

**Zeitschrift:** SPELL : Swiss papers in English language and literature  
**Herausgeber:** Swiss Association of University Teachers of English  
**Band:** 31 (2015)  
  
**Artikel:** Play on the move  
**Autor:** McGavin, John J.  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-583891>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 07.08.2025

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

# Plays on the Move<sup>1</sup>

John J. McGavin

Focussing on John Phillip's *The Comedy of Patient and Meek Grissill*, but using the non-pedagogical *Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis* by Sir David Lyndsay as a control, this essay explores the migratory potential of pedagogical drama; the methodological challenges which this poses to an understanding of historical spectatorship, and the rewards of viewing the drama of this period from the point of view of its "consumers." In particular, it suggests ways in which a critical response can be developed to cope with plays that have moved between different institutional auspices such as grammar school, choir school, and court, and are extant finally in print form. It argues that, although learning as a process; the importance of ethical gender relations; folly, and dramatic self-reflexivity all constitute enduring features of this genre's content and style, they have varying values dependent on the context of performance. Consequently the critical challenges of migratory drama should first be addressed with respect to the history of single plays rather than genres, since it was the capacity of the play to meet the real or imagined needs of the consumer at the point of reception which determined its suitability. It suggests that Phillip's *Comedy* needs to be revalued according to such criteria.

---

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Professor Elisabeth Dutton and Professor Indira Ghose for inviting me to speak at the Swiss Association of Medieval and Early Modern Studies conference on "Drama and Pedagogy," and to Professor Greg Walker for discussing the essay's contents.

There is very little certain about John Phillip's *Comedy of Patient and Meek Grissill*, licensed for publication by Thomas Colwell in 1565 and 1568 (Gildenhuis, *A Gathering of Griseldas* 76-152). Perhaps it, or some of its contents, started life in Radcliffe's school theatre at Hitchin, between 1538 and 1552. The idea that Griselda would make a suitable topic for pedagogical drama certainly seems to have had its origins in that period with Radcliffe. Perhaps the published *Comedy* of the 1560s was the play performed in 1559 by St Pauls' Boys, under the guidance of Sebastian Westcott, for Queen Elizabeth at Nonsuch palace, with John Phillip and John Heywood present, as recorded by Henry Machyn (206). Perhaps it contained work by both Phillip and Heywood – stylistically that seems highly likely. Perhaps the link between Radcliffe's version and a later one was provided by Heywood's having been Radcliffe's neighbour.

Precise dating of the composition of the *published* play also remains tendentious. Politick Persuasion's opening speech refers to the weathercock of old St Pauls catching his leg as he falls from heaven. Chambers, Harbage and Schoenbaum thought that this suggested the spire was still standing when the play was written. They argued that this would place composition closer to the 1559 performance, the spire having come down, struck by lightning, on 4 June 1561.<sup>2</sup> But this concatenation *proves* nothing since the opening speech is manifestly ludicrous, and would have made just as much sense as a foolish reference to a landmark now gone. If anything, one is suspicious about such a textual reference to the spire having appeared coincidentally *before* its collapse. The readers of the 1565 and 1568 published text could only have enjoyed the spire reference in hindsight, and if, as has been suggested (Potter, "Tales" 19), the published text was intended for future adoption by schoolmasters, *their* pupils would have understood the reference in terms of folly rather than as literal.

The problem is that there is not enough detail to pin anything down, but enough connection between the details to suggest that one is looking at an originally pedagogical play migrating between contexts and, as it does so, changing in form, authorship, style, function, auspices and intended audience. Like "Grandfather's knife" it has had the handle changed twice, the blade changed three times but it is still, for what that's worth, "Grandfather's knife" or, in this case, the "Griselda" play.

---

<sup>2</sup> I have drawn for many of the preceding details on Faith Gildenhuis's careful review of the scholarship, though she remains agnostic about "whether or not *Grissill* was the play performed at Nonsuch." (46).

A *possible* history for the published play, therefore, is that it started life in one kind of school, Radcliffe's grammar school, and was then developed in a different kind, the choir school. Whatever its narrower pedagogical function there, it was then thought suitable for court performance, and finally, in printed form and probably with additional changes, since the published frontispiece describes it as "newly compiled," it was aimed at a different market – that of *readers*, some of whom could well have been schoolmasters who, it was hoped, would then *readopt* it for practical classroom use. Of course, this is only one possible history, but the notion of the play as having a history was itself important at the time. The phrase "newly compiled" is an interesting one as it signals not just the printed play's modernity but also its previous existence; it is not *novelty* which is being promoted by the publisher, but rather the "updating" of material still considered valuable. The eventual purchaser of Phillip's play was to get a sense of immediate value but also of continuity with the past. The process of change was itself being commodified.

