 1832. It is singular, considering the popularity of the subject in Italy, and the peculiar facility with which it could be adapted to the stage, that it remained undramatized in that country until 1620. This statement we make upon the authority of Apostolo Zeno, who himself converted the story into an opera, and whose testimony is not to be disputed. In Germany it was adopted, and adapted, in the middle of the sixteenth century, Hans Saachs having converted it into a drama as early as the year 1550.

English readers first became acquainted with the story by means of Chaucer's beautiful and extended versification of the incidents; and comparing them with those in Boccaccio's novel, it may be inferred that

Chaucer saw Petrarch after he had read, if not translated, what Boccaccio had sent to him. Subsequently the story acquired great celebrity, and we find it thus noticed in Thomas Feylde's "Contraversye bytwene a Lover and a Jaye," printed, without date, by Wynkyn de Worde:—

" Ryght fewe of Grysylde's kynde
Is now lefte on lyve ;"

the author having previously introduced her among sundry pairs of lovers. Warton (H. E. P. iv. 136. edit. 1824) mentions a MS. poem dedicated to Queen Mary by William Forrest, her chaplain, comparing Katherine, the first wife of Henry VIII., to Griselda; and we know from the entries on the Stationers' Registers, that about the middle of the sixteenth century ballads upon the subject of "Patient Grissell" were by no means uncommon. What is called "The Pleasant and sweet History of Patient Grissell" was evidently an early production of this class, in prose and verse, although the only known copy of it, in black letter, has the date cut off, and purports to be "printed by E. P. for John Wright." Apart from the prose, the verse also remains to us in the shape of a black-letter broadside, under the title of "An excellent Ballad of a Noble Marquess and Patient Grissell." The language is evidently older than the date when these pieces appear to have been issued; and although they must have undergone various changes and many corruptions, we are perhaps warranted in concluding that they were the "Pacyente Grissell" which gave popularity to the tune, which went by that name, soon after Elizabeth came to the throne.