



JOHN LYDGATE

THE DISGUISED AT HERTFORD

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The Disguising at Hertford

by John Lydgate

c.1370 - 1449

a verse play written circa 1427.

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For the purposes of this multi-platform electronic text, the medieval 'thorn' (a character representing 'th') has been changed to 'th'. It was impracticable to reproduce the original punctuation, which mainly consisted of the virgule or slash. Modern commas and full stops have been sparingly imposed. Superscript tildes and mid-script tildes have been removed. Mid-script dots have been changed to colons as they seem to indicate a deliberate suspension. The last four words of the initial rubric (Brys : slayne at Loviers) appear to have been added to the manuscript at a date slightly later than when it was first written. Section marks occur in the original without consistency; where these clearly indicate a new section, a blank line has been inserted to produce a similar effect.

The endnotes include the original stage directions. Two lacunae in the manuscript have been supplied by reference to John Stow's late 16th-century manuscript copy of the text. The other endnotes are glosses of particular words in the text.

The transcription of Lydgate's text has also been published in book form under the title 'Lydgate's Disguising at Hertford Castle', including a modern verse translation of the text, an editor's introduction and notes, and a study of the literary and historical background of the play and of its first performance, which took place at Hertford Castle as part of the royal Christmas festivities of, probably, 1427. It is hoped that this additional material will become available as a Project Gutenberg etext. Readers interested in the book may wish to have its publication details

Lydgate's Disguising at Hertford Castle by Derek Forbes

with Foreword by Glynne Wickham
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1E Tavistock Street, London WC2E 7PA, UK.

Copies of the book were distributed by the Society for Theatre Research to
its members worldwide in 1998, and can be consulted in the libraries of
institutions which subscribe to the Society.

Nowe folowethe here the maner of a bille by wey of supplicacon putte to
the kyng holding his noble feest of Cristmasse in the Castel of Hertford
as in a disguysing : of the Rude upplandisshe people compleyning on hir
wyves with the boystous aunswere of hir wyves devysed by lydegate at the
Request of the Countre Roullour Brys : slayne at Loviers

Most noble prynce : With support of your grace,
Ther beon entred : in to youre royal place
And late coomen in to youre castell,
Youre poure lieges, wheche lyke no thing weel.
Nowe in the vigure of this nuwe yeere
Certayne sweynes, ful [froward of ther chere],
Of entent comen, [fallen on ther kne],
For to compleyne vn to youre magestee
Vpon the mescheef of gret aduersytee,
Vpon the trouble and the cruweltee [10]
Which that they haue endured in theyre lyves
By the felnesse of theyre fierce wyves,
Which is a tourment verray importable,
A bonde of sorowe, a knott vnremuuable.
For whoo is bounde or locked in maryage,
Yif he beo olde, he falleth in dotage,
And yong folkes, of theyre lymes sklendre,
Grene and lusty, and of brawne but tendre,
Phylosophres callen in suche aage

A Chylde to wyve, a woodnesse or a raage. [20]

For they afferme ther is noon eorthly stryff
May beo compared to wedding of a wyff,
And who that euer stonde the in the cas
He with his Rebecke may sing ful oft ellas,
Lyke as theos hynes, here standing oon by oon,
He may with hem vpon the daunce goon.
Leorne the traas, boothe at even and morowe
Of Karycantowe in tourment and in sorowe....
Weyle the while ellas that he was borne.
For Obbe, the Reeve, that goothe heere al to forne, [30]
He pleyne the sore, his mariage is not meete,
For his wyff, Beautyce Bittersweete,
Cast vpon him an hougly cheer ful rowghe
Whane he komethe home, ful wery frome the ploughe,
With hungry stomake, deed and paale of cheere,
In hope to fynde redy his dynier.

Thanne sittethe Beautyce, bolling at the nale,
As she that gyveth of him no maner tale.
For she alday with hir iowsy nolle,
Hathe for the collyk pouped in the bolle [40]
And for heed aache : with pepir and gynger
Dronk drolled ale, to make hir throte cleer,
And komethe hir hoome, whane hit drawethe to eve.
And thanne Robyn, the cely poure Reeve,
Fynde noone amendes of harome ne damage
But leene growell, and soupethe cold potage,
And of his wyf hathe noone other cheer
But cokkrowortes vn to his souper.
This is his servyce sitting at the borde,
And cely Robyn, yif he speke a worde, [50]
Beautyce of him doothe so lytel rekke
That with hir distaff she hittethe him in the nekke,
For a medecyne to chawf with his bloode.
With suche a metyerde she hathe shape him an hoode.

