Classic Poetry Series

John Skelton

- 27 poems -

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John Skelton (1460 - 1529)

John Skelton possibly born in Diss Norfolk, was an English poet.

Education

He is said to have been educated at Oxford. He certainly studied at Cambridge, and he is probably the "one Scheklton" mentioned by William Cole as taking his M.A. degree in 1484. In 1490, William Caxton writes of him, in the preface to The Boke of Eneydos compyled by Vyrgyle, in terms which prove that he had already won a reputation as a scholar. "But I pray mayster John Skelton," he says, "late created poete laureate in the unyversite of Oxenforde, to oversee and correct this sayd booke ... for him I know for suffycyent to expowne and englysshe every dyffyculte that is therin. For he hath late translated the epystlys of Tulle, and the boke of dyodorus siculus, and diverse other works ... in polysshed and ornate termes craftely ... suppose he hath drunken of Elycons well."

The laureateship referred to was a degree in rhetoric. In 1493 Skelton received the same honour at Cambridge, and also, it is said, at Leuven. He found a patron in the pious and learned countess of Richmond, Henry VII's mother, for whom he wrote Of Mannes Lyfe the Peregrynacioun, a translation, now lost, of Guillaume de Deguilleyule's Pèlerinage de la vie humaine. An elegy "Of the death of the noble prince Kynge Edwarde the forth," included in some of the editions of the Mirror for Magistrates, and another (1489) on the death of Henry Percy, fourth earl of Northumberland, are among his earliest poems.

Poet Laureate

In the last decade of the century he was appointed tutor to Prince Henry (afterwards Henry VIII). He wrote for his pupil a lost Speculum principis, and Erasmus, in dedicating an ode to the prince in 1500, speaks of Skelton as "unum Britannicarum literarum lumen ac decus." In 1498 he was successively ordained sub-deacon, deacon and priest. He seems to have been imprisoned in 1502, but no reason is known for his disgrace. (It has been said[by whom?] that he offended Wolsey but this would be impossible if the date is correct, given Wolsey was not yet an influential figure at court - Wolsey's rise began in 1508). Two years later he retired from regular attendance at court to become rector of Diss, a benefice which he retained nominally until his death.

Skelton frequently signed himself "regius orator" and poet-laureate, but there is no record of any emoluments paid in connection with these dignities, although the Abbé du Resnel, author of Recherches sur les poètes couronnez,

asserts that he had seen a patent (1513–1514) in which Skelton was appointed poet-laureate to Henry VIII. As rector of Diss he caused great scandal among his parishioners, who thought him, says Anthony Wood, more fit for the stage than for the pew or the pulpit. He was secretly married to a woman who lived in his house, and he had earned the hatred of the Dominican monks by his fierce satire. Consequently he came under the formal censure of Richard Nix, the bishop of the diocese, and appears to have been temporarily suspended. After his death a collection of farcical tales, no doubt chiefly, if not entirely, apocryphal, gathered round his name—The Merie Tales of Skelton.

During the rest of the century he figured in the popular imagination as an incorrigible practical joker. His sarcastic wit made him some enemies, among them Sir Christopher Garnesche or Garneys, Alexander Barclay, William Lilly and the French scholar, Robert Gaguin (c. 1425-1502). With Garneys he engaged in a regular "flyting," undertaken, he says, at the king's command, but Skelton's four poems read as if the abuse in them were dictated by genuine anger. Earlier in his career he had found a friend and patron in Cardinal Wolsey, and the dedication to the cardinal of his Replycacion is couched in the most flattering terms. But in 1522, when Wolsey in his capacity of legate dissolved convocation at St Paul's, Skelton put in circulation the couplet:

"Gentle Paul, laie doune thy sweard
For Peter of Westminster hath shaven thy beard."

In Colyn Cloute he incidentally attacked Wolsey in a general satire on the clergy, "Speke, Parrot" and "Why come ye nat to Courte?" are direct and fierce invectives against the cardinal who is said to have more than once imprisoned the author. To avoid another arrest Skelton took sanctuary in Westminster Abbey. He was kindly received by the abbot, John Islip, who continued to protect him until his death. The inscription on his tomb in the neighbouring church of St Margaret's described him as vales pierius. It is thought that Skelton wrote "Why come ye nat to Courte?" having been inspired by Sir Thomas Spring, a merchant in Suffolk who had fallen out with Wolsey over tax.

His Works

In his Garlande of Laurell Skelton gives a long list of his works, only a few of which are extant. The garland in question was worked for him in silks, gold and pearls by the ladies of the Countess of Surrey at Sheriff Hutton Castle, where he was the guest of the duke of Norfolk. The composition includes complimentary verses to the various ladies concerned, and a good deal of information about himself. But it is as a satirist that Skelton merits attention. The Bowge of Court is directed against the vices and dangers of court life. He had already in his Boke of the Thre Foles drawn on Alexander Barclay's version of the Narrenschijf of Sebastian Brant, and this more elaborate and imaginative poem belongs to the same class. Skelton, falling into a dream at Harwich, sees a stately ship in the harbour called the "Bowge of Court", the owner of which is the "Dame Saunce Pere". Her merchandise is Favour; the helmsman Fortune; and the poet, who figures as Drede (modesty), finds on board F'avell (the flatterer), Suspect, Harvy Hafter (the clever thief), Dysdayne, Ryotte, Dyssymuler and Subtylte, who all explain themselves in turn, until at last Drede, who finds they are secretly his enemies, is about to save his life by jumping overboard, when he wakes with a start. Both of these poems are written in the seven-lined Rhyme Royal, a Continental verse-form first used in English by Chaucer, but it is in an irregular metre of his own—known as "Skeltonics" —that his most characteristic work was accomplished.

The Boke of Phyllyp Sparowe, the lament of Jane Scroop, a schoolgirl in the Benedictine convent of Carrow near Norwich, for her dead bird, was no doubt inspired by Catullus. It is a poem of some 1,400 lines and takes many liberties with the formularies of the church. The digressions are considerable. We learn what a wide reading Jane had in the romances of Charlemagne, of the Round Table, The Four Sons of Aymon and the Trojan cycle. Skelton finds

space to give an opinion of Geoffrey Chaucer, John Gower and John Lydgate. Whether we can equate this opinion, voiced by the character of Jane, with Skelton's own is contentious. It would appear that he seems fully to have realized Chaucer's value as a master of the English language. Gower's matter was, Jane tells us, "worth gold," but his English she regards as antiquated. The verse in which the poem is written, called from its inventor "Skeltonical," is here turned entirely to whimsical use. The lines are usually six-syllabled, but vary in length, and rhyme in groups of two, three, four and even more. It is not far removed from the old alliterative English verse, and well fitted to be chanted by the minstrels who had sung the old ballads. For its comic admixture of Latin Skelton had abundant example in French and Low Latin macaronic verse. He makes frequent use of Latin and French words to carry out his exacting system of frequently recurring rhymes. This breathless, voluble measure was in Skelton's energetic hands an admirable vehicle for invective, but it easily degenerated into doggerel.

By the end of the 16th century he was a "rude rayling rimer" (Puttenham, Arte of English Poesie), and at the hands of Pope and Warton he fared even worse. His own criticism is a just one:

"For though my ryme be ragged,
Tattered and jagged,
Rudely rayne beaten,
Rusty and moughte eaten,
It hath in it some pyth."

Colyn Cloute represents the average country man who gives his opinions on the state of the church. There is no more scathing indictment of the sins of the clergy before the Reformation. He exposes their greed, their ignorance, the ostentation of the bishops and the common practice of simony, but takes care to explain that his accusations do not include all and that he writes in defence of, not against, the church. He repeatedly hits at Wolsey even in this general satire, but not directly. Speke, Parrot has only been preserved in a fragmentary form, and is exceedingly obscure. It was apparently composed at different times, but in the latter part of the composition he openly attacks Wolsey. In Why come ye not to Courte? there is no attempt at disguise. The wonder is not that the author had to seek sanctuary, but that he had any opportunity of doing so. He rails at Wolsey's ostentation, at his almost royal authority, his overbearing manner to suitors high and low, and taunts him with his mean extraction. This scathing invective was not allowed to be printed in the cardinal's lifetime, but it was no doubt widely circulated in manuscript and by repetition. The charge of coarseness regularly brought against Skelton is based chiefly on The Tunnynge of Elynoare Rummynge, a realistic description in the same metre of the drunken women who gathered at a well-known ale-house kept by Elynour Rummynge at Leatherhead, not far from the royal palace of Nonsuch.
"Skelton Laureate against the Scottes" is a fierce song of triumph celebrating the victory of Flodden. "Jemmy is ded And closed in led, That was theyr owne Kynge," says the poem; but there was an earlier version written before the news of James IV's death had reached London. This, which is the earliest singly printed ballad in the language, was entitled A Ballade of the Scottysshe Kynge, and was rescued in 1878 from the wooden covers of a copy of Huon de Bordeaux. "Howe the douty Duke of Albany, lyke a cowarde knight" deals with the campaign of 1523, and contains a panegyric of Henry VIII. To this is attached an envoi to Wolsey, but it must surely have been misplaced, for both the satires on the cardinal are of earlier date.

Skelton also wrote three plays, only one of which survives. Magnificence is one of the best examples of the morality play. It deals with the same topic as his satires, the evils of ambition; its moral, "how suddenly worldly wealth doth decay," being a favourite one with him. Thomas Warton in his History of English Poetry described another piece Nigramansir, printed by Wynkyn de Worde in 1504, and dealing with simony and the love of money in the church; but no copy is known to exist, and some suspicion has been cast on Warton's statement.

Illustration of the hold Skelton had on the public imagination is supplied from

the stage. A play (1600) called Scogan and Shelton, by Richard Hathwaye and William Rankins, is mentioned by Henslowe. In Anthony Munday's Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntingdon, Skelton acts the part of Friar Tuck, and Ben Jonson in his masque, The Fortunate Isles, introduced Skogan and Skelton in like habits as they lived.

Very few of Skelton's productions are dated, and their titles are here necessarily abbreviated. De Worde printed the Bowge of Court twice. Divers Batettys and dyties salacious devysed by Master Shelton Laureat, and Shelton Laureate agaynste a comely Coystroune have no date or printer's name, but are evidently from the press of Richard Pynson, who also printed Replycacion against certain yang scalers, dedicated to Wolsey. The Garlande or Chapelet of Laurell was printed by Richard Faukes (1523); Magnificence, A goodly interlude, probably by John Rastell about 1533, reprinted (1821) for the Roxburghe Club. Hereafter foloweth the Boke of Phyllyp Sparowe was printed by Richard Kele (1550?), Robert Toy, Antony Kitson (1560?), Abraham Veale (1570?), John Walley, John Wyght (1560?). Hereafter foloweth certaine bokes compyled by mayster Shelton ... including "Speke, Parrot," "Ware the Hawke," "Elynoure Rumpiynge" and others, was printed by Richard Lant (1550?), John King and Thomas March (1565?), by John Day (1560). Hereafter foloweth a title boke called Colyn Cloute and Hereafter ... why come ye nat to Courte? were printed by Richard Kele (1550?) and in numerous subsequent editions. Pithy, plesaunt and profitable workes of maister Shelton, Poete Laureate. Nowe collected and newly published was printed in 1568, and reprinted in 1736. A scarce reprint of Filnour Rummin by Samuel Rand appeared in 1624.

Five of Skelton's 'Tudor Portraits', including 'The Tunnying of Elynour Rummyng' were set to music by Ralph Vaughan Williams in or around 1935. Although he changed the text here and there to suit his music, the sentiments are well expressed. The other four poems are 'My pretty Bess','Epitaph of John Jayberd of Diss', 'Jane Scroop (her lament for Philip Sparrow)', and 'Jolly Rutterkin'. The music is rarely performed, although it is immensely funny, and captures the coarseness of Skelton in an inspired way.

See The Poetical Works of John Shelton; with Notes and some account of the author and his writings, by the Rev. Alexander Dyce (2 vols., 1843). A selection of his works was edited by WH Williams (London, 1902). See also Zur Charakteristik John Skeltons by Dr Arthur Koelbing (Stuttgart, 1904); F Brie, "Skelton Studien" in Englische Studien, vol. 38 (Heilbronn, 1877, etc.); A Rey, Skelton's Satirical Poems... (Berne, 1899); A Thummel, Studien über John Skelton (Leipzig-Reudnitz, 1905); G Saintsbury, Hist. of Eng. Prosody (vol. i, 1906); and A Kolbing in the Cambridge History of English Literature (vol. iii, 1909).

Family Life

John Skelton's lineage is difficult to prove. He was probably related to Sir John Shelton and his children, who also came from Norfolk.[citation needed] Sir John's daughter, Mary Shelton, was a mistress of Henry VIII's during the reign of her cousin, Anne Boleyn. Mary Shelton was the main editor and contributor to the Devonshire MS, a collection of poems written by various members of the court.
Interestingly, it is said that several of Skelton's works were inspired by women who were to become mothers to two of Henry VIII's six wives. Lady Elizabeth Boleyn, countess of Wiltshire and Ormonde, was said to be so beautiful that Skelton compared her to Cressida and a popular but unverifiable legend also suggests that several poems were inspired by Margaret Wentworth. Elizabeth was the mother of Queen Anne Boleyn, Henry's second wife; Margaret was the mother of his third, Queen Jane Seymour.

A Ballad of the Scottysshe Kyne

Kynge Jamy, Jomy your joye is all go.
Ye summoned our kynge. Why dyde ye so?
To you no thyng it dyde accorde
To sommom our kynge your soverayne lorde.
A kynge a sommer it is wonder;
Knowe ye not salte and suger asonder?
In your somnynage ye were to malaperte,
and your harolde no thynge experte;
Ye thought ye dyde it full valyauntolye,
But not worth thre skyppes of a pye.
Syr squyer-galyarde ye were to swyfte;
Your wyll renne before your wytte.
To be so scornefull to your alye
Your conseyle was not worth a flye.
Before the Frensshe kynge, Danes and other
Ye ought to honour your lorde and brother.
Trowe ye, Syr James, his noble grace
For you and your Scottes wolde tourne his face?
Now ye proude Scottes of Gelawaye
For your kynge may synge welawaye.
Now must ye knowe our kynge for your regent,
Your soverayne lorde and presedent.
In hym is figured Melchisedeche,
And ye be desolate as Armeleche.
He is our noble champyon,
A kynge anoynted, an ye be non.
Thrugh your counseyle your fader was slayne;
Wherfore I fere ye wyll suffre payne.
And ye proude Scottes of Dunbar,
Parde ye be his homager
And suters to his paylyment.
Ye dyde not your dewty therin,
Wyerfore ye may it now repent.
Ye bere yourselfe somwhat to bolde,
Therfore ye have lost your copyholde.
Ye be bounde tenauntes to his estate;
Give up your game, ye playe chek mate;
For to the castell of Norham
I understonde to soone ye cam,
For a prysoner therenow ye be
Eyther to the devyll or the trinite.
Thanked be saynte Gorge, our ladyes knythe,
Your pryd is paste, adwe, good nycht,
Ye have determyned to make a fraye,
Our kynge than beynge out of the waye;
But by the power and myght of God
Ye were beten weth your owne rod.
By your wanton wyll, syr,at a worde,
Ye have loste spores, cote armure and sworde.
Ye had be better to have busked to Huntley Bankes,
Than in Englonde to playe ony suche prankes;
But ye had some wyld sede to sowe,

Therefore ye be layde now full lowe.
Your power coude no lenger attayne
Warre with our kynge to meyntayne.
Of the kynge of Naverne ye may take hede
How unfortunately he doth now spede;
In double walles now he dooth dreme.
That is a kynge without a realme.
At hym example ye wolde none take;
Experyence hath brought you in the same brake.
Of the out yles ye rough foted Scottes
We have well eased you of the bottes.
Ye rowe ranke Scottes and dronken Danes
Of our Englysshe bowes ye have fette your banes.
It is not syttynge in tour nor towne
A sumner to were a kynges crowne.
That noble erle, the Whyte Lyon,
Your pompe and pryde hath layde a downe.
His sone the lorde admyrall is full good,
His swerde hath bathed in the Scottes blode.
God save kynge Henry and his lordes all
And sende the Frensshe kynge suche another fall.

Amen, for saynt charyte and God save noble
Kynge Henry the viij.

John Skelton

A Lawde and Prayse

[a laude and prayse made for our souereigne lord the kyng.]

The Rose both white and Rede
In one rose now dothe grow:
Thus thorow every stede
Thereof the fame dothe blow:
Grace the sede did sow.
England now gaddir flowris
Exclude now all dolowrs

Noble Henry the eight
Thy loving souereine lorde
Of kingis line moost streight
His titille dothe Recorde:
In whome dothe wele Acorde
Alexis yonge of Age
Adrastus wise and sage:

Astrea Iustice hight
That from the starry sky
Shall now com and do Right:
This hunderd yere scantly
A man kowd not Aspy
That Right dwelt vs Among
And that was the more wrong.

Right shall the foxis chare
The wolvis the beris also
That wrowght have moche care
And browght Englond in wo
They shall wirry no mo
Nor wrote the Rosary
By extort Trechery.

Of this our noble king
The law they shall not breke
They shall com to Rekening
No man for them wil speke:
The pepil durst not creke
Theire grevis to complaine
They browght them in soche paine.

Therfor nomore they shall
The commouns overbace
That wont wer overall
Both lorde and knight to face:
For now the yeris of grace
And welthe ar com Agayne
That maketh England faine.

Adonis of Freshe colour
Of yowthe the godely flour

Our prince of hih honour
Our paves our succour
Our king our Emperour
Our Priamus of Troy
Our welth our worldly Ioy.

Vpon vs he doth Reigne
That makith our hartis glad
As king moost souereine
That ever Englond had
Demure sober and sad
And Martis lusty knight
God save him in his Right:

Amen

Bien men souient:

Deo .21. gracias

John Skelton

A prayer to the Father of heaven

O radiant luminary of light interminable,
Celestial Father, potential God of might,
Of heaven and earth O Lord incomparable,
Of all perfections the essential most perfite !
O maker of mankind, that formëd day and night,
Whose power imperial comprehendeth every place :
Mine heart, my mind, my thought, my whole delight
Is after this life to see thy glorious face.

Whose magnificense is incomprehensible,
All arguments of reason which far doth exceed,
Whose deity doubtless is indivisible,
From whom all goodness and virtue doth proceed ;
Of thy support all creätures have need :
Assist me, good Lord, and grant my of thy grace
To live to thy pleasure in word, thought, and deed,
And after this life to see thy glorious face.