The critical problems posed by this play's apparent theatrical mobility are exemplary of the wider challenges facing the critic of sixteenth-century drama – in particular, its paradoxical need for, and resistance to, historicisation. There was "a lot going on" in the formative years of the *Griselda* play's history – between Henry's Act of Supremacy and Elizabeth's early reign – and, as with this play, one wants to map other drama with some precision onto the course of events so as to judge how, and how far, it engaged with the society which produced and consumed it. In general, the known civic identity of biblical drama, the dateable playhouses of the commercial theatre, the specifically pedagogical demands of school or university, and the regional political forces which shaped court or great house interludes all properly urge the critic to understand plays in relation to the moment of their creation, and their original institutional auspices. This pressure towards specificity has proved critically rich through major practice-based research projects on Heywood's *Play of the Weather* in Hampton Court, and Sir David Lyndsay's *Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis* in Linlithgow, both led by Greg Walker and Tom Betteridge.<sup>3</sup> The Heywood play emerged from this process as best understood in relation to the religious politics of the Henrician court of 1529-

---

<sup>3</sup> These research projects, and the resources associated with them, can be found online at <http://stagingthehenriciancourt.brookes.ac.uk/about/index.html> and <http://www.-stagingthescottishcourt.org/>



33. The demand that one historicise where one can is given added impetus by the evidence of probouleutic plays like *Gorboduc*, and other Inns of Court drama, that they were indeed aimed at commenting with various degrees of overtness on specific current political topics – though spectators might differ in what precisely they thought the play was saying to them (Hunt, “Dumb Politics” 549-50). But this is only one template for the drama of the time, and we must be careful not to let it obscure others.

Roughly contemporary with *Gorboduc*, at least as regards publication, was *Nice Wanton*, probably a school play, evidently not tied to larger historical circumstances, and capable of fitting into a number of different reigns from the late Henrician to the early Elizabethan, and there are others like this (McGavin, “*Nice Wanton*” 248-9). Phillip’s own play on Griselda seems to fit this pattern. Indeed the mid-century appears particularly susceptible to producing plays with migratory potential. The Walker-Betteridge performances of Lyndsay’s *Satyre*, so unlike Phillip’s pedagogical play in many respects, showed a drama moving successfully across the years between diverse spectator groups and different modes of reproduction: in this case from an indoor court performance (1540) to two very different outdoor communities, one provincial (1552 Cupar), one national with a regal audience (1554 Edinburgh), and eventually, like Phillip’s play, into the wider realm of national print publication (1602), where readers disconnected from performance, and far removed from the play’s original political environment, were almost certainly looking to the work to satisfy needs different from those of the original spectators.

In his major catalogue of *British Drama* from 1533 to 1642, Martin Wiggins revealingly has a “Best Guess” category for the date of composition of many plays. It is surely possible that the plays’ dates are lost not simply because of the *lacunae* characteristic in records at this time or because official notification, such as in the Stationers’ Register, was lacking, but because the people who *used* plays – the playwrights, actors and spectators – did not consider them time-bound, even if they had or in context could acquire an immediate topicality. At present, critical readings of plays up to the advent of commercial theatre are intimately bound up with views on when they might have been composed, but there is something to be learned from the difficulties one faces in this regard. Attempts to argue specific historical reference can feel strained when scholars try to assert a topical application (usually through a kind of allegory) for a play which seems to make perfect sense without it. Ursula Potter acknowledges this when claiming that Phillip’s *Comedy*

could have been taken as an attempt to exonerate Elizabeth's mother, Anne Boleyn: she argues this could only have applied when the play was performed in Elizabeth's court ("Tales" 19). At such moments the critic may well be in line with what an original spectator *could* have thought in a particular context, but that is different from suggesting that the play itself sought to promote such a response or requires this interpretation. And, if true, such a claim may be relevant to only a part of the play's history.

The middle decades of the sixteenth century constituted a period of recycling, revision, or reinvigoration of older cultural materials. The danger for modern critics lies in viewing the products of such processes with the benefit of hindsight, seeing in them advance or retrospection in respect of broader cultural or historical movements, when, *as experienced*, such plays had a quite different temporal significance to that with which they are now invested. They constituted interventions in people's lives, reshaping their memories, appearing to address their present problems, and offering models of the future that they could take away from the cultural event. They were *objects in use*, and in respect of mid-sixteenth-century drama were in use by members of a society with no known or even predictable end for its rapid changes.

To summarise, even where there are fairly certain dates for aspects of dramatic production, they tend to show how the drama of this period is hard to "fix," in terms of date of composition, auspices, authorship, the degree and timing of alterations and versions, whether indeed one play is a version of a known other or is a separate play altogether, whether the play before us is the same play as that which is referred to in the records, and sometimes even doubt about the date of print publication. The question the critic has to ask therefore is not "how does one historicise such a play with certainty?" but "does anything useful follow from the occasions when one *cannot* do this?"