And Colyn Cobeller, folowing his felawe,
Hathe hade his part of the same lawe,
For by the fayth that the preost him gaf
His wyff hathe taught him to pleyne at the staff.
Hir quarter strooke were so large and rounde
That on his rigge the towche was alwey founde. [60]

Cecely Sourechere, his owen precyous spouse,
Kowde him reheete whan he came to house.
Yif he ought spake whanne he felt peyne,
Ageyne oon worde always he hade tweyne.
Sheo qwytt him euer, ther was no thing to seeche,
Six for oon, of worde and strookes eeche.
Ther was no meen bytwene hem for to goone.
What euer he wan : clowting olde shoone
The wykday, pleynely this is no tale,
Sheo wolde on Sondayes drynk it at the nale. [70]
His part was noon, he sayde not oonys nay.
Hit is no game, but an herness play
For lack of wit a man his wyf to greeve.
Theos housbondemen : who so wolde hem leeve,
Koude yif they dourst telle : in Audyence,
What folowethe ther of wyves to doone offence.
Is noon so olde ne ryveld on hir face,
Wit tong or staff but that she dare manase.
Mabye, God hir sauve and blesse,
Koude yif hir list bere here of witnessse, [80]
Wordes, strookes vnhappe, and harde grace,
With sharp nayles kracching in the face.
I mene thus, whane the distaff is brooke
With theyre fistes wyves wol be wrooke.

Blessed thoo men that cane in suche offence
Meekly souffre, take al in pacyence
Tendure suche wyfly purgatorye.
Heven for theyre meede, to regne ther in glorye.
God graunt al housbandes that beon in this place
To wyne so heven for his hooly grace. [90]

Nexst in ordre, this bochier stoute and bolde
That killed hathe bulles and boores olde,
This Berthilmew, for al his broode knyff,
Yit durst he neuer with his sturdy wyff
In no mater holde chaumpartye.
And if he did, sheo wolde anoon defye
His pompe, his pryde, with a sterne thought,
And sodeynly setten him at nought.
Thoughe his bely were rounded lyche an ooke
She wolde not fail to gyf the first strooke. [100]
For proude Pernelle lyche a Chaumpyon

Wolde leve hir puddinges in a gret Cawdroun,
Suffre hem boylle and taake of hem noon heede,
But with hir skumour reeche him on the heued.
Shee wolde paye him and make no delaye,
Bid him goo pleye him a twenty deuel way.
She was no cowarde founde at suche a neode,
Hir fist ful offt made his cheekis bleed.
What querell euer that he agenst hir sette,
She cast hir not to dyen in his dette. [110]
She made no taylle, but qwyt him by and by.
His quarter sowde, she payde him feythfully.
And his waages, wt al hir best entent,
She made ther of noon assignement.

Eeke Thome Tynker, with alle hees pannes olde
And alle the wyres of Banebury that he solde,
His styth, his hamour, his bagge portatyf,
Bare vp his arme whane he faught with his wyff:
He foonde for haste no better bokeller,
Vpon his cheeke the distaff came so neer. [120]
Hir name was cleped Tybot Tapister.
To brawle and broyle she nad no maner fer,
To thakke his pilche stoundemel nowe and thanne
Thikker thane Thome koude clowten any panne.

Nexst Colle Tyler, ful hevy of his cheer,
Compleynethe on Phelyce his wyff the wafurer
Al his bred with sugre nys not baake,
Yit on his cheekis some tyme he hathe a caake
So hoot and nuwe, or he can taken heede,
That his heres glowe verray reede [130]
For a medecyne whane the forst is colde,
Makyng his teethe to rattle that beon oolde.

This is the compleynt that theos dotardes oolde
Make on theyre wyves that beon so stoute and bolde,
Theos holy martirs preued ful pacyent,
Lowly beseching, in al hir best entent,
Vnto youre noble ryal magestee,
To graunte hem fraunchyse and also liberte
Sith they beothe fetird and bounden in maryage,
A saufconduct to sauf him frome damage. [140]
Eeke vnder support of youre hyeghe renoun
Graunt hem also a proteccoun.

Conquest of wyves is rone thoroughe this lande,
Cleyming of Right to haue the hyegher hande.
But if you list, of youre Regallye,
The olde testament for to modefyte,
And that yee list asselen theyre request
That theos poure husbandes might lyf in rest,
And that theyre wyves in theyre felle might
Wol medle amonge mercy with theyre right. [150]
For it came neuer of nature ne raysoun
A lyonesse toppresse the lyoun,
Ner a wolfesse for al hir thyranye
Ouer the wolf to haven the maystrye.
Ther beon nowe wolfesses moo thane twoo or three
The bookys recorde, wheeche tht yonder bee.
Seothe to this mater of mercy and of grace,
And or thees dotardes parte out of this place,
Vpon theyre compleynt to shape remedye,
Or they beo likly to stande in iupardye. [160]
It is no game with wyves for to pleye,
But for foolis, that gif no force to deye.

Take the heed of thaunswer of the wyves.