John Skelton

An Elegie on Henry, fourth Erle of Northumberlande

Ad dominum properato meum mea pagina Percy,
Qui Northumbrorum jura paterna gerit.
Ad nutum celebris tu porna repone leonis,
Quaeque suo patri tristia justa cano.
Ast ubi perlegit, dubiam sub mente volutet
Fortunam, cunceta quae male fida rotat.
Qui leo sit felix, et Nestoris occupet annos;
Ad libitum cujus ipse paratus ero.

Skelton Laureat Upon the Dolourus Dethe and Muche Lamentable Chaunce of the Most Honorable Erle of Northumberlande.

I wayle, I wepe, I sobbe, I sigh ful sore
The dedely fate, the dolefulle desteny
Of hym that is gone, alas! without restore,
Of the bloud royall descending nobelly;
Whose lordshyp doutles was slayne lamentably
Thorow treson, ageyn him compassed and wrought,
Trew to his prince in word, in dede, and thought.

Of hevenly poems, O Clyo, calde by name
In the colege of Musis goddess hystoriall,
Adres the to me, whiche am both halt and lame
In elect uteraunce to make memoryall!
To the for souccour, to the for helpe I call,
Mine homely rudnes and dryghnes to expell
With the freshe waters of Elyconys well.

Of noble actes aunciently enrolde
Of famous pryncis and lordes of astate,
Be thy report ar wont to be extold,
Regestringe trewly every formare date;
Of thy bountie after the usuall rate
Kyndell in me suche plenty of thy nobles,
Thes sorrowfulle dites that I may shew expres.

In sesons past, who hathe h[ea]rde or sene
Of formar writyng by any presidente
That vilane hastarddis in their furious tene,
Fulfylled with malice of froward entente,
Confetered togeder of commonn concente
Falsly to slee theyr moste singuler good lord?
It may be regestrede of shamefull recorde.

So noble a man, so valiaunt lord and knyght,
Fulfilled with honor, as all the world doth ken;
At his commaundement which had both day and nyght
Knyghtes and squyers, at every season when
He calde upon them, as meniall household men;
Were not these commons uncurteis karlis of kind

To slo their owne lord? God was not in their mynd.

And were not they to blame, I say also,
That were aboute him, his owne servants of trust,
To suffre him slayn of his mortall fo?
Fled away from hym, let hym ly in the dust;
They bode not till the reckenyng were discust;
What shuld I flatter? what shuld I glose or paint?
Fy, fy for shame, their heartes were to faint.

In England and Fraunce which gretly was redouted,
Of whom both Flaunders and Scotland stode in drede,
To whome great estates obeyed and lowted,
And mayny of rude villayns made hym for to blede;
Unkyndly they slew him; that holp them oft at nede:
He was their bulwark, their paves, and their wall,
Yet shamefully they slew hym; that shame mot them befal!

I say, ye comoners, why we ye so stark mad?
What frantyk frensy fyll in your brayne?
Where was your wit and reson ye should have had?
What wilful foly made yow to ryse agayne
Your naturall lord? alas, I cannot fayne:
Ye armyd you with will, and left your wit behynd;
Well may you be called comones most unkynd.

He was your chefteyne, your shelde, your chef defence,
Redy to assyst you in every time of nede;
Your worshyp depended of his excellence;
Alas, ye mad men, to far ye did excede;
Your hap was unhappy, to ill was your spede:
What moved you againe him to war or to fyght?
What alyde you to sle your lord again all ryght?

The ground of his quarel was for his soverain lord,
The well concerning of all the hole lande,
Demandyng suche duties as nedes most acord
To the ryght of his prince, which shold not be withstand;
For whose cause ye slew him with your owne hand:
But had his noble men done wel that day,
Ye had not been able to have sayd him nay.

But ther was fals packing, or els I am begylde;
How-be-it the mater was evydent and playne,
For if they had occupied their spere and their shilde,
This noble man doutles had not bene slayne.
But men say they wer lynked with a double chaine,
And held with the comones under a cloke,
Which kindeled the wild fyr that made all this smoke.

The commons renyed ther taxes to pay,
Of them demaunded and asked by the kynge;

With one voice importune they playnly sayd nay;
They buskt them on a bushment themselfe in baile to bring,
Againe the kyngs plesure to wrestle or to wring;
Bluntly as bestis with boste and with crye
They sayd they forsed not, nor carede not to dy.

The noblenes of the north, this valiant lord and knight,
As man that was innocent of trechery or traine,
Pressed forth boldly to withstand the myght,
And, lyke marciall Hector, he faught them agayne,
Trustyng in noble men that were with him there;
Bot al they fled from hym for falshode or fere.

Barones, knyghtes, squiers, one and all,
Together with servauntes of his famuly,
Turned their baskis, and let their master fal,
Of whos [life] they counted not a flye;
Take up whose wold, for ther they let him ly.
Alas, his gold, his fee, his annual rent
Upon suche a sort was ille bestowd and spent!

He was environd aboute on every syde
With his enemyes, that we starke made and wode;
Yet while he stode he gave them woundes wyde;
Allas for ruth! what thoughe his mynd wer gode,
His corage manly, yet ther he shed his blode:
Al left alone, alas, he foughte in vayne!
For cruelly among them ther he was slayne.

Alas for pite! that Percy thus was spylt,
The famous Erle of Northumberland;
Of knyghtly prowes the sword, pomel, and hylt,
The myghty lyon doutted by se and lande;
O dolorous chaunce of Fortunes froward hande!
What man, remembryng howe shamefully he was slaine,
From bitter weping himself can restrain?

O cruell Mars, thou dedly god of war!
O dolorous tewisday, dedicate to thy name,
When thou shoke thy sworde so noble a man to mar!
O grounde ungracious, unhappy be thy fame,
Which wert endyed with rede bloud of the same
Most noble erle! O foule mysuryd ground,
Whereon he gat his finall dedely wounde!

O Atropos, of the fatall systers iii
Goddess most cruel unto the lyfe of man,
All merciles, in the is no pite!
O homicide, which sleest all that thou can,
So forcibly upon this erle thou ran,
That with thy sword, enharpit of mortall drede,
Thou kit asonder his perfight vitall threde!

My wordes unpullysht be, nakide and playne,
Of aureat poems they want ellumynynge;
But by them to knowlege ye may attayne
Of this lordes dethe and of his murdrynge;
Which whils he lyvyd had fuyson of every thing,
Of knights, of squyers, chyf lord of toure and towne,
Tyll fykkell Fortune began on hym to frowne:

Paregall to dukes, with kynges he might compare,
Surmounting in honor all eryls he did excede;
To all countreis aboute hym reporte me I dare;
Lyke to Eneas benigne in worde and dede,
Valiant as Hector in every marciall nede,
Provydent, discrete, circumspect, and wyse,
Tyll the chaunce ran agayne hym of Fortunes duble dyse.

What nedeth me for to extoll his fame
With my rude pen enkankered all with rust?
Whose noble actes show worshiply his name,
Transendyng far myne homly Muse, that muste
Yet somwhat wright supprised with herty lust,
Truly reportyng his right noble estate,
Immortally whiche is immaculate?

His noble blode never destaynyd was,
Trew to his prince for to defend his ryght
Doblenes hatyng fals maters to compas,
Treytory and treason he banysht out of syght,
With truth to medle was al his holl delyght,
As all his countrey can testyfy the same:
To sle suche a lorde, alas, it was great shame.

If the hole quere of the Musis nyne
In me all onely wer set and comprised,
Enbrethed with the blast of influence devyne,
As perfytly as could be thought or devisyd;
To me also allthough it were promised
Of laureat Phebus holy the eloquence,
All were to lytell for his magnificence.

O yonge lyon, but tender yet of age,
Grow and encrese, remembre thyne estate;
God the assyst unto thyn herytage,
And geve the grace to be more fortunate!
Agayn rebellyones arme the to make debate;
And, as the lyone, whiche is of bestes kynge,
Unto thy subjectes by curteis and benygne.

I pray God sende the prosperous lyfe and long,
Stable thy mynde constant to be and fast,
Ryght to mayntayn, and to resyst all wronge:

All flateryng faytors abhor and from the cast;
Of foule detraction God kepe the from the blast!
Let double delyng in the have no place,
And be not lyght of credence in no case.

With hevy chere, with dolorous hart and mynd,
Eche man may sorow in his inward thought
This lordes death, whose pere is hard to fynd,
Allgif Englond and Fraunce were thorow saught.
Al kynges, all princes, al dukes, well they ought,
Both temorall and spiritual, for to complayne
This noble man, that crewelly was slayne:

More specially barons, and those knyghtes bold,
And al other gentilmen with him entertenyed
In fee, as menyall men of his houseold,
Whom he as lord worshyply mainteyned;
To sorowful weping they ought to be constreined,
As oft as they call to theyr remembraunce,
Of ther good lord the fate and dedely chaunce.

O perlese Prince of heven emperyall!
That with one word formed al thing of noughte;
Heven, hell, and erthe obey unto thy call;
Which to thy resemblaunce wondersly hast wrought
All mankynd, whom thou full dere hast bought,
With thy bloud precious our finaunce thou did pay,
And us redemed from the fendys pray;

To the pray we, as Prince incomparable,
As thou art of mercy and pyte the well,
Thou bring unto thy joye eterminable
The soull of this lorde from all daunger of hell,
In endles blys with the to byde and dwell
In thy palace above the orient,
Where thou art Lord, and God omnipotent.

O quene of mercy, O lady full of grace,
Mayden most pure, and Goddess moder dere,
To sorowful hartes chef comfort and solace,
Of all women O flowre withouten pere!
Pray to thy Son above the sterris clere,
He to vouchesaf, by thy mediacion,
To pardon thy servaunt and brynge to salvacion.

In joy triumphant the hevenly yerarchy,
With all the hole sorte of that glorious place,
His soull mot receyve into theyr company
Thorow bounty of Hym that formed all solace:
Wel of pite, of mercy, and of grace,
The Father, the Sonn, and the Holy Ghost,
In Trinitate one God of myghtes moste!

John Skelton

Arectyng my syght

Arectyng my syght towarde the zodyake,
The sygnes xii for to beholde a farre,
When Mars retrogradant reuersyd his bak,
Lord of the yere in his orbicular,
Put vp his sworde, for he cowde make no warre,
And whan Lucina plenarly did shyne,
Scorpione ascendynge degrees twyse nyne.

John Skelton

COLYN CLOUTE

Quis consurget mecum adversus malignantes ?
aut quis stabit mecum adversus operantes iniqui-
tatem ? Nemo, Domine !

W H A T can it auayle
To dryue forth a snayle,
Or to make a sayle
Of an herynges tayle ;
To ryme or to rayle,
To wryte or to indyte,
Eyther for delyte
Or elles for despyte ;
Or bokes to compyle
Of dyuers maner style, 10
Vyce to reuyle
And synne to exyle ;
To teche or to preche,
As reason wyll reche ?
Say this, and say that,
His hed is so fat,
He wotteth neuer what
Nor wherof he speketh ;
He cryeth and he creketh,
He pryeth and he peketh, 20
He chydes and he chatters,
He prates and he patters,
He clytters and he clatters,
He medles and he smatters,
He gloses and he flatters ;
Or yf he speake playne,
Than he lacketh brayne,
He is but a fole ;
Let hym go to scole,
On a thre foted stole 30
That he may downe syt,
For he lacketh wyt ;
And yf that he hyt
The nayle on the hede,
It standeth in no stede ;
The deuyll, they say, is dede,
The deuell is dede.
  It may well so be,
Or els they wolde se
Otherwyse, and fle 40
From worldly vanyte,
And foule couetousnesse,
And other wretchednesse,
Fyckell falsenesse,
Varyablenesse,
With vnstablenesse.
  And if ye stande in doubte
Who brought this ryme aboute,

My name is Colyn Cloute.
I purpose to shake oute 50
All my connyng bagge,
Lyke a clerkely hagge ;
For though my ryme be ragged,
Tattered and iagged,
Rudely rayne beaten,
Rusty and moughte eaten,
If ye take well therwith,
It hath in it some pyth.
For, as farre as I can se,
It is wronge with eche degre : 60
For the temporalte
Accuseth the spiritualte ;
The spirituall agayne
Dothe grudge and complayne
Vpon the temporall men :
Thus eche of other blother
The tone agayng the tother :
Alas, they make me shoder !
For in hoder moder
The Churche is put in faute ; 70
The prelates ben so haut,
They say, and loke so hy,
As though they wolde fly
Aboue the sterry skye.
Laye men say indede
How they take no hede
Theyr sely shepe to fede,
But plucke away and pull
The fleces of theyr wull,
Vnethes they leue a locke 80
Of wull amonges theyr flocke ;
And as for theyr connynge,
A glommynge and a mummynge,
And make therof a iape ;
They gaspe and they gape
All to haue promocyon,
There is theyr deuocyon,
With money, if it wyll hap,
To catche the forked cap :
Forsothe they are so lewd 90
To say so, all beshrewd !
What trow ye they say more
Of the bysshoppes lore ?
How in matters they be rawe,
They lumber forth the lawe,
To herken Jacke and Gyll,
Whan they put vp a byll,
And iudge it as they wyll,
For other mennes skyll,
Expoundyng out theyr clauses, 100

And leue theyr owne causes :
In theyr prouynciall cure
They make but lytell sure,
And meddels very lyght
In the Churches ryght ;
But ire and venire,
And solfa so alamyre,
That the premenyre
Is lyke to be set a fyre
In theyr iurisdictions 110
Through temporall afflictions :
Men say they haue prescriptions
Agaynst spirituall contradictions,
Accomptynge them as fyctions.
And whyles the heedes do this,
The remenaunt is amys
Of the clergy all,
Bothe great and small.
I wot neuer how they warke,
But thus the people barke ;# 120
And surely thus they say,
Bysshoppes, if they may,
Small houses wolde kepe,
But slumbre forth and slepe,
And assay to crepe
Within the noble walles
Of the kynges halles,
To fat theyr bodyes full,
Theyr soules lene and dull,
And haue full lytell care 130
How euyll theyr shepe fare.
The temporalyte say playne,
How bysshoppes dysdayne
Sermons for to make,
Or suche laboure to take ;
And for to say trouth,
A great parte is for slouth,
But the greattest parte
Is for they haue but small arte
And ryght sklender connyng 140
Within theyr heedes wonnyng.
But this reason they take
How they are able to make
With theyr golde and treasure
Clerkes out of measure,
And yet that is a pleasure.
How be it some there be,
Almost two or thre,
Of that dygnyte,
Full worshypfull clerkes, 150
As appereth by theyr werkes,
Lyke Aaron and Ure,

The wolfe from the dore
To werryn and to kepe
From theyr goostly shepe,
And theyr spirituall lammes
Sequestred from rammes
And from the berded gotes
With theyr heery cotes ;
Set nought by golde ne grotes, 160
Theyr names if I durst tell.
    But they are loth to mell,
And loth to hang the bell
Aboute the cattes necke,
For drede to haue a checke ;
They ar fayne to play deuz decke,
They ar made for the becke.
How be it they are good men,
Moche herted lyke an hen :
Theyr lessons forgotten they haue 170
That Becket them gaue :
Thomas manum mittit ad fortia,
Spernit damna, spernit opprobria,
Nulla Thomam frangit injuria.
But nowe euery spirituall father,
Men say, they had rather
Spende moche of theyr share
Than to be combred with care :
Spende ! nay, nay, but spare ;
For let se who that dare 180
Sho the mockysshe mare ;
They make her wynche and keke,
But it is not worth a leke :
Boldnesse is to seke
The Churche for to defend.
Take me as I intende,
For lothe I am to offende
In this that I haue pende :
I tell you as men say ;
Amende whan ye may, 190
For, usque ad montem Sare,#
Men say ye can not appare ;
For some say ye hunte in parkes,
And hauke on hobby larkes,
And other wanton warkes,
Whan the nyght darkes.
    What hath lay men to do
The gray gose for to sho ?
Lyke houndes of hell,
They crye and they yell, 200
Howe that ye sell
The grace of the Holy Gost :
Thus they make theyr bost
Through owte euery cost,

Howe some of you do eate
In Lenton season fleshe mete,
Fesauntes, partryche, and cranes ;
Men call you therfore prophanes ;
Ye pycke no shrympes nor pranes,
Saltfysshe, stocfysshe, nor heryng, 210
It is not for your werynge ;
Nor in holy Lenton season
Ye wyll netheyr benes ne peason,
But ye loke to be let lose
To a pygge or to a gose,
Your gorge not endewed
Without a capon stewed,
Or a stewed cocke,
To knowe whate ys a clocke
Vnder her surfled smocke, 220
And her wanton wodicocke.
And how whan ye gyue orders
In your prouinciall borders,
As at Sitientes,
Some are insufficientes,
Some parum sapientes
Some nihil intelligentes,
Some valde negligentes,
Some nullum sensum habentes,
But bestiall and vntaught ; 230
But whan thei haue ones caught
Dominus vobiscum by the hede,
Than renne they in euery stede,
God wot, with dronken nolles ;
Yet take they cure of soules,
And woteth neuer what thei rede,
Paternoster, Ave, nor Crede ;
Construe not worth a whystle
Nether Gospell nor Pystle ;
Theyr mattyns madly sayde, 240
Nothynge deuoutly prayde ;
Theyr lernynge is so small,
Theyr prymes and houres fall
And lepe out of theyr lyppes
Lyke sawdust or drye chyppes.
I speke not nowe of all,
But the moost parte in generall.
Of suche vagabundus
Speketh totus mundus ;
Howe some synge Lætabundus 250
At euery ale stake,
With, welcome hake and make !
By the brede that God brake,
I am sory for your sake.
I speke not of the good wyfe,
But of theyr apostles lyfe ;