Pedagogical drama adds its own nuance to the problematic of historicising plays. In one sense, there is no form of drama more in need of precise historicisation than this, for its school context is one in which past examples, present behaviours and future social needs are all closely imbricated. The teacher's responsibility to imagine the likely future in order to prepare the pupil for it makes the school play potentially a touchstone for understanding society's development. At the same time, however, it is the schoolmaster's own past experience that determines the curriculum. We know that there is an inbuilt tendency to time-lag in such things, and the schoolmaster's capacity to predict what lies ahead may not be greater than anyone else's. In any case, the pressure of times

past, present and future in the schoolroom does not *demand* direct engagement with the world outside, for pedagogical drama also has to meet the specific, recurring needs of participant-spectators who do not age with history but in a sense remain young – as any lecturer will realise when faced again with the new first year intake.

The earliest extant drama we can associate with the humanist schools seems to the eye of the historian to be both inside and outside the specifics of historical movements. One reformist strand of it followed Erasmus, and can easily be seen as an attempt on the part of schoolmasters to urge their students along paths which we now know did indeed shape the larger history of the country. But the other strand, from about the late 1520s onwards, seems to have been much more determined by the immediate adolescent needs of the pupils – needs which were not part of a broader historical movement but were determined by the nature of a school itself, and are renewed with every new class of young men. Usually classical in content, this strand looked at male and female relations, and worked through the ethics of love and enmity, victimisation, guilt, error, criminality, and revenge in an overtly gendered, often familial and domestic, and not necessarily amatory, context: the earliest examples seem to have been John Shepreve's lost translations of Euripides's *Hecuba*, and Seneca's *Hercules Furens*, in which male violence prompted by a vengeful goddess is visited on the man's innocent family. The same constellation of issues characterised George Buchanan's choice of classical and biblical topics for his continental school plays and translations, *Jephtha*, *The Baptist*, *Medea*, and *Alcestis*, developed from the late 1520s through to the early 40s. It is also surely no coincidence that the Pynson and Thynne editions of Chaucer's works appeared in this very same period of educational development, he having been long associated with an ethical approach to gender relations – one recalls Gavin Douglas's remark that Chaucer was "ever woman's friend," and that Douglas, translator of Virgil's *Aeneid* (where he made the remark) was himself one of the early sixteenth-century humanists.

There are many examples similar to the plays of Shepreve and Buchanan which, taken together, constitute an educational tradition of gender-focussed drama, which attempted, amongst other things, to construct a body of ethical reference for young men about to leave tutelage for a world where they would meet women over whom they would have some authority, but with whom they might also embark on married relations. It was also a dramatic tradition whose concerns could find receptive audiences in different venues and under different auspices. It was thus one of the forces which made pedagogical drama potentially migra-

tory, and was indeed a core element in Phillip's play of *Griselda*. When, in the early-seventeenth century, the young Scottish aristocrat, Drummond of Hawthornden, sought to educate himself in current thoughts on gender, he could acquire this second-hand knowledge because elements of the tradition had moved beyond the school or university room into court plays, and eventually into the commercial theatre from which he took his excerpts. As Lynn Enterline has brilliantly shown in her recent book, it also eventually reactivated, for the boys who had acted in these heavily gendered plays, unresolved issues of identity, thereby setting up a complexity of spectator response which Shakespeare could exploit (2).

This essay argues, then, that alongside trying to understand plays in their specifically historical context, which is necessary for any nuanced study of historical spectatorship, one should develop a critical account of the characteristics which permit some (though not all) plays to move between contexts, so that the extant texts, which are frequently the printed version, can be viewed as the vestiges of a string of events past, and these published versions as themselves intended for future uses which one might infer from the characteristics of the text itself. In the second section of this paper, I wish to address the question of what constitutes appropriate critical appreciation of such material, concentrating on John Phillip's *Comedy of Patient and Meek Grissill*, and suggesting which features of the play might have helped it to be successful in different contexts and for different audiences. My emphasis will therefore be on spectatorship.

The only version of "Grandfather's knife" that modern critics have indubitably available is the final version of the play, and so one might want first to consider Phillip's play in its *published* form as it would have been received by its purchasers. The published text does seem to envisage practical performance, the stage directions occasionally lapsing into instructional mode: "Here let there be a clamor . . ." (SD 55). It also seems possible that the announced doubling scheme in the printed version is designed to give a prospective schoolmaster a sense of how many main actors he would need. The advertisement that it can be done "easily" with eight actors only makes complete sense if it is the *main* roles that are being described, so that the schoolmaster could think about whether he had the resources to cover these core elements, he having plenty of pupils to cover the lesser roles. The large number of parts, and of female parts, the importance of music and the fact that the text gives the name of the tune so that it could be re-performed, not to mention the content and style of the play as a whole, all suggest that the pub-



lished version would be suitable for aiming at a schoolmaster market. But that does not mean that schoolmasters were the *only* envisaged market for a publisher hoping to make money from sales. It is a fair assumption that the *Comedy's* eventual readership was expected to include single purchasers acquiring it for private reading possibly in a family context and, if this was the case, one is required to ask what imagined tastes and desires this publication was intended to satisfy.