Cum ipsis vel illis
Qui manent in villis
Est uxor vel ancilla,
Welcome Jacke and Gylla ! 260
My prety Petronylla,
And you wyll be stylla,
You shall haue your wylla.
Of suche Paternoster pekes
All the worlde spekes.
In you the faute is supposed,
For that they are not apposed
By iust examinacyon
In connyng and conuersacyon ;
They haue none instructyon 270
To make a true constructyon :
A preest without a letter,
Without his vertue be gretter,
Doutlesse were moche better
Vpon hym for to take
A mattocke or a rake.
Alas, for very shame !
Some can not declyne their name ;
Some can not scarsly rede,
And yet he wyll not drede 280
For to kepe a cure,
And in nothyng is sure ;
This Dominus vobiscum,
As wyse as Tom a thrum,
A chaplayne of trust
Layth all in the dust.
Thus I, Colyn Cloute,
As I go aboute,
And wandrynge as I walke,
I here the people talke. 290
Men say, for syluer and golde
Myters are bought and solde ;
There shall no clergy appose
A myter nor a crose,
But a full purse :
A strawe for Goddes curse !
What are they the worse ?
For a symonyake
Is but a hermoniake ;
And no more ye make 300
Of symony, men say,
But a chyldes play.
Ouer this, the foresayd laye
Reporte howe the Pope may
An holy anker call
Out of the stony wall,
And hym a bysshopp make,
If he on hym dare take

To kepe so harde a rule,
To ryde vpon a mule 310
With golde all betrapped,
In purple and paule belapped ;
Some hatted and some capped,
Rychely and warme bewrapped,
God wot to theyr great paynes,
In rotchettes of fyne Raynes,
Whyte as morowes mylke ;
Theyr tabertes of fyne silke,
Theyr styrops of myxt gold begared ;
There may no cost be spared ; 320
Theyr moyles golde dothe eate,
Theyr neyghbours dye for meate.
What care they though Gil sweate,
Or Jacke of the Noke ?
The pore people they yoke
With sommons and citacyons
And excommunycacyons,
About churches and market :
The bysshop on his carpet
At home full softe dothe syt. 330
This is a farly fyt,
To here the people iangle,
Howe warely they wrangle :
Alas, why do ye not handle
And them all to-mangle ?
Full falsely on you they lye,
And shamefully you ascrye,
And say as vntruely,
As the butterflye
A man myght saye in mocke 340
Ware the# wethercocke
Of the steple of Poules ;
And thus they hurte theyr soules
In sclaunderyng you for truthe :
Alas, it is great ruthe !
Some say ye syt in trones,
Lyke prynces aquilonis,
And shryne your rotten bones
With perles and precyous stones ;
But how the commons grones, 350
And the people mones
For prestes and for lones
Lent and neuer payd,
But from day to day delayde,
The commune welth decayde,
Men say ye are tonge tayde,
And therof speke nothynge
Byt dyssymulyng and glosyng.
Wherfore men be supposyng
The ye gyue shrewd counsell 360

Agaynst the commune well,
By poollynge and pyllage
In cytyes and vyllage,
By taxyng and tollage,
Ye make monkes to haue the culerage
For couerynge of an olde cottage,
That commytted is a collage
In the charter of dottage,
Tenure par seruyce de sottage,
And not par seruyce de socage, 370
After olde seygnyours,
And the lerning of Lytelton tenours :
Ye haue so ouerthwarted,
That good lawes are subuerted,
And good reason peruerted.
Relygous men are fayne
For to tourne agayne
In secula seculorum,
And to forsake theyr corum,
And vagabundare per forum, 380
And take a fyne meritorum,
Contra regulam morum,
Aut blacke monachorum,
Aut canonicorum,
Aut Bernardinorum,
Aut crucifixorum,
And to synge from place to place,
Lyke apostataas.
And the selfe same game
Begone ys now with shame 390
Amongest the sely nonnes :
My lady nowe she ronnes,
Dame Sybly our abbesse,
Dame Dorothe and lady Besse,
Dame Sare our pryoresse,
Out of theyr cloyster and quere
With an heuy chere,
Must cast vp theyr blacke vayles,
And set vp theyr fucke sayles,
To catche wynde with their ventales— 400
What, Colyne, there thou shales !
Yet thus with yll hayles
The lay fee people rayles.
And all the fawte they lay
On you, prelates, and say
Ye do them wrong and no ryght
To put them thus to flyght ;
No matyns at mydnyght,
Boke and chalys gone quyte ;
And plucke awaye the leedes 410
Evyn ouer theyr heedes,
And sell away theyr belles,

And all that they haue elles :
Thus the people telles,
Rayles lyke rebelles,
Redys shrewdly and spelles,
And with foundacyons melles,
And talkys lyke tytyuelles,
How ye brake the dedes wylles,
Turne monasteris into water milles, 420
Of an abbay ye make a graunge ;
Your workes, they saye, are straunge ;
So that theyr founders soules
Haue lost theyr beade rolles,
The mony for theyr masses
Spent amonge wanton lasses ;
The Diriges are forgotten ;
Theyr founders lye theyr rotten,
But where theyr soules dwell,
Therwith I wyll not mell. 430
What coulde the Turke do more
With all his false lore,
Turke, Sarazyn, or Jew ?
I reporte me to you,
O mercyfull Jesu,
You supporte and rescue,
My style for to dyrecte,
It may take some effecte !
For I abhorre to wryte
Howe the lay fee dyspyte 440
You prelates, that of ryght
Shulde be lanternes of lyght.
Ye lyue, they say, in delyte,
Drowned in deliciis,
In gloria et divitiis,
In admirabili honore,
In gloria, et splendore
Fulgurantis hastæ,
Viventes parum caste :
Yet swete meate hath soure sauce, 450
For after gloria, laus,
Chryst by cruelte
Was nayled vpon a tre ;
He payed a bytter pencyon
For mannes redemcyon,
He dranke eysell and gall
To redeme vs withall ;
But swete ypocras ye drynke,
With, Let the cat wynke !
Iche wot what yche other thynk ; 460
Howe be it per assimile
Some men thynke that ye
Shall haue penalte
For your iniquyte.

Nota what I say,
And bere it well away ;
If it please not theologys,
It is good for astrologys ;
For Ptholome tolde me
The sonne somtyme to be 470
In Ariete,
Ascendent a degre,#
Whan Scorpion descendynge,
Was so then pretendynge
A fatall fall of one
That shuld syt on a trone,
And rule all thynges alone.
Your teth whet on this bone
Amongest you euerychone,
And let Collyn Cloute haue none # 480
Maner of cause to mone :
Lay salue to your owne sore,
For els, as I sayd before,
After gloria, laus,
May come a soure sauce ;
Sory therfore am I,
But trouth can neuer lye.
With language thus poluted
Holy Churche is bruted
And shamfully confuted. 490
My penne nowe wyll I sharpe,
And wrest vp my harpe
With sharpe twynkyng trebelles,
Agaynst all suche rebelles
That laboure to confounde
And bryng the Churche to the grounde ;
As ye may dayly se
How the lay fee
Of one affynyte
Consent and agre 500
Agaynst the Churche to be,
And the dygnyte
Of the bysshoppes see.
And eyther ye be to bad,
Or els they ar mad
Of this to reporte :
But, vnder your supporte,
Tyll my dyenge day
I shall bothe wryte and say,
And ye shall do the same, 510
Howe they are to blame
You thus to dyffame :
For it maketh me sad
Howe that people are glad
The Churche to depraue ;
And some there are that raue,

Presumynge on theyr wyt,
Whan there is neuer a whyt,
To mayntayne argumentes
Agaynst the sacramentes. 520
Some make epylogacyon
Of hyghe predestynacyon ;
And of resydeuacyon
They make interpretacyon
Of an aquarde facyon ;
And of the prescience
Of dyuyne essence ;
And what ipostacis
Of Christes manhode is.
Suche logyke men wyll chop, 530
And in theyr fury hop,
When the good ale sop
Dothe daunce in theyr fore top ;
Bothe women and men,
Suche ye may well knowe and ken,
That agaynst preesthode
Theyr malyce sprede abrode,
Raylynge haynously
And dysdaynously
Of preestly dygnytes, 540
But theyr malygnytes.
And some haue a smacke
Of Luthers sacke,
And a brennyng sparke
Of Luthers warke,
And are somewhat suspecte
In Luthers secte ;
And some of them barke,
Clatter and carpe
Of that heresy arte 550
Called Wicleuista,
The deuelysshe dogmatista ;
And some be Hussyans,
And some be Arryans,
And some be Pollegians,
And make moche varyans
Bytwene the clergye
And the temporaltye,
Howe the Church# hath to mykel,
And they haue to lytell, 560
And bryng in materialites
And qualyfyed qualytes ;
Of pluralytes,
Of tryalytes,
And of tot quottes,
They commune lyke sottes,
As commeth to theyr lottes ;
Of prebendaries and deanes,

Howe some of them gleanes
And gathereth vp the store 570
For to catche more and more ;
Of persons and vycaryes
They make many outcryes ;
They cannot kepe theyr wyues
From them for theyr lyues ;
And thus the loselles stryues,
And lewdely sayes by Christ
Agaynst the sely preest.
Alas, and well away,
What ayles them thus to say ? 580
They mought be better aduysed
Then to be so dysgysed :
But they haue enterprysed,
And shamfully surmysed,
Howe prelacy is solde and bought,
And come vp of nought ;
And where the prelates be
Come of lowe degre,
And set in maieste
And spirituall dyngnyte, 590
Farwell benygnyte,
Farwell symplicite,
Farwell humylyte,
Farwell good charyte !
Ye are so puffed wyth pryde,
That no man may abyde
Your hygh and lordely lokes :
Ye cast vp then your bokes,
And vertue is forgotten ;
For then ye wyll be wroken 600
Of euery lyght quarell,
And call a lorde a iauell,
A knyght a knaue ye make ;
Ye bost, ye face, ye crake,
And vpon you ye take
To rule bothe kynge and kayser ;
And yf ye may haue layser,
Ye wyll brynge all to nought,
And that is all your thought :
For the lordes temporall, 610
Theyr rule is very small,
Almost nothyng at all.
Men saye howe ye appall
The noble blode royall :
In ernest and in game,
Ye are the lesse to blame,
For lordes of noble blode,
If they well vnderstode
How connyng myght them auaunce,
They wold pype you another daunce : 620

But noble men borne
To lerne they haue scorne,
But hunt and blowe an horne,
Lepe ouer lakes and dykes,
Set nothyng by polytykes ;
Therfore ye kepe them bace,
And mocke them to theyr face :
This is a pyteous case,
To you that ouer the whele
Grete lordes must crouche and knele, 630
And breke theyr hose at the kne,
As dayly men may se,
And to remembraunce call,
Fortune so turneth the ball
And ruleth so ouer all,
That honoure hath a great fall.
Shall I tell you more ? ye, shall.
I am loth to tell all ;
But the communalte yow call
Ydolles of Babylon, 640
De terra Zabulon
De terra Neptalym ;
For ye loue to go trym,
Brought vp of poore estate,
With pryde inordinate,
Sodaynly vpstarte
From the donge carte,
The mattocke and the shule,
To reygne and to rule ;
And haue no grace to thynke 650
Howe ye were wonte to drynke
Of a lether bottell
With a knauysshe stoppell,
Whan mamockes was your meate,
With moldy brede to eate ;
Ye cowde none other gete
To chewe and to gnawe,
To fyll therwith your mawe ;
Loggyng in fayre strawe,
Couchyng your drousy heddes 660
Somtyme in lousy beddes.
Alas, this is out of mynde !
Ye growe nowe out of kynde :
Many one ye haue vntwynde,
And made the commons blynde.
But qui se existimat stare,
Let hym well beware
Lest that his fote slyp,
And haue suche a tryp,
And falle in suche dekay, 670
That all the worlde may say,
Come downe, in the deuyll way !

Yet, ouer all that,
Of bysshops they chat,
That though ye round your hear
An ynche aboue your ear,
And haue aures patentes
And parum intendentes,
And your tonsors be croppyd,
Your eares they be stopped ; 680
For maister Adulator,
And doctour Assentator,
And Blandior blandiris,
With Mentior mentiris,
They folowe your desyres,
And so they blere your eyes,
That ye can not espye
How the male dothe wrye.
Alas, for Goddes wyll,
Why syt ye, prelates, styll, 690
And suffre all this yll ?
Ye bysshops of estates
Shulde open the brode gates
Of your spirituall charge,
And com forthe at large,
Lyke lanternes of lyght,
In the peoples syght,
In pullpettes awtentyke,
For the wele publyke
Of preesthode in this case ; 700
And alwayes to chase
Suche maner of sysmatykes
And halfe heretykes,
That wolde intoxicate,
That wolde conquinate,
That wolde contaminate,
And that wolde vyolate,
And that wolde derogate,
And that wolde abrogate
The Churchis hygh estates, 710
After this maner rates,
The which shulde be
Both franke and free,
And haue theyr lyberte,
As of antiquyte
It was ratefyed,
And also gratifyed,
By holy synodalles
And bulles papalles,
As it is res certa 720
Conteyned in Magna Charta.
But maister Damyan,
Or some other man,
That clerkely is and can

Well scrypture expounde
And hys textes grounde,
His benefyce worthe ten pounde,
Or skante worth twenty marke,
And yet a noble clerke,
He must do this werke ; 730
As I knowe a parte,
Some maisters of arte,
Some doctours of lawe,
Some lernde in other sawe,
As in dyuynyte,
That hath no dygnyte
But the pore degre
Of the vnyuersyte ;
Or els frere Frederycke,
Or els frere Dominike, 740
Or frere Hugulinus,
Or frere Augustinus,
Or frere Carmelus,
That gostly can heale vs ;
Or els yf we may
Get a frere graye,
Or els of the order
Vpon Grenewyche border,
Called Obseruance,
Or a frere of Fraunce ; 750
Or else the poore Scot,
It must come to his lot
To shote forthe his shot ;
Or of Babuell besyde Bery,
To postell vpon a kyry,
That wolde it shulde be noted
Howe scripture shulde be coted,
And so clerkley promoted ;
And yet the frere doted.
But men sey your awtoryte, 760
And your noble se,
And your dygnyte,
Shulde be imprynted better
Then all the freres letter ;
For if ye wolde take payne
To preche a worde or twayne,
Though it were neuer so playne,
With clauses two or thre,
So as they myght be
Compendyously conueyde, 770
These wordes shuld be more weyd,
And better perceyued,
And thankfullerlye receyued,
And better shulde remayne
Amonge the people playne,
That wold your wordes retayne

And reherce them agayne,
Than a thousand thousande other,
That blaber, barke, and blother,
And make a Walshmans hose 780
Of the texte and of the glose.
For protestatyon made,
That I wyll not wade
Farther in this broke,
Nor farther for to loke
In deuysynge of this boke,
But answere that I may
For my selfe alway,
Eyther analogice
Or els categorice, 790
So that in diuinite
Doctors that lerned be,
Nor bachelers of that faculte
That hath taken degre
In the vniversite,
Shall not be obiecte at by me.
But doctour Bullatus,
Parum litteratus,
Dominus doctoratus
At the brode gatus, 800
Doctour Daupatus,
And bacheler bacheleratus,
Dronken as a mouse,
At the ale house,
Taketh his pyllyon and his cap
At the good ale tap,
For lacke of good wyne ;
As wyse as Robyn swyne,
Vnder a notaryes sygne
Was made a dyuyne ; 810
As wyse as Waltoms calfe,
Must preche, a Goddes halfe,
In the pulpyt solempnely ;
More mete in the pyllory,
For, by saynt Hyllary,
He can nothyng smatter
Of logyke nor scole matter,
Neyther syllogisare,
Nor enthymemare,
Nor knoweth his elenkes, 820
Nor his predicamens ;
And yet he wyll mell
To amend the gospell,
And wyll preche and tell
What they do in hell ;
And he dare not well neuen
What they do in heuen,
Nor how farre Temple barre is

From the seuen starrys.
Nowe wyll I go 830
And tell of other mo,
Semper protestando
De non impugnando
The foure ordores of fryers,
Though some of them be lyers ;
As Lymyters at large
Wyll charge and dyscharge ;
As many a frere, God wote,
Preches for his grote,
Flatterynge for a newe cote 840
And for to haue his fees ;
Some to gather chese ;
Loth they are to lese
Eyther corne or malte ;
Somtyme meale and salte,
Somtyme a bacon flycke,
That is thre fyngers thycke
Of larde and of greace,
Theyr couent to encreace.
I put you out of doute, 850
This can not be rought aboutw
But they theyr tonges fyle, And make a plesaunt style
To Margery and to Maude,
Howe they haue no fraude ;
And somtyme they prouoke
Bothe Gyll and Jacke at Noke
Their dewtyes to withdrawe,
That they ought by the lawe
Theyr curates to content 860
In open tyme and in Lent :
God wot, they take great payne
To flatter and to fayne ;
But it is an olde sayd sawe,
That nede hath no lawe.
Some walke aboute in melottes,
In gray russet and heery cotes ;
Some wyl neyther golde ne grotes ;
Some plucke a partrych in remotes,
And by the barres of her tayle 870
Wyll knowe a rauen from a rayle,
A quayle, the raile, and the olde rauen
Sed libera nos a malo ! Amen.
And by Dudum, theyr Clementine,
Agaynst curates they repyne ;
And say propreli they ar sacerdotes,
To shryue, assoyle, and reles
Dame Margeries soule out of hell :
But when the freare fell in the well,
He coud not syng himselfe therout 880
But by the helpe of Christyan Clout.

Another Clementyne also,#
How frere Fabian, with other mo,
Exivit de Paradiso ;
Whan they agayn theder shal come,
De hoc petimus consilium :
And through all the world they go
With Dirige and Placebo.
But nowe my mynd ye vnderstand,
For they must take in hande 890
To prech, and to withstande
Al maner of abiectioons ;
For bysshops haue protections,
They say, to do corrections,
But they haue no affections
To take the sayd dyrections ;
In such maner of cases,
Men say, they bere no faces
To occupye suche places,
To sowe the sede of graces : 900
Theyr hertes are so faynted,
And they be so attaynted
With coueytous and ambycyon,
And other superstycyon,
That they be deef and dum,
And play scylens and glum,
Can say nothynge but mum.
They occupye them so
With syngyng Placebo,
They wyll no farther go : 910
They had leuer to please,
And take their worldly ease,
Than to take on hande
Worsshepfully to withstande
Such temporall warre and bate,
As nowe is made of late
Agaynst holy Church estate,
Or to mayntayne good quarelles.
The lay men call them barrelles
Full of glotony 920
And of hypocrysy,
That counterfaytes and payntes
As they were very sayntes :
In matters that them lyke
They shewe them polytyke,
Pretendyng grauyte
And sygnyoryte,
With all solempnyte,
For theyr indempnyte ;
For they wyll haue no losse 930
Of a peny nor of a crosse
Of theyr predyall landes,
That cometh to theyr handes,

And as farre as they dare set,
All is fysshe that cometh to net :
Buyldyng royally
Theyr mancyons curyously,
With turrettes and with toures,
With halles and with boures,
Stretchynge to the starres, 940
With glasse wyndowes and barres ;
Hangynge aboute the walles
Clothes of golde and palles,
Arras of ryche aray,
Fresshe as flours in May ;
Wyth dame Dyana naked ;
Howe lusty Venus quaked,
And howe Cupyde shaked
His darte, and bent his bowe
For to shote a crowe 950
At her tyrly tyrlowe ;
And howe Parys of Troy
Daunced a lege de moy,
Made lusty sporte and ioy
With dame Helyn the quene ;
With suche storyes bydene
Their chambres well besene ;
With triumphes of Cesar,
And of Pompeyus war,
Of renowne and of fame 960
By them to get a name :
Nowe all the worlde stares,
How they ryde in goodly chares,
Conueyed by olyphantes,
With lauryat garlantes,
And by vnycornes
With their semely hornes ;
Vpon these beestes rydynge,
Naked boyes strydynge,
With wanton wenches winkyng. 970
Nowe truly, to my thynkynge,
That is a speculacyon
And a mete meditacyon
For prelates of estate,
Their courage to abate
From worldly wantonnesse,
Theyr chambres thus to dresse
With suche parfetnesse
And all suche holynesse ;
How be it they let downe fall 980
Their churches cathedrall.
Squyre, knyght, and lorde,
Thus the Churche remorde ;
With all temporall people
They rune agaynst the steple,

Thus talkynge and tellyng
How some of you are mellyng ;
Yet softe and fayre for swellyng,
Beware of a quenes yellyng.
It is a besy thyng 990
For one man to rule a kyng
Alone and make rekenyng,
To gouerne ouer all
And rule a realme royall
By one mannes verrey wyt ;
Fortune may chaunce to flyt,
And whan he weneth to syt,
Yet may he mysse the quysshon :
For I rede a preposycyon,
Cum regibus amicare, 1000
Et omnibus dominari,
Et supra te pravare ;
Wherfore he hathe good vre
That can hymselfe assure
Howe fortune wyll endure.
For the communalte dothe reporte
That they haue great wonder
That ye kepe them so vnder ;
Yet they meruayle so moche lesse, 1010
For ye play so at the chesse,
As they suppose and gesse,
That some of you but late
Hath played so checkemate
With lordes of great estate,
After suche a rate,
That they shall mell nor make,
Nor vpon them take,
For kynge nor kayser sake,
But at the playsure of one 1020
That ruleth the roste alone.
Helas, I say, Helas !
Howe may this come to passe,
That a man shall here a masse,
And not so hardy on his hede,
To loke on God in forme of brede,
But that the parysshe clerke
There vpon must herke,
And graunt hym at his askyng
For to se the sacryng ? 1030
And howe may this accorde,
No man to our souerayne lorde
So hardy to make sute,
Nor yet to execute
His commaundement,
Without the assent
Of our presydent,
Nor to expresse to his person,

Without your consentatyon
Graunt hym his lycence 1040
To preas to his presence,
Nor to speke to hym secretly,
Openly nor preuyly,
Without his presydent be by,
Or els his substytute
Whom he wyll depute ?
Neyther erle ne duke
Permytted ? by saynt Luke,
And by swete saynt Marke,
This is a wonderous warke ! 1050
That the people talke this,
Somewhat there is amysse :
The deuil cannot stop their mouthes,
But they wyl talke of such vncouthes,
All that euer they ken
Agaynst all spirituall men.
    Whether it be wrong or ryght,
Or els for dyspyght,
Or howe euer it hap,
Theyr tonges thus do clap, 1060
And through suche detractyon
They put you to your actyon ;
And whether they say trewly
As they may abyde therby,
Or els that they do lye,
Ye knowe better then I.
But nowe debetis scire,
And groundly audire,
In your convenire,
Of this premenire, 1070
Or els in the myre
They saye they wyll you cast ;
Therfore stande sure and fast.
    Stande sure, and take good fotyng,
And let be all your motyng,
Your gasyng and your totyng,
And your parcyall promotyng
Of those that stande in your grace ;
But olde seruantes ye chase,
And put them out of theyr place. 1080
Make ye no murmuracyon,
Though I wryte after this facion ;
Though I, Colin Cloute,
Among the hole route
Of you that clerkes be,
Take nowe vpon me
Thus copyously to wryte,
I do it for no despyte.
Wherfore take no dysdayne
At my style rude and playne ; 1090

For I rebuke no man
That vertuous is : why than
Wreke ye your anger on me ?
For those that vertuous be
Haue no cause to say
That I speke out of the way.
    Of no good bysshop speke I,
Nor good preest I escrye,
Good frere, nor good chanon,
Good nonne, nor good canon, 1100
Good monke, nor good clercke,
Nor yette of no good werke :
But my recountyng is
Of them that do amys,
In speking and rebellyng,
In hynderyng and dysauaylyng
Holy Churche, our mother,
One agaynst another ;
To vse suche despytyng
Is all my hole wrytyng ; 1110
To hynder no man,
As nere I can,
For no man haue I named :
Wherfore sholde I be blamed ?
Ye ought to be ashamed,
Agaynst me to be gramed,
And can tell no cause why,
But that I wryte trewly.
    Then yf any there be
Of hygh or lowe degre 1120
Of the spiritualte,
Or of the temporalte
That dothe thynke or wene
That his conscyence be not clene,
And feleth hymselfe sycke,
Or touched on the quycke,
Suche grace God them sende
Themselfe to amende,
For I wyll not pretende
Any man to offende. 1130
    Wherfore, as thynketh me,
Great ydeottes they be,
And lytell grace they haue,
This treatyse to depraue ;
Nor wyll here no prechyng,
Nor no vertuous techyng,
Nor wyll haue no resytyng
Of any vertuous wrytyng ;
Wyll knowe none intellygence
To refourme theyr neglygence, 1140
But lyue styll out of of facyon,
To theyr owne dampnacyon.

To do shame they haue no shame,
But they wold no man shulde them blame :
They haue an euyl name,
But yet they wyll occupy the same.
    With them the worde of God
Is counted for no rod ;
They counte it for a raylyng,
That nothyng is auaylyng ; 1150
The prechers with euyll hayling :
Shall they daunt vs prelates,
That be theyr prymates ?
Not so hardy on theyr pates !
Herke, howe the losell prates,
With a wyde wesaunt !
Auaunt, syr Guy of Gaunt !
Auaunt, lewde preest, auaunt !
Auaunt, syr doctour Deuyas !
Prate of thy matyns and thy masse, 1160
And let our maters passe :
Howe darest thou, daucocke, mell ?
Howe darest thou, losell,
Allygate the gospell
Agaynst vs of the counsell ?
Auaunt to the deuyll of hell !
Take hym, wardeyne of the Flete,
Set hym fast by the fete !
I say, lyeutenaunt of the Toure,
Make this lurdeyne for to loure ; 1170
Lodge hym in Lytell Ease,
Fede hym with beanes and pease !
The Kynges Benche or Marshalsy,
Haue hym thyder by and by !
The vyllayne precheth openly,
And declareth our vyllany ;
And of our fre symplenesse
He sayes that we are rechelesse,
And full of wylfulnesse,
Shameles and mercylesse, 1180
Incorrigible and insaciate ;
And after this rate
Agaynst vs dothe prate.
    At Poules Crosse or els where,
Openly at Westmynstere,
And Saynt Mary Spyttell,
They set not by vs a whystell :
At the Austen fryers
They count vs for lyers :
And at Saynt Thomas of Akers 1190
They carpe vs lyke crakers,
Howe we wyll rule al at wyll
Without good reason or skyll ;
And say how that we be

Full of parcyalyte ;
And howe at a pronge
We tourne ryght into wronge,
Delay causes so longe
That ryght no man can fonge ;
They say many matters be born 1200
By the ryght of a rambes horne.
Is not this a samfull scorne,
To be teared thus and torne.
How may we thys indure ?
Wherfore we make you sure,
Ye prechers shall be yawde ;
And some shall be sawde,
As noble Isaias,
The holy prophet, was ;
And some of you shall dye, 1210
Lyke holy Jeremy ;
Some hanged, some slayne,
Some beaten to the brayne ;
And we wyll rule and rayne,
And our matters mayntayne
Who dare say there agayne,
Or who dare dysdayne
At our pleasure and wyll :
For, be it good or be it yll,
As it is, it shall be styll, 1220
For all master doctour of Cyuyll,
Or of Diuine, or doctour Dryuyll,
Let hym cough, rough, or sneuyll ;
Renne God, renne deuyll,
Renne who may renne best,
And let take all the rest !
We set not a nut shell
The way to heuen or to hell.
Lo, this is the gyse now a dayes !
It is to drede, men sayes, 1230
Lest they be Saduces,
As they be sayd sayne
Whiche determyned playne
We shulde not ryse agayne
At dredefull domis day ;
And so it semeth they play,
Whiche hate to be corrected
Whan they be infected,
Nor wyll suffre this boke
By hoke ne by croke 1240
Prynted for to be,
For that no man shulde se
Nor rede in any scrolles
Of theyr dronken nolles,
Nor of theyr noddy polles,
Nor of theyr sely soules,

Nor of some wytles pates
Of dyuers great estates,
As well as other men.
   Now to withdrawe my pen, 1250
And now a whyle to rest,
Me semeth it for the best.
   The forecastell of my shyp
Shall glyde, and smothely slyp
Out of the wawes wod
Of the stormy flod ;
Shote anker, and lye at rode,
And sayle not farre abrode,
Tyll the cost be clere,
And the lode starre appere : 1260
My shyp nowe wyll I stere
Towarde the porte salu
Of our Sauyour Jesu,
Suche grace that he vs sende,
To rectyfye and amende
Thynges that are amys,
Whan that his pleasure is.
            Amen !
In opere imperfecto,
In opere semper perfecto,
Et in opere plusquam perfecto ! 1270
Colinus Cloutus, quanquam mea carmina multis
Sordescunt stultis, sed puevinate sunt rare cultis,
Pue vinatis altisem divino flamine flatis.
Unde meâ refert tanto minus, invida quamvis
Lingua nocere parat, quia, quanquam rustica canto,
Undique cantabor tamen et celebrabor ubique,
Inclita dum maneat gens Anglica. Laurus honoris,
Quondam regnorum regina et gloria regum,
Heu, modo marcescit, tabescit, languida torpet !
Ah pudet, ah miseret ! vetor hic ego pandere plura
Pro gemitu et lacrimis : præstet peto præmia pæna.**

John Skelton

Cuncta Licet Cecidisse Putas Discrimina Rerum

Cuncta licet cecidisse putas discrimina rerum,
Et prius incerta nunc tibi certa manent,
Consiliis usure meis tamen aspice caute,
Subdola non fallat te dea fraude sua:
Saepe solet placido mortales fallere vultu,
Et cute sub placida tabida saepe dolent;
Ut quando secura putas et cuncta serena,
Anguis sub viridi gramine saepe latet.
Though ye suppose all jeperdys ar paste,
And all is done that ye lokyd for before,
Ware yet, I rede you, of Fortunes dowble cast,
For one fals poynt she is wont to kepe in store,
And vnder the fell oft festered is the sore:
That when ye thynke all daunger for to pas,
Ware of the lesard lyeth lurkyng in the gras.

Qd Skelton, laureat.

John Skelton

Excerpt from Speke, Parrot

Parotte.
So many morall maters,* and so lytell vsyd ;
So myche newe makyng,* and so madd tyme spente ;
So myche translacion in to Englyshe confused ;
So myche nobyll prechyng, and so lytell amendment ;
So myche consultacion, almoste to none entente ;
So myche provision, and so lytell wytte at nede ;—
Syns Dewcalyons flodde there can no clerkes rede.

So lytyll dyscressyon, and so myche reasonyng ;
So myche hardy dardy, and so lytell manlynes ;
So prodigall expence, and so shamfull reconyng ;
So gorgyous garmentes, and so myche wrechydnese ;
So myche portlye pride, with pursys penyles
So myche spente before, and so myche vnpayd behynde ;—
Syns Dewcalyons flodde there can no clerkes fynde.

So myche forcastyng, and so farre an after dele ;
So myche poletyke pratyng, and so lytell stondythe* in stede ;
So lytell secretnese, and so myche grete councell ;
So manye bolde barons, there hertes as dull as lede ;
So many nobyll bodyes vndyr on dawys hedd ;*
So royall a kyng as reynythe vppon vs all ;—
Syns Dewcalions flodde was nevyr sene nor shall.

So many complayntes, and so smalle redresse ;
So myche callyng on, and so smalle takyng hede ;
So myche losse of merchaundyse, and so remedyles ;
So lytell care for the comyn weall, and so myche nede ;
So myche dow3tfull daunger,* and so lytell drede ;
So myche pride of prelattes, so cruell and so kene ;—
Syns Dewcalyons flodde, I trowe, was nevyr sene.

So many thevys hangyd, and thevys never the lesse ;
So myche prisonment ffor matyrs not worthe an hawe ;*
So myche papers weryng for ryghte a smalle exesse ;*
So myche pelory pajauntes* vndyr colower of good lawe ;
So myche towrnyng on the cooke stole* for euery guy gaw ;*
So myche mokkyshe makyng of statutes of array ;—
Syns Dewcalyons flodde was nevyr, I dar sey.

So braynles caluys hedes, so many shepis taylys ;
So bolde a braggyng bocher,* and flesshe sold so dere ;
So many plucte partryches, and so fatte quaylles ;
So mangye a mastyfe curre, the grete grey houndes pere ; *
So bygge a bulke of brow auntlers cabagyd that yere;*
So many swannes dede, and so small revell ;
Syns Dewcalyons flodde, I trow, no man can tell.

So many trusys takyn, and so lytyll perfyte trowthe ;
So myche bely joye, and so wastefull banketyng ;*
So pynchyng and sparyng, and so lytell profyte growthe ;

So many howgye* howsys byldyng, and so small howseholding ;
Suche statutes apon* diettes, suche pyllyng and pollyng ;*
So ys all thyng wrowghte wylfully withowte reson and skylle* ;—
Syns Dewcalyons flodde the world was never so yll.

So many vacabondes, so many beggers bolde ;
So myche decay of monesteries and of relygious places ;
So hote hatered agaynste the Chyrche, and cheryte so colde ;
So myche of my lordes grace, and in hym no grace ys ;
So many holow hartes, and so dowbyll faces ;
So myche sayntuary brekyng,* and preuylegidde barrydd ;—
Syns Dewcalyons flodde was nevyr sene nor lyerd.*

So myche raggyd ryghte of a rammes horne ;
So rygorous revelyng1 in a prelate specially ;
So bold and so braggyng, and was so baselye borne ;
So lordlye of hys lokes and so dysdayneslye ;*
So fatte a magott, bred of a flesshe flye ;
Was nevyr suche a ffylty gorgon,* nor suche an epycure,
Syn[s] Dewcalyons flodde, I make thé faste and sure.

So myche preuye wachyng in cold wynters nyghtes ;
So myche serchyng of loselles, and ys hymselfe so lewde ;*
So myche coniuracions for elvyshe myday sprettes ;*
So many bullys of' pardon puplysshyd* and shewyd ;
So myche crossyng and blyssyng, and hym all beshrewde ; *
Suche pollaxis and pyllers, suche mvlys trapte with gold ;—
Sens Dewcalyons flodde in no cronycle ys told.

Dixit, quod Parrot.
Crescet in immensum me vivo Psittacus iste ;
Hinc mea dicetur Skeltonidis inclyta fama.
Quod Skelton Lawryat,
Orator Regius.
34.]

John Skelton

from Colin Clout

What can it avail
To drive forth a snail,
Or to make a sail
Of an herring's tail;
To rhyme or to rail,
To write or to indict,
Either for delight
Or else for despight;
Or books to compile
Of divers manner of style,
Vice to revile
And sin to exile;
To teach or to preach,
As reason will reach?
Say this, and say that,
His head is so fat,
He wotteth never what
Nor whereof he speaketh;
He crieth and he creaketh,
He prieth and he peeketh,
He chides and he chatters,
He prates and he patters,
He clitters and he clatters,
He meddles and he smatters,
He gloses and he flatters;
Or if he speak plain,
Then he lacketh brain,
He is but a fool;
Let him go to school,
On a three footed stool
That he may down sit,
For he lacketh wit;
And if that he hit
The nail on the head,
It standeth in no stead;
The devil, they say, is dead,
The devil is dead.
    It may well so be,
Or else they would see
Otherwise, and flee
From worldly vanity,
And foul covetousness,
And other wretchedness,
Fickle falseness,
Variableness,
With unstableness.
    And if ye stand in doubt
Who brought this rhyme about,
My name is Colin Clout.
I purpose to shake out
All my connying bag,
Like a clerkly hag;

For though my rhyme be ragged,
Tattered and jagged,
Rudely rain beaten,
Rusty and moth eaten,
If ye take well therewith,
It hath in it some pith.

John Skelton

Go, Piteous Heart

GO, pytyous hart, rasyd with dedly wo,
Persyd with payn, bleding with wondes smart,
Bewayle thy fortune, with vaynys wan and blo.
O Fortune vnfrendly, Fortune vnkynde thow art,
To be so cruell and so ouerthwart,
To suffer me so carefull to endure,
That wher I loue best I dare not dyscure !

One there is, and euer one shalbe,
For whose sake my hart is sore dyseasyd ;
For whose loue, welcom dysease to me !
I am content so all partys be pleasyd :
Yet, and God wold, I wold my payne were easyd !
But Fortune enforsyth me so carefully to endure,
That where I loue best I dare not dyscure.

John Skelton

Knoledge, Acquayntance, Resort, Fauour With Grace

Knoledge, acquayntance, resort, fauour with grace;
Delyte, desyre, respyte wyth lyberte;
Corage wyth lust, conuenient tyme and space;
Dysdayns, dystres, exylyd cruelte;
Wordys well set with good habylyte;
Demure demenaunce, womanly of porte;
Transendyng plesure, surmountyng all dysporte;

Allectuary arrectyd to redres
These feuerous axys, the dedely wo and payne
Of thoughtfull hertys plungyd in dystres;
Refresshyng myndys the Aprell shoure of rayne;
Condute of comforte, and well most souerayne;
Herber enverduryd, contynuall fressh and grene;
Of lusty somer the passyng goodly quene;

The topas rych and precyouse in vertew;
Your ruddys wyth ruddy rubys may compare;
Saphyre of sadnes, enuayned wyth indy blew;
The pullyshed perle youre whytenes doth declare;
Dyamand poyntyd to rase oute hartly care;
Geyne surfetous suspecte the emeraud commendable;
Relucent smaragd, obiecte imcomperable;

Encleryd myrroure and perspectyue most bryght,
Illumynyd wyth feturys far passyng my reporte;
Radyent Esperus, star of the clowdy nyght,
Lode star to lyght these louers to theyr porte,
Gayne dangerous stormys theyr anker of supporte,
Theyr sayll of solace most comfortably clad,
Whych to behold makyth heuy hartys glad:

Remorse haue I of youre most goodlyhod,
Of youre behauoure curtes and benynge,
Of your bownte and of youre womanhod,
Which makyth my hart oft to lepe and sprynge,
And to remember many a praty thynge;
But absens, alas, wyth tremelyng fere and drede
Abashyth me, albeit I haue no nede.