Gildenhuys describes the play's concern with gender as "timely," but when she justifies this, it is with reference to the plays of the *next* generation – *Spanish Tragedy*, *Titus Andronicus* and *Hamlet* (39-40). The publisher of Phillip's *Comedy*, however, had no sense of what was around the corner, and could not figure the tastes of his readership in those late-Elizabethan terms. Rather, he was aiming at readers whose experience of school was in the past, and whose understanding of gender had been formed in adolescence by the pedagogical tradition of the *previous* 25 years, though their own personal circumstances had now changed. That tradition had created the market for the published text, and while this was a school play which the publisher thought might become one again, it also had an alternative trajectory: to satisfy those who had already been at school, and who could now revisit topics and styles, theatrical challenges and no doubt painful memories, with a mixture of nostalgia, recognition, and some self-congratulation – for the demonstrably learned style of the play offered the educated reader a chance to reaffirm their sense of themselves *as* educated: reading the play would have re-staged for them the kinds of issue which they already knew, and in a style for which they had been prepared. My present account, therefore, models the relationship between the reader of the published play and the memories of their own schoolroom experiences as possibly recuperative, safe, commercially controllable by the individual, and therefore to a degree emotionally manageable. This is not offered in opposition to the model which Enterline proposed, when she argued that, "Shakespeare's affectively charged returns to early school training in Latin grammar and rhetoric are so emotionally powerful precisely because these personifications reenact, or reengage, earlier institutional events, scenes, and forms of discipline that were not fully understood or integrated when they occurred" (2). Not only do I find her account convincing, I think it could coexist, even within the same person, as the model I am suggesting, though my focus is on a much earlier generation of educated men.

The "reading" experience of the published *Comedy* was probably conducted in circumstances where the social aspirations linked to education

had been in part satisfied for the readers – they could also be satisfied anew and vicariously through the established high status situation of the male protagonist Gautier (equivalent to the traditional legend's Walter). For this play was speaking to men who were beyond the years treated in *Wit and Science*: the male at the centre of the play was not now the schoolboy finding his lessons tedious; now he was a man embarking on marriage and exercising authority, a man whose enemies were to be found not in his books but in his entourage and in popular prejudices about what women are like. The play appears to envisage readers who might share or recognise Gautier's stage in life, even if they did not possess his social status.

Whatever its origins or intermediate versions, this final printed version aims at two specific demographics with different intentions: schoolmasters and already educated men. Gildenhuis's insight that, in the play, "Walter's entrance into the world of power is elided with his entry into sexuality and the world of desire and anxiety" (18) makes two different kinds of sense when we consider it in terms of the intended use of the published text: the schoolmaster could use it with respect to the adolescent pupil to continue a long-established tradition of nuancing the ethics of gender, but the mature reader could see it as speaking to, and in a sense respectfully acknowledging, his own stage in life. The Preface to the published version promised female patience and children's obedience, but the play also carried advice on the ethics of married relations, and the dangers of common misogynist characterisations of women, which the educated man could appreciate, and which would continue the education he already knew. This is the kind of multiple value which lies behind the migratory potential of pedagogical drama: although it might emerge first to address specific schoolroom needs, it *could* be used in different ways, in different contexts, to satisfy different spectators, and, increasingly, spectators who had been prepared by its own pedagogical practices.

If one can find such diversity of value even in respect of the final printed version, perhaps it is also possible to discern in it the features which would have made this play suitable for earlier migration between contexts, serving the different needs of pedagogy, court display and publication. I believe that it is, and that, broadly speaking, these features fall into three main categories (1) transferable ethics and aspirations (2) a style which could serve different functions and create pleasure for different audiences (3) self-reflexivity which focuses the spectators' attention on the dramatic medium itself.



Firstly, whatever we might now think about the play's ideological assumptions, we cannot avoid the conclusion that this play is about propriety within gender relations in a familial, social and, it is implied, national context. It is not just a treatise about women, but rather about attitudes. It looks at decorum in personal relations in a way which would suit the play's educational origins; would delight court spectators with its affirmation of what virtues uphold the state, one of which is acknowledgement of the rights of birth status, and it provided a broad-based account of propriety in family life for the reader of the printed edition. In these different ways it builds upon, and qualifies, the substantial pedagogical tradition which focussed on male and female crimes and revenges, errors and catastrophes, now offering to different kinds of spectator a more optimistic model of failure and success, which they could appreciate in their own terms. This is a transferable ethos which has its roots in the play's commitment to exploring the widest range of personal, familial, and social relations consistent with the outlook of the spectators and the potential in the story – relations of service, blood, community, marriage – in order to show how all must be covered by the natural and reasonable ethic of mutual obligation. This extends, for example, to Gautier's praise of those ladies who cared for him when a child and youth: "Wherefore Nature doth urge me still to show your worthy praise, / Shown largely to me, youthful wight, in these my tender days" (575-6), and to his courtiers: "Most gratefully I yield you thanks for this your taken pain. / If God permit to length my life, I will requite again" (559-60). The play contains a widow and a widower, women in service, on the brink of marriage and the brink of death, courtiers who are trustworthy and one who is not, poor and rich, the individual and the populace, a young man in control of servants, at the onset of governmental responsibility, and at the age for marriage.