You I assure, absens is my fo,
My dedely wo, my paynfull heuynes;
And if ye lyst to know the cause why so,
Open myne hart, beholde my mynde expres:
I wold ye coud ! then shuld ye se, mastres,
How there nys thynge that I couet so fayne
As to enbrace you in myne armys twayne.

Nothynge yerthly to me more desyrous
Than to beholde youre bewteouse countenaunce:
But, hatefull absens, to me so enuyous,
Though thou withdraw me from her by long dystaunce,

Yet shall she neuer oute of remembraunce;
For I haue grauyd her wythin the secret wall
Of my trew hart, to loue her best of all!

Qd Skelton, laureat.

John Skelton

Mannerly Margery Milk and Ale

Ay, beshrew you! By my fay,
These wanton clerks be nice alway!
Avaunt, avaunt, my popinjay!
What, will ye do nothing but play?
Tilly, vally, straw, let be I say!
    Gup, Christian Clout, gup, Jack of the Vale!
    With Mannerly Margery Milk and Ale.

By God, ye be a pretty pode,
And I love you an whole cart-load.
Straw, James Foder, ye play the fode,
I am no hackney for your rod:
Go watch a bull, your back is broad!
    Gup, Christian Clout, gup, Jack of the Vale!
    With Mannerly Margery Milk and Ale.

Ywis ye deal uncourteously;
What, would ye frumple me? Now fy!
What, and ye shall be my pigesnye?
By Christ, ye shall not, no hardely:
I will not be japed bodily!
    Gup, Christian Clout, gup, Jack of the Vale!
    With Mannerly Margery Milk and Ale.

Walk forth your way, ye cost me nought;
Now I have found what I have sought:
The best cheap flesh that ever I bought.
Yet, for His love that all hath wrought,
Wed me, or else I die for thought.
    Gup, Christian Clout, your breath is stale!
    Go, Mannerly Margery Milk and Ale!
    Gup, Christina Clout, gup, Jack of the Vale!
    With Mannerly Margery Milk and Ale.

John Skelton

My Darling Dear, My Daisy Flower

WITH lullay, lullay, like a child,
Thou sleepèst too long, thou art beguiled!
'My darling dear, my daisy flower,
Let me,' quoth he, 'lie in your lap.'
'Lie still,' quoth she, 'my paramour,
Lie still hardily1, and take a nap.'
His head was heavy, such was his hap,
All drowsy, dreaming, drowned in sleep,
That of his love he took no keep,
With hey, lullay, etc.

With ba, ba, ba, and bas, bas, bas!
She cherished him both cheek and chin
That he wist never where he was;
He had forgotten all deadly sin!
He wanted wit her love to win:
He trusted her payment and lost all his pay;
She left him sleeping and stale2 away,
With hey, lullay, etc.

The rivers rough, the waters wan;
She sparèd not to wet her feet.
She waded over, she found a man
That halsèd3 her heartily and kissed her sweet;
Thus after her cold she caught a heat.
'My lief,4' she said, 'rowteth5 in his bed;
Iwys6 he hath an heavy head,'
With hey, lullay, etc.

What dreamest thou, drunkard, drowsy pate?
Thy lust and liking is from thee gone;
Thou blinkard blowboll7, thou wakèst too late;
Behold thou liest, luggard, alone!
Well may thou sigh, well may thou groan,
To deal with her so cowardly.
Ywis, pole-hatchet,8 she blearèd thine eye!

John Skelton

Of all nacyons vnder the heuyn

[Skelton Laureate agaynste a comely Coystrowne that curyowsly chawntyd And curryshly cowntred, And madly in hys Musykkys mokkyshly made, Agaynste the .ix. Musys of polytyke Poems & Poettys matryculat.]

[Of all nacyons vnder the heuyn]

Of all nacyons vnder the heuyn.
These frantyke foolys I hate most of all.
For though they stumble in the synnys seuyn.
In peuyshnes yet they snapper and fall.
Which men the .viii. dedly syn call.
This peuysh proud thys prendergest.
When he is well yet can he not rest.

A swete suger-lofe & sowre bayardys-bun.
Be sumdele lyke in forme & shap.
The one for a duke the other for dun.
A maunchet for morell thereon to snap.
Hys hart is to hy to haue any hap.
But for in his gamvt carp that he can.
Lo Iak wold be a Ientylman

Wyth hey troly loly lo whip here Iak.
Alumbek sodyldym syllorym ben.
Curyowsly he can both counter & knak
Of Martyn swart & all hys mery men.
Lord how perkyn is proud of hys Pohen.
But ask wher he fyndyth among hys monacordys.
An holy-water clarke a ruler of lordys.

He can not fynd it in rule nor in space.
He solfyth to haute hys Trybyll is to hy.
He braggyth of hys byrth that borne was full bace
Hys musyk withoute mesure to sharp is hys my
He trymmyth in hys tenor to counter pyrdewy.
Hys dyscant is besy it is withoute a mene.
To fat is hys fantsy hys wyt is to lene.

He lumbryth on a lewde lewte roty bully Ioyse.
Rumbyll downe tumbyll downe hey go now now.
He fumblyth in hys fyngeryng an vgly good noyse.
It semyth the sobbyng of an old sow.
He wold be made moch of & he wyst how.
Wele sped In spyndels and turnyng of tauellys.
A bungler a brawler a pyker of quarellys.

Comely he clappyth a payre of clauycordys.
He whystelyth so swetely he makyth me to swete.
His descant is dasshed full of dyscordes
A red angry man but easy to intrete.
An vssher of the hall fayn wold I get.

To poynte this proude page a place and a rome
For Iak wold be a Ientylman that late was a grome

Iak wold Iet and yet Iyll sayd nay.
He counteth in his countenaunce to checke with the best.
A malaperte medler that pryeth for his pray
In a dysh dare he rush at the rypest.
Dremyng in dumpys to wrangyll & to wrest.
He fyndeth a proporcyon in his prycke-songe.
To drynk at a draught a larg & a long

Nay iape not with hym he is no small fole
It is a solempne syre and a solayne.
For lordes and ladyes lerne at his scole
He techyth them so wysely to solf and to fayne.
That neyther they synge wel prycke-songe nor playne
Thys docter deuyas commensyd in a cart.
A master a mynstrell a fydler a farte

What though ye can cownter Custodi nos.
As well it becomyth yow a parysh towne-Clarke.
To syng Sospitati dedit Egros.
Yet bere ye not to bold to braule ne to bark.
At me, that medeled nothyng with youre wark.
Correct fyrst thy-self, walk & be nought.
Deme what thou lyst thou knowyst not my thought.

A prouerbe of old say well or be styll.
Ye are to vnhappy occasyons to fynde.
Uppon me to clater or els to say yll.
Now haue I shewyd you part of your proud mynde
Take thys in worth the best is behynde.
Wryten at Croydon by Crowland in the Clay.
On Candelmas euyn the Kalendas of May.

John Skelton

The Auncient Acquaintance, Madam, Betwen Vs Twayn

The auncient acquaintance, madam, betwen vs twayn,
The famylyaryte, the formal dalyaunce,
Causyth me that I can not myself refrayne
But that I must wryte for my plesaunt pastaunce:
Remembryng your passying goodly countenaunce,
Your goodly port, your bewteous visage,
Ye may be countyd comfort of all corage.

Of all your feturs fauorable to make tru discripcion,
I am insuffycyent to make such enterpryse;
For thus dare I say, without [con]tradiccyon,
That dame Menolope was neuer half so wyse:
Yet so it is that a rumer begynneth for to ryse,
How in good horsmen ye set your hole delyght,
And haue forgoten your old trew louyng knyght.

Wyth bound and rebound, bounsyngly take vp
Hys jentyll curtoyl, and set nowght by small naggys!
Spur vp at the hynder gyrth, with Gup, morell, gup!
With, Jayst ye, jenet of Spayne, for your tayll waggys!
Ye cast all your corage vppon such courtly haggys.
Haue in sergeaunt ferrour, myne horse behynd is bare;
He rydeth well the horse, but he rydeth better the mare.

Ware, ware, the mare wynsyth wyth her wanton hele!
She kykyth with her kalkyns and keylyth with a clench;
She goyth wyde behynde, and hewyth neuer a dele:
Ware gallyng in the widders, ware of that wrenche!
It is perlous for a horseman to dyg in the trenche.
Thus greuyth your husband, that ryght jentyll knyght,
And so with youre seruantys he fersly doth fyght.

So fersly he fytyth, his mynde is so fell,
That he dryuyth them doune with dyntes on ther day wach;
He bresyth theyr braynpannys and makyth them to swell,
Theyre browys all to-brokyn, such clappys they cach;
Whose jalawsy malycyous makyth them to lepe the hach;
By theyr conusaunce knowing how they serue a wily py:
Ask all your neybours whether that I ly.

It can be no counsell that is cryed at the cros:
    For youre jentyll husband sorowfull am I;
How be it, he is not furst hath had a los:
Aduertysyng you, madame, to warke more secretly,
Let not all the world make an owtcry;
Play fayre play, madame, and loke ye play clene,
Or ells with gret shame your game wylbe sene.

Qd Skelton, laureat.

John Skelton

The Book of Phillip Sparrow

Pla ce bo,
Who is there, who?
Di le xi,
Dame Margery;
Fa, re, my, my,
Wherfore and why, why?
For the sowle of Philip Sparowe,
That was late slayn at Carowe,
Among the Nones Blake,
For that swete soules sake,
And for all sparowes soules,
Set in our bederolles,
Pater noster qui,
With an Ave Mari,
And with the corner of a Crede,
The more shalbe your mede.

Whan I remembre agayn
How mi Philyp was slayn,
Never halfe the payne
Was betwene you twayne,
Pyramus and Thesbe,
As than befell to me:
I wept and I wayled,
The tearys downe hayled;
But nothinge it avayled
To call Phylyp agayne,
Whom Gyb our cat hath slayne.

Gib, I saye, our cat,
Worrowyd her on that
Which I loved best:
It can not be exprest
My sorowfull hevynesse,
But all without redresse;
For within that stounde,
Halfe slumbrynge, in a swounde
I fell downe to the grounde.

Unneth I kest myne eyes
Towarde the cloudy skyes:
But whan I dyd beholde
My sparow dead and colde,
No creatuer but that wolde
Have rewed upon me,
To behold and se
What hevynesse dyd me pange;
Wherewith my handes I wrange,
That my senaws cracked,
As though I had ben racked,
So payned and so strayned,
That no lyfe wellnye remayned.

I syghed and I sobbed,
For that I was robbed
Of my sparowes lyfe.
O mayden, wydow, and wyfe,
Of what estate ye be,
Of hye or lowe degre,
Great sorowe than ye myght se,
And lerne to wepe at me!
Such paynes dyd me frete,
That myne hert dyd bete,
My vysage pale and dead,
Wanne, and blewe as lead;
The panges of hatefull death
Wellnye had stopped my breath.
Heu, heu, me,
That I am wo for the!
Ad Dominum, cum tribularer, clamavi:
Of God nothynge els crave I
But Phyllypes soule to kepe
From the marees deepe
Of Acherontes well,
That is a flode of hell;
And from the great Pluto,
The prynce of endles wo;
And from foule Alecto,
With vysage blacke and blo;
And from Medusa, that mare,
That lyke a fende doth stare;
And from Megeras edders,
For rufflynge of Phillips fethers,
And from her fyry sparklynges,
For burnynge of his wynges;
And from the smokes sowre
Of Proserpinas bowre;
And from the dennes darke,
Wher Cerberus doth barke,
Whom Theseus dyd afraye,
Whom Hercules dyd outraye,
As famous poetes say;
From that hell-hounde,
That lyeth in cheynes bounde,
With gastly hedes thre,
To Jupyter pray we
That Phyllyp preserved may be!
Amen, say ye with me!

Do mi nus,
Helpe nowe, swete Jesus!
Levavi oculos meos in montes:
Wolde God I had Zenophontes,
Or Socrates the wyse

To shew me their devyse,
Moderatly to take
This sorrow that I make
For Phylyp Sparowes sake!
So fervently I shake,
I fele my body quake;
So urgently I am brought
Into carefull thought.
Like Andromach, Hectors wyfe,
Was wery of her lyfe,
Whan she had lost her joye,
Noble Hector of Troye;
In lyke maner also
Encreaseth my dedly wo,
For my sparowe is go.

It was so prety a fole,
It wold syt on a stole,
And lerned after my scole
For to kepe his cut,
With, "Phyllyp, kepe your cut!"

It had a velvet cap,
And wold syt upon my lap,
And seke after small wormes,
And somtyme white bred crommes;
And many tymes and ofte
Betwene my brestes softe
It wolde lye and rest;
It was propre and prest.

Somtyme he wolde gaspe
Whan he sawe a waspe;
A fly or a gnat,
He wolde flye at that;
And prytely he wold pant
Whan he saw an ant;
Lord, how he wolde pry
After the butterfly!
Lorde, how he wolde hop
After the gressop!
And whan I sayd, "Phyp! Phyp!"
Than he wold lepe and skyp,
And take me by the lyp.
Alas, it wyll me slo,
That Phillyp is gone me fro!

John Skelton

The Bowge of Courte

In Autumpne whan the sonne in vyrgyne
By radyante hete enryped hath our corne
Whan luna full of mutabylyte
As Emperes the dyademe hath worne
Of our pole artyke smylynge halfe in scorne
At our foly and our vnstedfastnesse
The tyme whan Mars to werre hym dyd dres

I callynge to mynde the great auctoryte
Of poetes olde whyche full craftely
Under as couerte termes as coude be
Can touche a troughte and cloke it subtylly
Wyth fresshe vtteraunce full sentencyously
Dyuerse in style some spared not vyce to wrythe
Some of moralyte nobly dyde endyte

Wherby I rede theyr renome and theyr fame
Maye neuer dye bute euermore endure
I was sore moued to a force the same
But Ignoraunce full soone dyde me dyscure
And shewed that in this arte I was not sure
For to Illumyne she sayde I was to dulle
Auysynge me my penne awaye to pulle

And not to wrythe/ for he so wyll atteyne
Excedynge ferther than his connynge is
His hede maye be harde but feble is his brayne
Yet haue I knowen suche er this
But of reproche surely he maye not mys
That clymmeth hyer than he may fotynge haue
What and he slyde downe who shall hym saue

Thus vp & down my mynde was drawen & cast
That I ne wyste what to do was beste
Soo sore enwered that I was at the laste
Enforsed to slepe and for to take some reste
And to lye downe as soone as I me dreste
At harwyche porte slumbrynge as I laye
In myne hostes house called powers keye

Me thoughte I sawe a shyppe goodly of sayle
Come saylynge forth into that hauen brood
Her takelynge ryche and of hye apparayle
She kyste an anker and there she laye at rode
Marchauntes her borded to see what she had lode
Therein they founde Royall marchaundyse
Fraghted with plesure of what ye coude deuyse

But than I thoughte I wolde not dwell behynde
Amonge all other I put myselfe in prece
Than there coude I none aquentaunce fynde
There was moche noyse anone one cryed cese

Sharpely commaundynge eche man holde hys pece
Maysters he sayde the shyp that ye here see
The bowge of courte it hyghte for certeynte

The awnner therof is lady of estate
Whoos name to tell is dame saunce pere
Her marchaundyse is ryche and fortunate
But who wyll haue it muste paye therfore dere
This Royall chaffre that is shypped here
Is called fauore to stonde in her good grace
Than sholde ye see there pressynge in a pace

Of one and other that wolde this lady see
Whiche sat behynde a traues of sylke fyne
Of golde of tessew the fynest that myghte be
In a trone whiche fer clerer dyde shyne
Than Phebus in his spere celestyne
Whoos beaute honoure goodly porte
I haue to lytyll connynge to reporte

But of eche thynge there as I toke hede
Amonge all other was wrytten in her trone
In golde letters this worde whiche I dyde rede
Garder le fortune que est mauelz et bone
And as I stode redynge this verse myselfe allone
Her chyef gentylwoman daunger by her name
Gaue me a taunte and sayde I was to blame

To be so perte to prese so proudly vppe
She sayde she trowed that I had eten sause
She asked yf euer I dranke of saucys cuppe
And I than softly answered to that clause
That so to saye. I had gyuen her no cause
Than asked she me Syr so god the spede
What is thy name and I sayde it was drede

What mouyd the quod she hydder to come
Forsoth quod I to bye some of youre ware
And with that worde on me she gaue a glome
With browes bente and gan on me to stare
Full daynnously and fro me she dyde fare
Leuynge me stondynge as a mased man
To whome there came another gentylwoman

Desyre her name was and so she me tolde
Sayenge to me broder be of good chere
Abasshe you not but hardely be bolde
Auaunce yourselfe to aproche and come nere
What though our chaffer be neuer so dere
Yet I auyse you to speke for ony drede
Who spareth to speke in fayth he spareth to spede

Maystres quod I. I haue none aquentaunce
That wyll for me be medyatoure and mene
And this another I haue but smale substaunce
Pece quod Desyre ye speke not worth a bene
Yf ye haue not in fayth I wyll you lene
A precyous Iewell no rycher in this londe
Bone auenture haue here now in your honde

Shyfte now therwith let see as ye can
In bowge of courte cheuysaunce to make
For I dare saye that there nys erthly man
But an he can bone auenture take
There can no fauour nor frendshyp hym forsake
Bone auenture may brynge you in suche case
That ye shall stonde in fauoure and in grace

But of one thynge I werne you er I goo
She that styreth the shyp make her your frende
Maystres quod I. I praye you tell me why soo
And how I maye that waye & meanes fynde
Forsothe quod she howeuer blowe the wynde
Fortune gydeth and ruleth all oure shyppe
Whome she hateth shall ouer the seeboorde skyp

Whome she loueth of all plesyre is ryche
Whyles she laugheth and hath luste for to playe
Whome she hateth she casteth in the dyche
For whan she frouneth she thynketh to make a fray
She cheryssheth him and hym she casseth a waye
Alas quod I how myghte I haue her sure
In fayth quod she by bone auenture

Thus in a rowe of martchauntes a grete route
Suwed to fortune that she wold be theyre frynde
They thronge in fast and flocked her aboute
And I with them prayed her to haue in mynde
She promysed to vs all she wolde be kynde
Of bowge of court she asketh what we wold haue
And we asked fauoure/ and fauour she vs gaue

Thus endeth the prologue. And begynneth the bowge of Courte breuely compyled.

Drede

The sayle is vp fortune ruleth our helme
We wante no wynde to passe now ouerall
Fauoure we haue toughther than ony elme
That wyll abyde and neuer frome vs fall
But vnder hony oftetyme lyeth bytter gall
For as methoughte in our shyppe I dyde see
Full subtyll persones in nombre foure and thre

The fyrste was Fauell full of flatery
Wyth fables false that well coude fayne a tale
The seconde was Suspecte whiche that dayly
Mysdempte eche man with face deedly & pale
And Haruy hafter that well coude picke a male
With other foure of theyr affynyte
Dysdayne. Ryotte. Dyssymuler. Subtylte.

Fortune theyr frende with whome oft she dyde daunce
They coude not faile thei thought they were so sure
And oftentymes I wolde myselfe auaunce
With them to make solace and pleasure
But my dysporte they coude not well endure
They sayde they hated for to dele with Drede
Than Fauell gan wyth fayre speche me to fede

Fauell.

Noothynge erthely that I wonder so sore
As of your connynge that is so excellent
Deynte to haue with vs suche one in store
So vertuously that hath his dayes spente
Fortune to you gyftes of grace hath lente
Loo what it is a man to haue connynge
All erthly tresoure it is surmountynge

Ye be an apte man as ony can be founde
To dwell with vs & serue my ladyes grace
Ye be to her yea worth a thousande pounde
I herde her speke of you within shorte space
Whan there were dyuerse that sore dyde you manace
And though I say it I was myselfe your frende
For here be dyuerse to you that be vnkynde

But this one thynge ye maye be sure of me
For by that lorde that bought dere all mankynde
I can not flater I muste be playne to the
And ye nede ought man shewe to me your mynde
For ye haue me whome faythfull ye shall fynde
Whyles I haue ought by god thou shalt not lacke
And yf nede be a bolde worde I dare cracke

Nay naye be sure whyles I am on your syde
Ye maye not fall truste me ye maye not fayle
Ye stonde in fauoure and fortune is your gyde
And as she wyll so shall our grete shyppe sayle
Thyse lewde cokwattes shall neuermore preuayle
Ageynste you hardely therfore be not afrayde
Farewell tyll soone but no worde that I sayde

Drede.

Than thanked I hym for his grete gentylnes
But as methoughte he ware on hym a cloke
That lyned was with doubtfull doublenes
Methoughte of wordes that he had full a poke
His stomak stuffed oftetymes dyde reboke
Suspycyon methoughte mette hym at a brayde
And I drewe nere to herke what they two sayde

In fayth quod suspecte) spake drede no worde of me
Why what than wylte thou lete men to speke
He sayth he can not well accorde with the
Twyst quod suspecte) goo playe hym I ne reke
By cryste quod fauell drede is soleyne freke
What lete vs holde him vp man for a whyle
Ye soo quod suspecte) he maye vs bothe begyle

And whan he came walkynge soberly
Wyth whom/ and /ha/ and with a croked loke
Methoughte his hede was full of gelousy
His eyen rollynge his hondes faste they quoke
And to me warde the strayte waye he toke
God spede broder to me quod he than
And thus to talke with me he began

Suspycyon

Ye remembre the gentylman ryghte nowe
That commaunde with you methought a praty space
Beware of him for I make god auowe
He wyll begyle you and speke fayre to your face
Ye neuer dwelte in suche another place
For here is none that dare well other truste
But I wolde telle you a thynge and I durste

Spake he a fayth no worde to you of me
I wote and he dyde ye wolde me telle
I haue a fauoure to you wherof it be
That I muste shewe you moche of my counselle
But I wonder what the deuyll of helle
He sayde of me whan he with you dyde talke
By myne auyse vse not with him to walke

The soueraynst thynge that ony man maye haue
Is lytyll to saye/ and moche to here and see
For but I trusted you so god me saue
I wolde noothynge so playne be
To you oonly methynke I durste shryue me
For now am I plenarely dysposed
To shewe you thynges that may not be disclosed

Drede

Than I assured hym my fydelyte
His counseyle secrete neuer to dyscure
Yf he coude fynde in herte to truste me
Els I prayed hym with all my besy cure
To kepe it hymselfe for than he myghte be sure
That noo man erthly coude hym bewreye
Whyles of his mynde it were lockte with the keye

By god quod he this and thus it is
And of his mynde he shewed me all and some
Farewell quod he we wyll talke more of this
Soo he departed there he wolde be come
I dare not speke I promysed to be dome
But as I stode musynge in my mynde
Haruy hafter came lepynge lyghte as lynde

Upon his breste he bare a versyngeboxe
His throte was clere and lustely coude fayne
Methoughte his gowne was all furred wyth foxe
And euer he sange/ sythe I am nothynge playne
To kepe him frome pykynge it was a grete payne
He gased on me with his gotyshe berde
Whan I loked on hym my purse was half aferde

Heruy hafter.

Syr god you saue why loke ye so sadde
What thynge is that I maye do for you
A wonder thynge that ye waxe not madde
For and I studye sholde as ye doo nowe
My wytte wolde waste I make god auowe
Tell me your mynde methynke ye make a verse
I coude it skan and ye wolde it reherse

But to the poynte shortely to procede
Where hathe your dwellynge ben er ye cam here
For as I trowe I haue sene you indede
Er this whan that ye made me Royall chere
Holde vp the helme loke vp & lete god stere
I wolde be mery what wynde that euer blowe
Heue & how rombelow row the bote norman rowe

Prynces of youghte can ye synge by rote
Or shall I sayle wyth you a felashyp assaye
For on the booke I can not synge a note
Wolde to god it wolde please you some daye
A baladeboke before me for to laye
And lerne me to synge Re my fa sol
And whan I fayle bobbe me on the noll

Loo what is to you a pleasure grete

To haue that connynge & wayes that ye haue
By goddis soule I wonder how ye gete
Soo greate pleasyre or who to you it gaue
Syr pardone me I am an homely knaue
To be with you thus perte and thus bolde
But ye be welcome to our housholde

And I dare saye there is no man hereInne
But wolde be glad of your company
I wyste neuer man that so soone coude wynne
The fauoure that ye haue with my lady
I praye to god that it maye neuer dy
It is your fortune for to haue that grace
As I be saued it is a wonder case

For as for me I serued here many a daye
And yet vnneth I can haue my lyuynge
But I requyre you no worde that I saye
For and I knowe ony erthly thynge
That is agayne you ye shall haue wetynge
And ye be welcome syr so god me saue
I hope hereafter a frende of you to haue

Drede.

Wyth that as he departed soo fro me
Anone ther mette with him as methoughte
A man/ but wonderly besene was he
He loked hawte he sette eche man at noughte
His gawdy garment with scornnys was all wrought
With Indygnacyon lyned was his hode
He frowned as he wolde swere by cockes blode

He bote the lyppe he loked passynge coye
His face was belymmed as byes had him stounge
It was no tyme with him to Iape nor toye
Enuye hathe wasted hys lyuer and his lounge
Hatred by the herte so had hym wrounge
That he loked pale as asshes to my syghte
Dysdayne I wene this comerous carkes hyghte

To heruy hafter than he spake of me
And I drewe nere to harke what they two sayde
Now quod Dysdayne as I shall saued be
I haue grete scorne & am ryghte euyll apayed
Than quod Heruy why arte thou so dysmayde
By cryste quod he for it is shame to saye
To see Iohan dawes that came but yesterdaye

How he is now taken in conceyte
This doctour dawcocke Drede I wene he hyghte
By goddis bones but yf we haue som sleyte

It is lyke he wyll stonde in our lyghte
By god quod Heruy & it so happen myghte
Lete vs therfore shortely at a worde
Fynde some mene to caste him ouer the borde

By him that me boughte than quod Dysdayne
I wonder sore he is in such conceyte
Turde quod Hafter I wyll the nothynge layne
There muste for hym be layde some prety beyte
We tweyne I trowe be not withoute dysceyte
Fyrste pycke a quarell & fall oute with hym then
And soo outface hym with a carde of ten

Forthwith he made on me a prowde assawte
With scornfull loke meuyd all in moode
He wente aboute to take me in a fawte
He frounde he stared he stampped where he stoode
I loked on hym I wende he had be woode
He set the arme proudly vnder the syde
And in this wyse he gan with me to chyde

Disdayne.

Remembrest thou what thou sayd yesternyght
Wylt thou abyde by the wordes agayne
By god I haue of the now grete dyspyte
I shall the angre ones in euery vayne
It is greate scorne to see suche an hayne
As thou arte one that cam but yesterdaye
With vs olde seruauntes such maysters to playe

I tell the I am of countenaunce
What weneste I were. I trowe thou knowe not me
By goddis woundes but for dysplesaunce
Of my querell soone wolde I venged be
But no force I shall ones mete with the
Come whan it wyll oppose the I shall
Whatsomeuer auenture therof fall

Trowest thou dreuyll I saye thou gawdy knaue
That I haue deynte to see the cherysshed thus
By goddis syde my sworde thy berde shall shaue
Well ones thou shalte be chermed I wus
Naye strawe for tales thou shalte not rule vs
We be thy betters and so thou shalte vs take
Or we shall the oute of thy clothes shake

Drede.

Wyth that came Ryotte russhynge all atones
A rusty gallande to ragged and to rente
And on the borde he whyrled a payre of bones

Quater treye dews he clatered as he wente
Nowe haue at all by saynte Thomas of kente
And euer he threwe & kyst I wote nere what
His here was growen thoroweoute his hat

Thenne I behelde how he dysgysed was
His hede was heuy for watchynge ouernyghte
His eyen blereed his face shone lyke a glas
His gowne so shorte that it ne couer myghte
His rumpe he wente so all for somer lyghte
His hose was garded wyth a lyste of grene
Yet at the knee they were broken I wene

His cote was checked with patches rede & blewe
Of kyrkeby kendall was his shorte demye
And ay he sange in fayth decon thou crewe
His elbowe bare he ware his gere so nye
His nose a droppynge his lyppes were full drye
And by his syde his whynarde & his pouche
The deuyll myghte daunce therin for ony crowche

Counter he coude (O lux) vpon a potte
An eestrychefedder of a capons tayle
He set vp fresshely vpon his hat a lofte
What reuellroute quod he and gan to rayle
How ofte he hadde hit Ienet on the tayle
Of felyce fetewse and lytell prety cate
How ofte he knocked at her klyckedgate

What sholde I tell more of his rebaudrye
I was ashamed so to here hym prate
He had no pleasure but in harlotrye
Ay quod he in the deuylles date
What arte thou I sawe the nowe but late
Forsothe quod I in this courte I dwell nowe
Welcome quod Ryote I make god auowe

Ryote.

And syr in fayth why comste not vs amonge
To make the mery as other felowes done
Thou muste swere and stare man aldaye longe
And wake all nyghte and slepe tyll it be none
Thou mayste not studye or muse on the mone
This worlde is nothynge but ete drynke & slepe
And thus with vs good company to kepe

Plucke vp thyne herte vpon a mery pyne
And lete us laugh a placke or tweyne at nale
What the deuyll man myrthe was neuer one
What loo man see here of dyce a bale
A brydelyngecaste for that is in thy male

Now haue at all that lyeth vpon the burde
Fye on this dyce they be not worth a turde

Haue at the hasarde or at the dosen browne
Or els I pas a peny to a pounde
Now wolde to god thou wolde leye money downe
Lorde how that I wolde caste it full rounde
Ay in my pouche a buckell I haue founde
The armes of calyce I haue no coyne nor crosse
I am not happy I renne ay on the losse

Now renne muste I to the stewys syde
To wete yf malkyn my lemman haue gete oughte
I lete her to hyre that men maye on her ryde
Her harnes easy ferre and nere is soughte
By goddis sydes syns I her thyder broughte
She hath gote me more money with her tayle
Than hath some shyppe that into bordews sayle

Had I as good an hors as she is a mare
I durste auenture to Iourney thorugh Fraunce
Who rydeth on her he nedeth not to care
For she is trussed for to breke a launce
It is a curtel that well can wynche & praunce
To her wyll I nowe all my pouerte lege
And tyll I come haue here is myne hat to plege

Drede

Gone is this knaue this rybaude foule & leude
He ran as fast as euer that he myghte
Unthryftynes in hym may well be shewed
For whome tyborne groneth both daye and nyghte
And as I stode and kyste asyde my syghte
Dysdayne I sawe with Dyssymulacyon
Standynge in sadde communicacion

But there was poyntynge & noddynge with his hede
And many wordes sayde in secrete wyse
They wandred ay and stode styll in no stede
Methoughte alwaye Dyscymular dyde deuyse
Me passynge sore myne herte than gan aryse
I dempte & drede theyr talkynge was not good
Anone dyscymular came where I stode

Than in his hode I sawe there faces tweyne
That one was lene & lyke a pyned goost
That other loked as he wolde me haue slayne
And to mewarde as he gan for to coost
Whan that he was euen at me almoost
I sawe a knyfe hyd in his one sleue
Wheron was wryten this worde myscheue

And in his other sleue methought I sawe
A spone of golde full of hony swete
To fede a fole and for to preye a dawe
And on that sleue these wordes were wrete
A false abstracte cometh from a fals concrete
His hode was syde his cope was roset graye
Thyse were the wordes he to me dyde saye

Dyssymulation

How do ye mayster ye loke so soberly
As I be saued at the dredefull daye
It is a perylous vyce this enuy
Alas a connynge man ne dwelle maye
In no place well but foles with hym fraye
But as for that connynge hath no foo
Saue hym that nought can/ scrypture sayth soo.

I knowe your vertu and your lytterkture
By that lytel connynge that I haue
Ye be malygned sore I you ensure
But ye haue crafte yourselfe alwaye to saue
It is grete scorne to se a mysproude knaue
With a clerke that connynge is to prate
Lete theym go lowse theym in the deuylles date

For allbeit that this longe not to me
Yet on my backe I bere suche lewde delynge
Ryghte now I spake with one I trowe I see
But what a strawe I maye not tell allthynge
By god I saye there is a grete hertebrennynge
Betwene the persone ye wote of you
Alas I coude not dele so with a Iew

I wolde eche man were as playne as I
It is a worlde I saye to here of some
I hate this faynynge fye vpon it fye
A man can not wote where to become
I wys I coude tell but humlery home
I dare not speke we be so layde awayte
For all our courte is full of dysceyte

Now by saynte fraunceys that holy man & frere
I hate this wayes agayne you that they take
Were I as you I wolde ryde them full nere
And by my trouthe but yf an ende they make
Yet wyll I saye some wordes for your sake
That shall them angre I holde thereon a grote
For some shall wene be hanged by the throte

I haue a stoppyngeoyster in my poke

Truste me and yf it come to a nede
But I am lothe for to reyse a smoke
Yf ye coude be otherwyse agrede
And so I wolde it were so god me spede
For this maye brede to a confusyon
Withoute god make a good conclusyon

Naye see where yonder stondeth the teder man
A flaterynge knaue & false he is god wote
The dreuyll stondeth to herken and he can
It were more thryft he boughte him a newe cote
It wyll not be/ his purse is not on flote
All that he wereth it is borowed ware
His wytte is thynne his hode is thredebare

More coude I saye but what this is ynowe
Adewe tyll soone we shall speke more of this
Ye muste be ruled as I shall tell you howe
Amendis maye be of that is now a mys
And I am your syr so haue I blys
In euery poynte that I can do or saye
Gyue me your honde farewell & haue good daye

Drede

Sodaynly as he departed me fro
Came pressynge in one in a wonder araye
Er I was ware behynde me he sayde bo
Thenne I astonyed of that sodeyne fraye
Sterte all at ones I lyked nothynge his playe
For yf I had not quyckely fledde the touche
He had plucte oute the nobles of my pouche

He was trussed in a garmente strayte
I haue not sene suche anothers page
For he coude well vpon a casket wayte
His hode all pounsed and garded lyke a cage
Lyghte lymefynger he toke none other wage
Harken quod he loo here myne honde in thyne
To vs welcome thou arte by saynte Quyntyne

Disceyte.

But by that lorde that is one two and thre
I haue an errande to rounde in your ere
He tolde me so by god ye maye truste me
Parde remembre whan ye were there
There I wynked on you/ wote ye not where
In (A) loco I mene iuxta (B)
Woo is hym that is blynde and maye not see

But to here the subtylte and the crafte

As I shall tell you yf ye wyll harke agayne
And whan I sawe the horsons wolde you hafte
To holde myne honde by god I had grete payne
For forthwyth there I had him slayne
But that I drede mordre wolde come oute
Who deleth with shrewes hath nede to loke aboute

Drede.

And as he rounded thus in myne ere
Of false collusyon confetryd by assente
Methoughte I see lewde felawes here and there
Came for to slee me of mortall entente
And as they came the shypborde faste I hente
And thoughte to lepe/ and euen with that woke
Caughte penne and ynke & wroth this lytyll boke

I wolde therwith no man were myscontente
Besechynge you that shall it see or rede
In euery poynte to be indyfferente
Syth all in substaunce of slumbrynge doth procede
I wyll not saye it is mater indede
But yet oftyme suche dremes be founde trewe
Now constrewe ye what is the resydewe

John Skelton

The Bowge of Courte

In Autumpne, whan the sonne in vyrgyne
By radyante hete enryped hath our corne,
Whan Luna, full of mutabylyte,
As Emperes the dyademe hath worne
Of our pole artyke, smylynge halfe in scorne
At our foly and our unstedfastnesse,
The tyme whan Mars to werre hym dyde dres,

pole artyke: Arcturus of the Corona Borealis
I, callynge to mynde the great auctoryte
Of poetes olde, whyche full craftely
Under as coverte termes as coude be,
Can touche a troughte and cloke it subtylly
Wyth fresshe utteraunce full sentencyonsly,
Dyverse in style, some spared not vyce to wrythe,
Some of moralyte nobly dyde endyte,

Wherby I rede theyr renome and theyr fame
Maye never dye bute evermore endure.
I was sore moved to a force the same,
But Ignoraunce full soone dyde me dyscure
And shewed that in this arte I was not sure,
For to illumyne she sayde I was to dulle,
Avysynge me my penne awaye to pulle

And not to wrythe, for he so wyll atteyne,
Excedynge ferther than his connynge is,
His hede maye be harde, but feble is his brayne!
Yet have I knowen suche er this;
But of reproche surely he maye not mys
That clymmeth hyer than he may fotynge have;
What and he slyde downe, who shall hym save?