For the schoolboy seeking to make his way in the world, and for the Elizabethan court after the turmoil of the previous decades, and later for the private purchaser and reader, this play offers a secure set of values which exist within a lightly reformist environment but which are independent of it: mutual obligations, prompted by Nature, supported by Reason, authorised by traditional values like Faithfulness, assisted by the measured outlook implied by Sobriety (another time-honoured virtue), generalised across family and society – the play affirms these as the grounds of personal success and social cohesion: inclusivity round a firm ethical pattern. It is a perfect play for the mid-century, when not having a pattern had been the prevailing experience. To a degree it corresponds with Lyndsay's contemporary *Satyre*, which is also widely in-

clusive and, though the *Satyre* counsels reform of clerical institutions and unlike the *Comedy* is angry in its tone, it is also looking for a way of stabilising and renewing society around civic values of equity without looking for major disruption in the form of a major break from Rome or a full doctrinal Reformation.

Lyndsay's *Satyre* and Phillip's *Comedy* also share that mixture of older morality forms with new moral imperatives directed at the spectator that mark mid-century drama, whether pedagogical or not. Lyndsay's Lady Sensualitie is not exactly a vice – her intention is not to damn the soul or bring down the nation – she just is what she is, and it is the failings of men in how they view her that cause the problem. This shift towards locating moral challenge in the spectator may itself have been driven by the pedagogical tradition. While the attraction of theatre to school may have been its methodological training in memory, language, imagination, deportment, and performativity, it was also training its pupil spectators to recognise what they saw as ethically complex and demanding. Victor I. Scherb has argued that moral discrimination was developed in boys as a capacity to distinguish between good and bad forms of entertainment in the same play (271-97). But ethically-charged spectatorship seems to have emerged also as a reflex of the schoolroom's interest in gender, and it is that tradition that Phillip exploits.

The name of Phillip's vice figure, Politick Persuasion, also suggests a very broadly envisaged audience – it may sound especially suitable for the 1559 courtly spectators, and he certainly operates in the environment of Gautier's court, but actually such a name is deeply generic: try to identify a vice of the previous 80 years' drama who could not have been characterised at some point as "politic persuasion" – that's what vices do: they persuade you in ways which they present as politic. So this vice, while institutionally appropriate to the court performance, was also broadly relevant to adolescents or pupils in education, representing the influences they should resist; and for a general readership it had its meaning specified by the narrative action: as a name for someone who promotes the common prejudices about women and men that the play is seeking to undermine. The meaning of the name is thus re-definable relative to the context of performance, having broad allegorical value, local institutional relevance, and narrative specificity. This is a vice whose name already anticipates many audiences, stretching beyond the context of original composition and of performance. In the same way, his promotion of rancour, backbiting, gossip, and prejudicial attitudes to women would fit many contexts.

But Politick Persuasion is suitable in another way for migration between audiences, because, while he is vicious, he's not solely a Vice, but firstly a representative of that institutionally-transferable, and universally feared, horror – Folly. And here one finds another parallel with Lyndsay's mid-century *Satyre*, which ends in an extended theatrical assertion by Folly that he is present in all institutions and individuals, including, of course, the spectators enjoying his behaviour. Politick's powers of persuasion may be ambiguously poised between claims for virtually allegorical capacity and arguments which prove less persuasive in practice. But his entry into the play, with a Skeltonically chaotic account of his journey, characterised by stylistic and social indecorum, strange metamorphoses, rapid changes of direction, sudden unexpected ascents and descents, and an aimless progress which ends in the playing space which he cannot identify, "Good Lord, where am I now?" (2), indubitably links him to Folly. It is an unsettlingly enjoyable introduction to the play's world, preparing us for the unexpected twists and turns of feeling and fortune which the play seems to revel in, and the rather motiveless course of action which Gautier adopts. But Politick's failures in social and rhetorical propriety, and his absence of a consistent goal, make him an ideal bogeyman for diverse audiences, representing what must be avoided by those who are being taught decorum, and those who already live within its demands, whether they are of the school, the court, or society at large. The fear which Politick Persuasion represents to all of these groups is, in fact, social disappearance. His is a deliberate and signalled departure from the play, 350 lines before the end, at the very point where the final test of Griselda with its happy conclusion is still to be played out: "Fare ye well, all, I will be packing" (1649). What characterises this as an easily migrated pedagogical play is that it conceives of its vice as folly – and inutility, a lack of future, as the end of both. No particular group of auditors is required; all can be touched by this fear.