Thus up and down my mynde was drawen and cast
That I ne wyste what to do was beste;
Soo sore enwered that I was, at the laste,
Enforsed to slepe and for to take some reste,
And to lye downe as soone as I me dreste.
At Harwyche Porte, slumbrynge as I laye
In myne hostes house, called Powers Keye,

Me thoughte I sawe a shyppe, goodly of sayle,
Come saylyng forth into that haven brood,
Her takelynge ryche and of hye apparayle;
She kyste an anker and there she laye at rode.
Marchauntes her borded to see what she had lode.
Therein they founde Royall marchaundyse,
Fraghted with plesure of what ye coude devyse.

But than I thoughte I wolde not dwell behynde,
Amonge all other I put myselfe in prece.

Than there coude I none aquentaunce fynde;
There was moche noyse, anone one cryed, cese!
Sharpely commaundynge eche man holde hys pece.
Maysters, he sayde, the shyp that ye here see,
The Bowge of Courte it hyghte for certeynte;

The awnner thereof is lady of estate,
Whoos name to tell is Dame Saunce Pere.
Her marchaundyse is ryche and fortunate,
But who wyll have it muste paye therfore dere;
This royall chaffre that is shypped here
Is called favore-to-stonde-in-her-good-grace.
Than sholde ye see there pressynge in a pace

Of one and other that wolde this lady see,
Whiche sat behynde a traves of sylke fyne,
Of golde of tessew the fynest that myghte be,
In a trone whiche fer clerer dyde shyne
Than Phebus in his spere celestyne,
Whoos beaute, honoure, goodly porte,
I have to lytyll connynge to reporte.

But of eche thynge there as I take hede,
Among all other was wrytten in her trone
In golde letters, this worde, whiche I dyde rede:
Garder le fortune que est mauelz et bone.
And as I stode redynge this verse myselfe allone,
Her chyef gentylwoman, daunger by her name,
Gave me a taunte, and sayde I was to blame

To he so perte to prese so proudly uppe.
She sayde she trowed that I had eten sause;
She asked yf ever I dranke of saucys cuppe.
And I than softly answered to that clause,
That, so to saye, I had gyven her no cause.
Than asked she me, Syr, so God the spede,
What is thy name? and I sayde it was Drede.

What movyd the, quod she, hydder to come?
Forsoth, quod I, to bye some of youre ware.
And with that worde on me she gave a glome
With browes bente and gan on me to stare
Full daynnously, and fro me she dyde fare,
Levynge me stondynge as a mased man,
To whome there came another gentylwoman.

Desyre her name was, and so she me tolde,
Sayenge to me, Broder, be of good chere,
Abasshe you not, but hardely be bolde,
Avaunce your selfe to aproche and come nere.
What though our chaffer he never so dere,
Yet I avyse you to speke for ony drede;

Who spareth to speke, in fayth, he spareth to spede.

Maystres, quod I, I have none aquentaunce
That wyll for me be medyatoure and mene;
And this an other, I have but smale substaunce.
Pece, quod Desyre, ye speke not worth a bene!
Yf ye have not, in fayth, I wyll you lene
A precyous jewell, no rycher in this londe:
Bone aventure have here now in your honde.

Shyfte now therwith, let see, as ye can,
In Bowge of Courte chevysaunce to make;
For I dare saye that there nys erthly man
But, and he can Bone aventure take,
There can no favour nor frendshyp hym forsake.
Bone aventure may brynge you in suche case
That ye shall stonde in favoure and in grace.

But of one thynge I werne you er I goo:
She that styreth the shyp, make her your frende.
Maystres, quod I, I praye you tell me why soo,
And how I maye that waye and meanes fynde.
Forsothe, quod she, how ever blowe the wynde,
Fortune gydeth and ruleth all oure shyppe.
Whome she hateth shall over the see boorde skyp.

Whome she loveth, of all plesyre is ryche
Whyles she laugheth and hath luste for to playe,
Whome she hateth she casteth in the dyche,
For whan she fronneth, she thynketh to make a fray;
She cheryssheth him, and hym she casseth awaye.
Alas, quod I, how myghte I have her sure?
In fayth, quod she, by bone aventure.

Thus in a rowe of martchauntes a grete route
Suwed to Fortune that she would be theyre frynde.
They thronge in fast and flocked her aboute,
And I with them prayed her to have in mynde.
She promysed to us all she wolde be kynde;
Of Bowge of Court she asketh what we wold have,
And we asked favoure, and favour she us gave. 120

Thus endeth the prologue; and begynneth
the Bowge of Courte brevely compyled.

DREDE

THE sayle is up, Fortune ruleth our helme,
We wante no wynde to passe now over all;
Favoure we have toughther than ony elme,

That wyll abyde and never frome us fall.
But under hony ofte tyme lyeth bytter gall,
For as me thoughte in our shyppe I dyde see
Full subtyll persones in nombre foure and thre.

The fyrste was Favell, full of flatery,
Wyth fables false, that well coude fayne a tale;
The seconde was Suspecte whiche that dayly
Mysdempte eche man, with face deedly and pale;
And Harvy Hafter, that well coude picke a male;
With other foure of theyr affynyte:
Dysdayne, Ryotte, Dyssymuler, Subtylte.

Fortune theyr frende with whome oft she dyde daunce:
They coude not faile, thei thought, they were so sure.
And oftentymes I wolde myselfe avaunce
With them to make solace and pleasure;
But my dysporte they coude not well endure;
They sayde they hated for to dele with Drede.
Than Favell gan wyth fayre speche me to fede.

FAVELL

Noo thynge erthely that I wonder so sore
As of your connynge that is so excellent;
Deynte to have with us suche one in store,
So vertuously that hath his dayes spente.
Fortune to you gyftes of grace hath lente:
Loo, what it is a man to have connynge!
All erthly tresoure it is surmountynge.

Ye be an apte man, as ony can be founde,
To dwell with us and serve my ladyes grace.
Ye be to her, yea, worth a thousande pounde;
I herde her speke of you within shorte space,
Whan there were dyverse that sore dyde you manace.
And though I say it I was myselfe your frende,
For here be dyverse to you that be unkynde.
But this one thynge ye maye be sure of me,
For by that lorde that bought dere all mankynde,
I can not flater, I muste be playne to the.
And ye nede ought, man, shewe to me your mynde,
For ye have me whome faythfull ye shall fynde;
Whyles I have ought, by God, thou shalt not lacke,
And yf nede be, a bolde worde I dare cracke.

Nay, naye, be sure, whyles I am on your syde
Ye maye not fall, truste me, ye maye not fayle.
Ye stonde in favoure and Fortune is your gyde,
And as she wyll so shall our grete shyppe sayle.
Thyse lewde cok wattes shall nevermore prevayle
Ageynste you hardely; therefore be not afrayde,

Farewell tyll soone, but no worde that I sayde.

DREDE

Than thanked I hym for his grete gentylnes,
But as me thoughte he ware on hym a cloke
That lyned was with doubtfuIl doublenes.
Me thoughte of wordes that he had full a poke,
His stomak stuffed ofte tymes dyde reboke.
Suspycyon, me thoughte, mette hym at a brayde,
And I drewe nere to herke what they two sayde.

In fayth, quod Suspecte, spake Drede no worde of me?
Why, what than? wylte thou lete men to speke?
He sayth he can not well accorde with the.
Twyst, quod Suspecte, goo playe, hym I ne reke!
By Cryste, quod Favell, Drede is soleyne freke.
What, lete us holde him up, man, for a whyle.
Ye, soo, quod Suspecte, he maye us bothe begyle.

And whan he came walkynge soberly,
Wyth 'Whom' and 'Ha' and with a croked loke,
Me thoughte his hede was full of gelousy,
His eyen rollynge, his hondes faste they quoke;
And to mewarde the strayte waye he toke.
God spede, broder, to me quod he than,
And thus to talke with me he began:

Ye remembre the gentylman ryghte nowe
That commaunde with you, me thought, a praty space?
Beware of him, for I make God avowe,
He wyll begyle you and speke fayre to your face.
Ye never dwelte in suche an other place,
For here is none that dare well other truste;
But I wolde telle you a thynge, and I durste.

Spake he, a fayth, no worde to you of me?
I wote and he dyde ye wolde me telle.
I have a favoure to you, wherof it be
That I muste shewe you moche of my counselle;
But I wonder what the devyll of helle
He sayde of me, whan he with you dyde talke;
By myne avyse use not with him to walke.

The soveraynst thynge that ony man maye have
Is lytyll to saye and moche to here and see;
For but I trusted you so God me save,
I wolde noo thynge so playne be.
To you oonly, me thynke, I durste shryve me,
For now am I plenarely dysposed
To shewe you thynges that may not be disclosed.

DREDE

Than I assured hym my fydelyte,
His counseyle secrete never to dyscure,
Yf he coude fynde in herte to truste me.
Els I prayed hym with all my besy cure
To kepe it hymselfe, for than he myghte be sure
That noo man erthly coude hym bewreye.
Whyles of his mynde it were lockte with the keye.

By God, quod he, this and thus it is,
And of his mynde he shewed me all and some.
Fare well, quod he, we wyll talke more of this.
Soo he departed there he wolde be come.
I dare not speke, I promysed to be dome.
But as I stode musynge in my mynde,
Harvy Hafter came lepynge, lyghte as lynde.

Upon his breste he bare a versynge boxe;
His throte was clere and lustely coude fayne;
Me thoughte his gowne was all furred wyth foxe;
And ever he sange, Sythe I am no thynge playne.
To kepe him frome pykynge, it was a grete payne;
He gased on me with his gotyshe berde;
Whan I loked on hym, my purse was half aferde.

HERVY HAFTER

Syr, God you save, why loke you so sadde?
VVhat thynge is that I maye do for you?
A wonder thynge that ye waxe not madde.
For and I studye sholde as ye doo nowe,
My wytte wolde waste, I make God avowe.
Tell me your mynde, me thynke ye make a verse,
I coude it skan and ye wolde it reherse.

But to the poynte shortely to procede,
Where hathe your dwellynge ben, er ye cam here?
For as I trowe, I have sene you in dede
Er this, whan that ye made me royall chere.
Holde up the helme, loke up and lete God stere:
I wolde be mery that wynde that ever blowe,
Heve and how, rombelow, Row the bote, Norman, rowe!

Prynces of youghte can ye synge by rote?
Or Shall I sayle wyth you a felashyp assaye?
For on the booke I can not synge a note,
Wolde to God it wolde please you some daye
A balade boke before me for to laye,
And leme me to synge Re my fa sol!
And whan I fayle bobbe me on the noll.

Loo, what is to you a pleasure grete
To have that connynge and wayes that ye have;
By Goddis soule, I wonder how ye gete
Soo greate pleasyre or who to you it gave.
Syr, pardone me, I am an homely knave
To be with you thus perte and thus bolde;
But ye be welcome to our housholde.

And I dare saye there is no man hereinne
But wolde be glad of your company:
I wyste never man that so soone coude wynne
The favoure that ye have with my lady.
I praye to God that it maye never dy;
It is your fortune for to have that grace,
As I be saved, it is a wonder case.

For as for me, I served here many a daye,
And yet unneth I can have my lyvynge—
But I requyre you no worde that I saye.
For, and I knowe ony erthly thynge
That is agayne you, ye shall have wetynge;
And ye be welcome, syr, so God me save,
I hope here after a frende of you to have.

DREDE

Wyth that, as he departed soo fro me,
Anone ther mette with him, as me thoughte,
A man, but wonderly besene was he:
He loked hawte, he sette eche man at noughte,
His gawdy garment with scornnys was all wrought;
With Indygnacyon lyned was his hode;
He frowned as he wolde swere by Cockes blode.

He bote the lyppe, he loked passynge coye,
His face was belymmed as byes had him stounge;
It was no tyme with him to jape nor toye.
Envye hathe wasted his lyver and his lounge,
Hatred by the herte so had hym wrounge
That he loked pale as asshes to my syghte;
Dysdayne, I wene, this comerous carkes hyghte.

To Hervy Hafter than he spake of me,
And I drewe nere to harke what they two sayde.
Now, quod Dysdayne, as I shall saved be,
I have grete scorne and am ryghte evyll apayed.
Than, quod Hervy, why arte thou so dysmayde?
By Cryste, quod he, for it is shame to saye,
To see Johan Dawes that came but yesterdaye

How he is now taken in conceyte,

This Doctour Dawcocke, Drede, I wene he hyghte.
By Goddis bones, but yf we have som sleyte,
It is lyke he wyll stonde in our lyghte.
By God, quod Hervy, and it so happen myghte.
Lete us therfore shortely at a worde
Fynde some mene to caste him over the borde.

By him that me boughte, than quod Dysdayne,
I wonder sore he is in suche cenceyte.
Turde, quod Hafter, I wyll the nothynge fayne,
There muste for hym be layde some prety beyte.
We tweyne, I trowe, be not withoute dysceyte:
Fyrste pycke a quarell and fall oute with hym then,
And soo outface hym with a carde of ten.

Forthwith he made on me a prowde assawte,
With scornfull loke meuyd all in moode.
He wente aboute to take me in a fawte;
He frounde, he stared, he stampped where he stoode.
I loked on hym, I wende he had be woode.
He set the arme proudly under the syde,
And in this wyse he gan with me to chyde.

DISDAYNE

Remembrest thou what thou sayd yesternyght?
Wylt thou abyde by the wordes agayne?
By God, I have of the now grete dyspyte;
I shall the angre ones in every vayne.
It is greate scorne to see suche an hayne
As thou arte, one that cam but yesterdaye,
With us olde servauntes such maysters to playe.

I tell the I am of countenaunce;
What weneste I were? I trowe thou knowe not me.
By Goddis woundes but for dysplesaunce
Of my querell soone wolde I venged be.
But, no force, I shall ones mete with the;
Come whan it wyll, oppose the I shall,
Whatsomever aventure therof fall.

Trowest thou, drevyll, I saye, thou gawdy knave,
That I have deynte to see the cherysshed thus?
By Goddis syde, my sworde thy berde shall shave!
Well, ones thou shalte be chermed, I wus.
Naye, strawe for tales, thou shalte not rule us,
We be thy betters and so thou shalte us take,
Or we shall the oute of thy clothes shake!

DREDE

Wyth that came Ryotte russhynge all at ones,
A rusty gallande, to ragged and to rente,
And on the borde he whyrled a payre of bones;
Quater treye dews, he clatered as he wente:
Now have at all, by Saynte Thomas of Kente.
And ever he threwe, and kyst I wote nere what,
His here was growen thorowe oute his hat.

cast I never knew what
Thenne I behelde how he dysgysed was,
His hede was hevy for watchynge overnyghte,
His eyen blereed, his face shone lyke a glas,
His gowne so shorte that it ne cover myghte
His rumpe, he wente so all for somer lyghte;
His hose was garded wyth a lyste of grene,
Yet at the knee they were broken, I wene.

somer lyghte: dressed for summer. lyste: strip
His cote was checked with patches rede and blewe,
Of Kyrkeby Kendall was his shorte demye;
And ay he sange, In fayth, Decon, thou crewe.
His elbowe bare, he ware his gere so nye,
His nose a.droppynge, his lyppes were full drye,
And by his syde his whynarde and his pouche,
The Devyll myghte daunce therin for ony crowche.

Counter he coude (O lux) upon a potte,
An eestryche fedder of a capons tayle
He set up fresshely upon his hat alofte;
What, revell route, quod he, and gan to rayle
How ofte he hadde hit Jenet on the tayle,
Of Felyce fetewse and lytell prety Cate,
How ofte he knocked at her klycked gate.

What sholde I tell more of his rebaudrye?
I was ashamed so to here hym prate,
He had no pleasure but in harlotrye.
Ay, quod he, in the devylles date,
What arte thou? I sawe the nowe but late.
Forsothe, quod I, in this courte I dwell nowe.
Welcome, quod Ryote, I make God avowe.

RYOTE

And, syr, in fayth, why comste not us amonge
To make the mery, as other felowes done?
Thou muste swere and stare, man, aldaye longe,
And wake all nyghte and slepe tyll it be none;
Thou mayste not studye or muse on the mone.
This worlde is nothynge but ete, drynke and slepe,

And thus with us good company to kepe.

Plucke up thyne herte upon a mery pyne,
And lete us laugh a placke or tweyne at nale;
What the devyll, man, myrthe was never one.
What, loo, man, see here of dyce a bale;
A brydelynge caste for that is in thy male!
Now have at all that lyeth upon the burde,
Fye on this dyce, they be not worth a turde!

Have at the hasarde or at the dosen browne,
Or els I pas a peny to a pounde;
Now wolde to God thou wolde leye money downe!
Lorde, how that I wolde caste it full rounde!
Ay, in my pouche a buckell I have founde,
The armes of Calyce, I have no coyne nor crosse,
I am not happy, I renne ay on the losse!

Now renne muste I to the stewys syde,
To wete yf Malkyn, my lemman, have gete oughte:
I lete her to hyre that men maye on her ryde,
Her harnes easy ferre and nere is soughte.
By Goddis sydes, syns I her thyder broughte,
She hath gote me more money with her tayle
Than hath some shyppe that into Bordews sayle.

Had I as good an hors as she is a mare,
I durste aventure to journey thorugh Fraunce;
Who rydeth on her, he nedeth not to care,
For she is trussed for to breke a launce.
It is a curtel that well can wynche and praunce;
To her wyll I nowe all my poverte lege.
And tyll I come have, here is myne hat to plege.

DREDE

Gone is this knave, this rybaude foule and leude;
He ran as fast as ever that he myghte.
Unthryftynes in hym may well be shewed,
For whome Tyborne groneth both daye and nyghte.
And as I stode and kyste asyde my syghte,
Dysdayne I sawe with Dyssymulacyon,
Standynge in sadde communicacion.