The second group of features to permit this play's transfer between contexts is stylistic. Rather than going down the route of political allegory, which the story of Griselda suggested to Phillip's anti-Henrician contemporary, William Forrest, (Gildenhuis, *Gathering* 39), the *Comedy of Patient and Meek Grissill* comes over as an educational pattern book or primer of different types of theme, action, character, and songs, fully exploring a wide emotional palette, a rollercoaster of desire, frustration, pity, ruthlessness, and rapid transitions from grief to joy or from anxiety to relief (e.g., 1219-26; 1306-24). The characters comment explicitly on these, permitting us to see what part they are playing, such as when Gautier describes himself, "Well, as one pensive, devoid of consolation,

/ I will rest me here some tidings to hear" (1313-14), or announces his love of Grissill to her father, "What living wight more than myself abideth Cupid's ire? / Such is the force of ardent fire that boils in secret breast, / So severe is the darted wound with which I am oppressed," and so on (634-6).

Emotions are clearly identified, the rhetoric through which they are expressed is demonstrated, and the ethical problems which impel them are carefully delineated. Just as Politick Persuasion mutates from fool to vice before our eyes at the moment when he says "I will not cease hunting as a hound doth for his prey" (104), so the devices by which emotion is created are laid bare for us in affective rhetoric which is deictic and self-identifying. We might now think of this as rather stagey, and functional only at the rhetorical level, but the contemporary spectator was obviously expected to find affect in what might appear to a modern spectator only as its signals. The assumption is that rhetorically enacted grief – "Ah, Grissill, now mayest thou complain, infortune thine, alas. / Thy tender days in deadly dole, thou now must learn to pass" (474-5) – is convincing *evidence* of grief and, with the occasional addition of song such as her lament sung "to the tune of 'Damon and Pythias'" (SD 486), could be enough for the spectators to feel the emotion. The theatrical "language" of feeling is being created for the boys and spectators in a protracted display of decorum which matches the play's emphasis on decorum as an ethical good. Shakespeare later makes fun of this staginess, and of the "boiling breast" metaphor that Gautier used, but in the schoolroom of the 1550s the pupil was being given a compendium of the means by which feeling might be publicly signalled and an identity theatrically performed. Perhaps this is where the recent mirror neuron theory of spectatorship makes most sense<sup>4</sup> – as an explanation of how it is that pedagogically ostensive, self-conscious, rhetorical displays of feeling might in the collaborative context of theatrical spectatorship nonetheless carry an emotional charge for the audience. It is also, of course, possible that this form of drama helped some of the court spectators to *learn* dramatic communication and so enrich their spectatorship.

Display is also precisely what would make this an appropriate play for migration to another context: what is necessary for education in the schoolroom can function as implicit flattery in the court. The play is a demonstration piece – showing off the skills of the boys to the court – a large scale version of the schoolboy orations at royal visitations. There is

---

<sup>4</sup> There have been various recent versions of this approach but two significant book-length studies are those of Amy Cook and Jill Stevenson.



a flamboyant and regular contrasting of styles, songs (of very differing kinds, tones, content, and tunes), brief and extended asides and semi-asides (language which the other character can only partly hear); there is playing with homophone statements, dialogue, monologue, and debate; biblical, proverbial, inkhorn, classical, and idiomatic language is deployed, all within a matrix of learning. Range is the key to this play's approach. That must be why there is a brief scene of quarrelling lackeys (521-42), whose language displays a low-life predisposition to swearing and contention – it has little other point than to contribute to range and offer stylistically extravagant stage business, pleasurable in itself, and perhaps a promise of future fun when these boys, no doubt chosen for their aptitude, grow up a bit.

The choir school seems to exist as an institution for migrating what was once instructional so that it can fulfil exhibitionist and complimentary functions in court performance. The published version of the play then assumes that it can go back to its practical educational purposes. But the individual reader of the book could also have felt something akin to the flattery which flamboyant skill would have provided to the court spectator. He could have felt the self-esteem of reading such an emphatic reminder of past exercises, reflecting on his acquisition of education, and his familiarity with a range of styles, as those who have acquired a new language revisit their own achievement even as they access new material through it.

My final point concerns theatrical self-reflexivity. The subject matter, a woman whose virtues are tested by her being brought to believe, wrongly as it turns out, that her children have been killed and that she is to be replaced by a younger wife, was ideal for directing the attention of the spectators towards the dramatic medium itself and towards their enjoyment of it. This focus was suitable for many different contexts of consumption. In brief, for a school, it offered the opportunity to “act” falsehoods on stage; to the courtly spectator it offered the pleasure of affect nuanced by an appreciation of artifice, and for the reader it offered the pleasures of imagined feeling, where anxiety is always under the control of the reader.