But there was poyntynge and noddynge with the hede,
And many wordes sayde in secrete wyse;
They wandred ay and stode styll in no stede.
Me thoughte, alwaye Dyscymular dyde devyse;
Me, passynge sore, myne herte than gan aryse,
I dempte and drede theyr talkynge was not good.
Anone Dyscymular came where I stode.

Than in his hode I sawe there faces tweyne,
That one was lene and lyke a pyned goost,
That other loked as he wolde me have slayne.
And to mewarde as he gan for to coost,
Whan that he was even at me almoost,
I sawe a knyfe hyd in his one sIeve,
Wheron was wryten this worde, myscheve.

And in his other sleve, me thought I sawe
A spone of golde, full of hony swete,
To fede a fole, and for to preye a dawe.
And on that sleve these wordes were wrete,
A false abstracte cometh from a fals concrete.
His hode was syde, his cope was roset graye,
Thyse were the wordes he to me dyde saye:

DYSSYMULATION

How do ye, mayster? Ye loke so soberly,
As I be saved at the dredefull daye,
It is a perylous vyce, this envy.
Alas, a connynge man ne dwelle maye
In no place well, but foles with hym fraye.
But as for that, connynge hath no foo
Save hym that nought can: scrypture sayth soo.

I knowe your vertu and your lytterkture
By that lytel connynge that I have;
Ye be malygned sore, I you ensure
But ye have crafte your selfe alwaye to save.
It is grete scorne to se a mysproude knave
With a clerke that connynge is to prate:
Lete theym go lowse theym, in the devylles date.

For allbeit that this longe not to me,
Yet on my backe I bere suche lewde delynge;
Ryghte now I spake with one, I trowe, I see—
But, what, a strawe! I maye not tell all thynge.
By God, I saye, there is grete herte brennynge
Betwene the persone ye wote of, you—
Alas, I coude not dele so with a Jew!

is not my business
I wolde eche man were as playne as I,
It is a worlde, I saye, to here of some;
I hate this faynynge, fye upon it, fye!
A man can not wote where to become;
Iwys I coude tell—but humlery, home,
I dare not speke, we be so layde awayte,
For all our courte is full of dysceyte.

Now, by Saynte Fraunceys, that holy man and frer

I hate this wayes agayne you that they take!
Were I as you, I wolde ryde them full nere,
And by my trouthe but yf an ende they make,
Yet wyll I saye some wordes for your sake
That shall them angre, I holde thereon a grote,
For some shall wene be hanged by the throte.

I bet money on it
I have a stoppyng oyster in my poke,
Truste me and yf it come to a nede;
But I am lothe for to reyse a smoke,
Yf ye coude be otherwyse agrede;
And so I wolde it were, so God me spede,
For this maye brede to a confusyon,
Withoute God make a good conclusyon.

Naye, see where yonder stondeth the teder man,
A flaterynge knave and false he is, God wote;
The drevyll stondeth to herken and he can.
It were more thryft he boughte him a newe cote;
It wyll not be, his purse is not on flote.
All that he wereth it is borowed ware,
His wytte is thynne, his hode is threde-bare.

More coude I saye, but what this is ynowe;
Adewe tyll soone, we shall speke more of this.
Ye muste be ruled as I shall tell you howe,
Amendis maye be of that is now amys.
And I am your, syr, so have I blys,
In every poynte that I can do or saye.
Gyve me your honde, fare well and have good daye.

DREDE

Sodaynly, as he departed me fro,
Came pressynge in one in a wonder araye;
Er I was ware, behynde me he sayde Bo!
Thenne I, astonyed of that sodeyne fraye,
Sterte all at ones. I lyked no thynge his playe,
For yf I had not quyckely fledde the touche,
He had plucte oute the nobles of my pouche.

He was trussed in a garmente strayte
(I have not sene suche anothers page)
For he coude well upon a casket wayte,
His hode all pounsed and garded lyke a cage.
Lyghte lyme fynger, he toke none other wage.
Harken, quod he, loo here myne honde in thyne,
To us welcome thou arte, by Saynte Quyntyne.

DISCEYTE

But by that Lorde that is one, two and thre,
I have an errande to rounde in your ere.
He tolde me so, by God, ye maye truste me.
Parde, remembre whan ye were there,
There I wynked on you, wote ye not where?
In (A) loco, I mene juxta (B),
Woo is hym that is blynde and maye not see!

But to here the subtylte and the crafte,
As I shall tell you, yf ye wyll harke agayne:
And whan I sawe the horsons wolde you hafte,
To holde myne honde, by God, I had grete payne;
For forthwyth there I had him slayne,
But that I drede mordre wolde come oute;
Who deleth with shrewes hath nede to loke aboute.

DREDE

And as he rounded thus in myne ere
Of false collusyon confetryd by assente,
Me thoughte I see lewde felawes here and there
Game for to slee me of mortall entente.
And as they came, the shyphorde faste I hente,
And thoughte to lepe, and even with that woke,
Caughte penne and ynke, and wroth this lytyll boke.

I wolde therwith no man were myscontente,
Besechynge you that shall it see or rede,
In every poynte to be indyfferente,
Syth all in substaunce of slumbrynge doth procede.
I wyll not saye it is mater in dede,
But yet oftyme suche dremes be founde trewe;
Now constrewe ye what is the resydewe.

John Skelton

The Tunning of Elenor Rumming

Tell you I chyll,
If that ye wyll
A whyle be styll,
Of a comely gyll
That dwelt on a hyll:
But she is not gryll,
For she is somwhat sage
And well worne in age;
For her vysage
It would aswage
A mannes courage.

Her lothely lere
Is nothynge clere,
But ugly of chere,
Droupy and drowsy,
Scurvy and lowsy;
Her face all bowsy,
Comely crynkled,
Woundersly wrynkled,
Lyke a rost pygges eare,
Brystled wyth here.

Her lewde lyppes twayne,
They slaver, men sayne,
Lyke a ropy rayne,
A gummy glayre:
She is ugly fayre;
Her nose somdele hoked,
And camously croked,
Never stoppynge,
But ever droppynge;
Her skynne lose and slacke,
Grained lyke a sacke;
With a croked backe.

Her eyen gowndy
Are full unsowndy,
For they are blered;
And she gray hered;
Jawed lyke a jetty;
A man would have pytty
To se how she is gumbed,
Fyngered and thumbed,
Gently joynted,
Gresed and annoynted
Up to the knockles;
The bones of her huckels
Lyke as they were with buckels
Togyther made fast:
Her youth is farre past:
Foted lyke a plane,

Legged lyke a crane;
And yet she wyll jet,
Lyke a jollyvet,
In her furred flocket,
And gray russet rocket,
With symper the cocket.
Her huke of Lyncole grene,
It had ben hers, I wene,
More then fourty yere;
And so doth it apere,
For the grene bare thredes
Loke lyke sere wedes,
Wyddered lyke hay,
The woll worne away;
And yet I dare saye
She thynketh herselfe gaye
Upon the holy daye,
Whan she doth her aray,
And gyrdeth in her gytes
Stytched and pranked with pletes;
Her kyrtel Brystow red,
With clothes upon her hed
That wey a sowe of led,
Wrythen in wonder wyse,
After the Sarasyns gyse
With a whym wham,
Knyt with a trym tram,
Upon her brayne pan,
Lyke an Egyptian,
Capped about:
When she goeth out
Herselfe for to shewe,
She dryveth downe the dewe
Wyth a payre of heles
As brode as two wheles;
She hobles as a gose
With her blanket hose
Over the falowe;
Her shone smered wyth talowe,
Gresed upon dyrt
That baudeth her skyrt.

Primus passus

And this comely dame,
I understande, her name
Is Elynour Rummynge,
At home in her wonnynge;
And as men say
She dwelt in Sothray,
In a certayne stede

Bysyde Lederhede.
She is a tonnysh gyb;
The devyll and she be syb.

But to make up my tale,
She breweth noppy ale,
And maketh therof port sale
To travellars, to tynkers,
To sweters, to swynkers,
And all good ale drynkers,
That wyll nothynge spare,
But drynke tyll they stare
And brynge themselfe bare,
With, "Now away the mare,
And let us sley care,
As wyse as an hare!"

Come who so wyll
To Elynour on the hyll,
Wyth, "Fyll the cup, fyll,"
And syt there by styll,
Erly and late:
Thyther cometh Kate,
Cysly, and Sare,
With theyr legges bare,
And also theyr fete,
Hardely, full unswete;
Wyth theyr heles dagged,
Theyr kyrtelles all to-jagged,
Theyr smockes all to-ragged,
Wyth titters and tatters,
Brynge dysshes and platters,
Wyth all theyr myght runnynge
To Elynour Rummynge,
To have of her tunnynge:
She leneth them on the same.
And thus begynneth the game.

Instede of coyne and monny,
Some brynge her a conny,
And some a pot with honny,
Some a salt, and some a spone,
Some theyr hose, some theyr shone;
Some ran a good trot
With a skellet or a pot;
Some fyll theyr pot full
Of good Lemster woll:
An huswyfe of trust,
Whan she is athrust,
Suche a webbe can spyn,
Her thryft is full thyn.

Some go streyght thyder,
Be it slaty or slyder;
They holde the hye waye,
They care not what men say,
Be that as be maye;
Some, lothe to be espyde,
Start in at the backe syde,
Over the hedge and pale,
And all for the good ale.

Some renne tyll they swete,
Brynge wyth them malte or whete,
And dame Elynour entrete
To byrle them of the best.

Than cometh an other gest;
She swered by the rode of rest,
Her lyppes are so drye,
Without drynke she must dye;
Therefore fyll it by and by,
And have here a pecke of ry.

Anone cometh another,
As drye as the other,
And wyth her doth brynge
Mele, salte, or other thynge,
Her harvest gyrdle, her weddyng rynge,
To pay for her scot
As cometh to her lot.
Som bryngeth her husbandes hood,
Because the ale is good;
Another brought her his cap
To offer to the ale-tap,
Wyth flaxe and wyth towe;
And some brought sowre dowe;
Wyth, "Hey, and wyth, Howe,
Syt we downe a-rowe,
And drynke tyll we blowe,
And pype tyrly tyrlowe!"

Some layde to pledge
Theyr hatchet and theyr wedge,
Theyr hekell and theyr rele,
Theyr rocke, theyr spynnyng whele;
And some went so narrowe,
They layde to pledge theyr wharrowe,
Theyr rybskyn and theyr spyndell,
Theyr nedell and theyr thymbell:
Here was scant thryft
Whan they made suche shyft

Theyr thrust was so great,

They asked never for mete,
But drynke, styll drynke,
"And let the cat wynke,
Let us washe our gommes
From the drye crommes!"

But some than sat ryght sad
That nothynge had
There of theyre awne,
Neyther gelt nor pawne;
Suche were there menny
That had not a penny,
But, whan they should walke,
Were fayne wyth a chalke
To score on the balke,
Or score on the tayle:
God gyve it yll hayle!
For my fyngers ytche;
I have wrytten to mytche
Of this mad mummynge
Of Elynour Rummynge:
Thus endeth the gest
Of this worthy fest!

Quod Skelton, Laureat.

John Skelton

To Mistress Isabell Pennell

By Saint Mary, my lady,
Your mammy and your dady
Brought forth a goodly baby !
    My maiden Isabel,
Reflaring rosabell,
The flagrant camamell,
    The ruddy rosary,
The sovereign rosemary,
The pretty strawberry,
    The columbine, the nepte,
The jeloffer well set,
The proper violet ;
    Ennewëd your colowre
Is like the daisy flower
After the April shower ;
    Star of the morrow gray,
The blossom on the spray,
The freshest flower of May :
    Maidenly demure,
Of womanhood the lure ;
Wherefore I make you sure
    It were an heavenly health,
It were and endless wealth,
A life for God himself,
    To hear this nightingale
Among the birdës smale
Warbeling in the vale,—
Dug, dug, jug, jug,
Good year and good luck,
With chuck, chuck, chuck, chuck !

John Skelton

To Mistress Margaret Hussey

MERRY Margaret
As midsummer flower,
Gentle as falcon
Or hawk of the tower:
With solace and gladness,
Much mirth and no madness,
All good and no badness;
So joyously,
So maidenly,
So womanly
Her demeaning
In every thing,
Far, far passing
That I can indite,
Or suffice to write
Of Merry Margaret
As midsummer flower,
Gentle as falcon
Or hawk of the tower.
As patient and still
And as full of good will
As fair Isaphill,
Coliander,
Sweet pomander,
Good Cassander;
Steadfast of thought,
Well made, well wrought,
Far may be sought,
Ere that ye can find
So courteous, so kind
As merry Margaret,
This midsummer flower,
Gentle as falcon
Or hawk of the tower.

John Skelton

To Mistress Margery Wentworth

WITH margerain gentle,
   The flower of goodlihead,
Embroidered the mantle
   Is of your maidenhead.
Plainly I cannot glose;
   Ye be, as I divine,
The pretty primrose,
   The goodly columbine.

Benign, courteous, and meek,
   With wordes well devised;
In you, who list to seek,
   Be virtues well comprised.
With margerain gentle,
   The flower of goodlihead,
Embroidered the mantle
   Is of your maidenhead.

John Skelton

To Mistress Margery Wentworth -2

With margerain gentle,
The flower of goodlihead,
Embroidered the mantle
Is of your maidenhead.
Plainly I cannot glose;
Ye be, as I divine,
The pretty primrose,
The goodly columbine.

Benign, courteous, and meek,
With wordes well devised;
In you, who list to seek,
Be virtues well comprised.
With margerain gentle,
The flower of goodlihead,
Embroidered the mantle
Is of your maidenhead.

John Skelton

Vppon a Deedmans Hed

[Skelton Laureat vppon a deedmans hed that was sent to hym from an honorable Ientyll-woman for a token Deuysyd this gostly medytacyon in Englysh Couenable in sentence Comendable, Lamentable, Lacrymable, Profytable for the soule.]

Youre vgly tokyn.
My mynd hath brokyn.
From worldly lust.
For I haue dyscust.
We ar but dust.
And dy we must.

It is generall.
To be mortall.
I haue well espyde.
No man may hym hyde.
From deth holow-eyed.
With synnews wyderyd.
With bonys shyderyd.
With hys worme-etyn maw.
And hys gastly Iaw.
Gaspyng asyde.
Nakyd of hyde.
Neyther flesh nor fell.

Then by my councell.
Loke that ye spell.
Well thys gospell.
For wher-so we dwell.
Deth wyll vs quell.
And with vs mell.

For all oure pamperde paunchys.
Ther may no fraunchys.
Nor worldly blys.
Redeme vs from this.
Oure days be datyd.
To be chek-matyd.
With drawttys of deth.
Stoppyng oure breth.
Oure eyen synkyng.
Oure bodys stynkyng.
Oure gummys grynnyng.
Oure soulys brynnyng.
To whom then shall we sew.
For to haue rescew.
But to swete Iesu.
On vs then for to rew.

O goodly chyld.
Of Mary mylde.
Then be oure shylde.
That we be not exylyd.

To the dyne dale.
Of boteles bale. Nor to the lake.
Of fendys blake.

But graunt vs grace.
To se thy face.
And to purchace.
Thyne heuenly place.
And thy palace.
Full of solace.
Aboue the sky.
That is so hy.
Eternally.
To beholde and se.
The Trynyte.

Amen.

John Skelton

WHY were ye Calliope embrawdered with letters of golde ?

CALLIOPE,
As ye may se,
Regent is she
Of poetes al,
Whiche gaue to me
The high degre
Laureat to be
Of fame royall ;
Whose name enrolde
With silke and golde
I dare be bolde
Thus for to were.
Of her I holde
And her householde ;
Though I waxe olde
And somdele sere,
Yet is she fayne,
Voyde of disdayn,
Me to retayn
Her seruiture :
With her certayne
I wyll remayne
As my souerayne
Moost of pleasure,
Maulqre touz malheureux.

John Skelton

With Lullay, Lullay

With lullay, lullay, like a child,
Thou sleepest too long, thou art beguiled!
"My darling dear, my daisy flower,
Let me," quoth he, "lie in your lap."
"Lie still," quoth she, "my paramour,
Lie still hardily, and take a nap."
His head was heavy, such was his hap,
All drowsy, dreaming, drowned in sleep,
That of his love he took no keep,
With hey, lullay, etc.

With ba, ba, ba, and bas, bas, bas!
She cherished him both cheek and chin
That he wist never where he was;
He had forgotten all deadly sin!
He wanted wit her love to win:
He trusted her payment and lost all his pay;
She left him sleeping and stale away,
With hey, lullay, etc.

The rivers rough, the waters wan;
She sparèd not to wet her feet.
She waded over, she found a man
That halsed her heartily and kissed her sweet;
Thus after her cold she caught a heat.
"My lief, she said, 'rowteth in his bed;
Iwys he hath an heavy head,"
With hey, lullay, etc.

What dreamest thou, drunkard, drowsy pate?
Thy lust and liking is from thee gone;
Thou blinkard blowboll, thou wakest too late;
Behold thou liest, luggard, alone!
Well may thou sigh, well may thou groan,
To deal with her so cowardly.
Ywis, pole-hatchet, she bleared thine eye!

Quoth Skelton Laureate.

John Skelton

Womanhod Wanton Ye Want

Womanhod wanton ye want.
Youre medelyng mastres is manerles.
Plente of yll of goodnes skant.
Ye rayll at ryot recheles.
To prayse youre porte it is nedeles.
For all your draffe yet and your dreggys.
As well borne as ye full oft-tyme beggys.

Why so koy and full of skorne.
Myne horse is sold I wene you say.
My new furryd gowne when it is worne.
Put vp youre purs ye shall non pay.
By Crede I trust to se the day.
As proud a pohen as ye sprede.
Of me and other ye may haue nede.

Though angelyk be youre smylyng.
Yet is youre tong an adders tayle.
Full lyke a Scorpyon styngyng.
All those by whom ye haue auayle.
Good mastres Anne there ye do shayle.
What prate ye praty pyggys-ny.
I truste to quyte you or I dy.

Youre key is mete for euery lok.
Youre key is commen & hangyth owte.
Youre key is redy we nede not knok.
Nor stand long wrestyng there-aboute.
Of youre doregate ye haue no doute.
But one thyng is that ye be lewde.
Holde youre tong now all be shrewde.

To mastres Anne that farly swete.
That wonnes at the key in temmys strete.

John Skelton