The main body of the story involves action which some of the characters believe to be true and others know to be false. Rhetoric is consequently a means to true expression of feeling for some but an exercise in counterfeiting by others. Different kinds of acting are thus happening on stage: pretence within the plot by Gautier and his servants, but acting in the usual sense by Griselda and the others towards the audience. Drama shows this inbuilt fascination with exploiting its own status as

artifice from late in the fifteenth century (*Wisdom* is an example). The staging of pretence, usually through the assumed characters, names and costumes of vices, was common, and could take on reformist functions when it involved clerical garb, implying the falsehood of real clerics. Lyndsay was still using it in this way in the 1550s. In Phillip's play, however, it is internalised, a part of the given subject matter, and the forensic process is employed to test character. But if the device had its attractions from tradition, it had specific value in context.

A pedagogical production, as we have seen, is alert to its own processes – indeed mastering the processes is part of the teaching, and this play demonstrates and flaunts the signs of process, the most fundamental of which is “feigning.” The tale of Grissill allowed the schoolmaster an extended exercise in different kinds of pretence, and this is explicitly pointed out when Politick Persuasion turns to the audience to comment on Diligence's capacity to create a credible threat towards the children: “Body a God! This is a Dick for the nonce, by the Rood! / He'll do't, he, and he say the word” (1134-5). The play seriously enacts the rhetoric of feeling before the testing of Grissill, with that studiedness that suggests the needs of a school play, but then, during the testing, it enacts this rhetoric again as intra-diegetic pretence. The pupils and spectators are implicitly challenged to consider if these things are distinguishable. Gautier erred in taking on Politick Persuasion because he took the name “Politick Persuasion” for the thing. The play proceeds to show on a much larger rhetorical scale how the word may be taken for the reality. The artifice and truth of drama are thus both present, and the instructive and pleasurable are mixed. Surprisingly, however, the lesson to be learned is not the narrow one that Gautier should have looked a bit more deeply into things to distinguish the true from the false when he employed Politick Persuasion. One associates that kind of learning with the earlier moral interludes (and with Shakespeare). The *Comedy's* message is quite different: feigning and not feigning can be impossible to distinguish, and it is essential to the ethical core of the play that this is the case. Griselda's virtue cannot be proved without her failure to separate appearance from reality, word from actuality: through falsehood her truth is proved. In this respect the play is completely self-reflexive, because its underlying message is that the artifice of drama can reveal truth – a message to reassure *all* who engage with the form – schoolmasters, schoolboys, courtiers or readers.

There is elegance in the way Phillip exploits internal pretence to defer to, empower and flatter his spectators through the knowing position into which they are put. Knowing what is false enables them to feel



more deeply the affective power of moments like Grissill's or the Nurse's lamentation, because for the spectator "feigning" is located elsewhere. The plot's demands and the drama's own generic fashions work together in a playful way: the killing of the children off stage, which in humanist drama (though not medieval) would have taken place off stage for aesthetic reasons, here *has* to take place off stage because it is not happening at all, and the playwright cleverly draws the audience's attention to this overlapping of affect and artifice: "Nay, stay thy hand, good friend! Convey her out of place, / For nature will not let me see her slain before my face. / . . . Therefore from out our sights, I pray thee hastily do wend." (1167-8, 1170)

The conclusion to the play has slightly rough edges if closely scrutinised (the daughter seems strangely undisturbed by finding that her proposed wedding was a fake) but such analyses are really inappropriate because the play demands that theatrical logic prevail, and that characters' unstated feelings are less important than their stated ones. The aim is to bring the spectator finally into a condition of compassionate patronage of Grissill: knowingly feeling for her, sharing her joy, but also retaining a sense that one is the *author* of that joy because one has known the truth of the matter all along. It is a particularly courtly, but also an intrinsically aesthetic, delight which affirms the status of any spectator *as a spectator*. Lyly was outrageously playing with just this theatrical *desideratum* when he promised to the spectators of *Gallathea* that the happy romantic ending which they wished, but could not expect because the play's lovers were both girls only pretending to be boys in the plot, could nevertheless be achieved by turning one of the girls back into a boy off stage after the play was finished. His resolution wholly integrated the spectators' desires, the practicalities of performance, and the logic of fiction because, of course, both these fictional girls were being played by boys anyway, and the spectators were thus allowed to resolve the matter in their own minds by deciding which of the lovers should, in effect, revert to their non-theatrical gender, and which would, by remaining a girl, extend the world of fiction into the real world beyond. Though *Gallathea's* resolution represents an extreme case of playing with the fictionality of theatre, it was adumbrated a generation before in the mid-century techniques of Phillip's comedy – another school play which transferred to court and then to publication.

As a coda to this account of migratory drama, one might consider a scene from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In it Theseus chooses among the possible entertainments for his nuptial night (V. 1. 42-76). *The Battle of the Centaurs*, a sung poem, is rejected not for its genre

but because he himself had already told the story to Hippolyta in honour of his ancestor, Hercules – thus an important member of the audience had already heard a more authoritative version and so probably wouldn't take pleasure from this one. "The riot of the tipsy Bacchanals, Tearing the Thracian singer in their rage" is rejected as an old "device," and here it may be the theatrical realisation of content that is old hat: when you've seen how one group of Bacchanals can act tipsy and tear a poet to bits, you've seen them all. The "keen and critical" satire of "The thrice three Muses mourning for the death Of Learning, late deceased in beggary" doesn't fit the happiness of the occasion. Such audiences evidently judged possible entertainments in a context nuanced by the accidents of occasion or personal experience, and any of these accidents might prevent performance in the new venue.

Theseus is, however, revealingly intrigued by the proffered mechanicals' play of *Pyramus and Thisbe*. While its oxymoronic advertisement of tedious brevity and tragical mirth may seem risible evidence of the performers' inadequacy, that is not how Theseus takes it, musing instead, "How shall we find the concord of this discord?" What Theseus is looking for is something very specific to the formalities of the medium rather than to its historical context: a play which sets up a difficulty and finds the means to resolve it: the spectator's pleasure will be in the process of discovery. Ethical content is not an issue for Theseus; neither are the auspices under which it was composed, though this one does sound like a school play which, like Phillip's *Comedy*, has been exported from the school room, and is now about to migrate to court, albeit with the intermediary stage of having been acquired by a manual worker; nor is Theseus interested in the performers *as yet*. What is of primary interest to him is the capacity of art to resolve the complexities which it sets up. Theseus's first reaction to the advertisement shows that for him, and one imagines, for Shakespeare's contemporaries, drama could be appreciated (not necessarily but possibly) in ways which did *not* depend upon moral content, educational value, or the original auspices of composition, but on its own formal processes. This is a sensibility which has become receptive to drama moving from one context to another. And it may well have been developed by such migrations over the previous seventy or so years, pedagogical plays having been prominent instances.

When Theseus's *first* thoughts about *Pyramus and Thisbe* were about its capacity to resolve its discords, he was responding as a potential spectator, free to look to his own desires, rather than concern himself (as his Master of Ceremonies, Philostrate, seems bound to do) with the route by which the play had come to him. I would argue that it was the

migratory potential in pedagogical drama that made that a possibility for him and, more importantly, for the Elizabethan spectators who were watching him decide.

## References

- Cook, Amy. *Shakespearean Neuroplay: Reinvigorating the Study of Dramatic Texts and Performance Through Cognitive Science*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- Drummond, William, of Hawthornden. Hawthornden MSS, vols. VII and VIII. *Drummond Miscellanies*. National Library of Scotland MS 2059 and MS 2060.
- Enterline, Lynn. *Shakespeare's Schoolroom: Rhetoric, Discipline, Emotion*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.
- Hunt, Alice. "Dumb Politics in *Gorboduc*." *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Drama*. Ed. Thomas Betteridge and Greg Walker. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 547-65.
- Machyn, Henry. *The Diary of Henry Machyn, citizen and merchant-taylor of London, from AD 1550 to AD 1563*. Ed. John Gough Nichols. Camden Society (1848). Repr. New York: AMS, 1968.
- McGavin, John J. "Nice Wanton, c.1550." *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Drama*. Ed. Thomas Betteridge and Greg Walker. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 246-61.
- Phillip, John. *The Comedy of Patient and Meek Grissill*. Ed. Faith Gildenhuis. *A Gathering of Griseldas: Three Sixteenth-Century Texts*. Publications of the Barnaby Riche Society, 6. Ottawa: Dovehouse, 1996.
- Potter, Ursula. "Tales of Patient Griselda and Henry VIII." *Early Theatre* 5.2 (2002): 11-28.
- Scherb, Victor I. "Playing at Maturity in John Redford's *Wit and Science*." *SEL: Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 45. 2 (2005): 271-297.
- Shakespeare, William. *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*. 3rd edn. Ed David Bevington. London: Scott, Foresman and Coy, 1980.
- Sharratt, P. and P. G. Walsh, eds. *George Buchanan Tragedies*. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1983.
- Stevenson, Jill. *Performance, Cognitive Theory, and Devotional Culture: Sensual Piety in Late Medieval York*. New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- Walker, Greg, ed. *Medieval Drama: An Anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.
- Wiggins, Martin, ed. *British Drama 1533-1642: A Catalogue*. 3 vols. [vol. 1: 1533-1566]. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.