Touching the substance of this hyeghe discorde,
We six wyves : beon ful of oon acorde,
Yif worde and chydying may vs not avaylle
We wol darrein it in chaumpcloos by bataylle,
Iupart oure right laate or ellys raathe.
And for oure partye, the worthy Wyff of Bathe
Cane shewe statutes moo than six of seven
Howe wyves make hir housbandes wynne heven, [170]
Maugre the feonde and al his vyolence.
For theyre vertu of parfyte pacyence
Partenethe not to wyves nowe adayes,
Sauf on theyre housbandes for to make assayes.
Ther pacyence was buryed long agoo,
Gresyldes story recordethe pleinely soo.

It longethe to vs to clappen as a mylle,
No counseyle keepe, but the trouthe oute telle.
We beo not borne by hevenly influence
Of oure nature to keepe vs in sylence. [180]
For this is no doute, euery prudent wyff

Hathe redy aunswere in al suche maner stryff,
 Though theos dotardes, with theyre dokked berdes
 Which strowtethe out as they were made of herdes,
 Haue ageyn hus a gret quarell nowe sette.
 I trowe the bakoun was neuer of hem fette
 Awaye at Dounmowe in the Pryorye.
 They weene of vs to haue ay the maystrye.
 Ellas theos fooles let hem aunswere here to,
 Whoo cane hem wasshe, who can hem wring alsoo, [190]
 Wryng hem, yee wryng, so als god vs speed,
 Til that some tyme we make hir nases bleed,
 And sowe hir clothes whane they beothe to rent,
 And clowte hir bakkes til some of vs beo shent.
 Loo yit theos fooles, god gyf hem sory chaunce,
 Wolde sette hir wyves vnder gouernaunce,
 Make vs to hem for to lowte lowe:
 We knowe to weel the bent of lackys bowe.
 Al that we clayme, we clayme it but of right.
 Yif they say nay let preve it out by ffight. [200]
 We wil vs grounde not vpon womanhede.
 Fy on hem, cowardes. When hit komethe to nede,
 We clayme maystrye by prescripcyoun,
 Be long tytyle of successyoun
 Frome wyff to wyff, which we wol not leese.
 Men may weel gruchche, but they shal not cheese.
 Custume is vs for nature and vsaunce
 To set oure housbandes lyf in gret noysaunce.
 Humbelly byseching nowe at oon worde
 Vn to oure liege, and moost souerein lord, [210]
 Vs to defende of his regallye,
 And of his grace susteenen oure partye,
 Requiring the statuyt of olde antiquytee
 That in youre tyme it may confermed bee.

The complaynte of the lewed housbandes wt the cruwell aunswers of theyre
 wyves herde, the kyng yivethe ther vpon sentence and iugement.

This noble Prynce, moost royal of estate,
 Having an eyeghe to this mortal debate,
 First aduerting of ful hyeghe prudence,
 Wil vnavysed gyve here no sentence
 With oute counseylle of haste to procede
 By sodeyne doome, for he takythe heede [220]
 To eyther partye as iuge indifferent,

Seing the paryll of hasty iugement.
 Pourposithe him in this contynude stryffe
 To gif no sentence ther of diffynytyff
 Til ther beo made examynacyoun
 Of other partye, and inquysicyoun.
 He considerethe, and makethe Raysoun his guyde,
 As egal iuge enclyning to noo syde.
 Not with standing, he hathe compassyoun
 Of the poure housbandes trybulacyoun, [230]
 So afft arrested with theyre wyves rokkes
 Which of theyre distaves haue so many knokkes,
 Peysing also in his regallye
 The lawe tht wymmen allegge for theyre partye,
 Custume, Nature and eeke prescripcyoun,
 Statuyt vsed by confirmacyoun,
 Processe and daate of tyme oute of mynde,
 Recorde of Cronycles, witnesse of hir kuynde.
 Wher fore the Kyng wol al this nexst yeere
 That wyves fraunchyse : stonde hoole and entier, [240]
 And that no man withstonde it ne withdrawe,
 Til man may fynde some pcesse oute by lawe
 That they shoulde by nature in theyre lyves
 Haue souerayntee on theyre prudent wyves,
 A thing vnkouthe, which was neuer founde.
 Let men be ware ther fore, or they beo bounde.
 The bonde is hard, who soo that lookethe weel.
 Some man were leuer fetterd beon in steel.
 Raunsoun might help his peyne to aswaage,
 But whoo is wedded lyuethe euer in suage. [250]
 And I knowe neuer, nowher fer ner neer,
 Man that was gladde to bynde him prysonier,
 Thoughe that his prysoun, his castell, or his holde
 Wer depeynted with asure or with golde.

Explicit.

Glossary, Stage directions, Notes

line

- 5 vigyle of this nuwe yeere = this new year's eve
- 6 froward of ther chere: lacuna made up from Stow
- 7 fallen on ther kne: lacuna made up from Stow
- 13 importable = unbearable

- 16 dotage = feeble-mindedness
20 woodnesse = madness
24 Rebecke = fiddle; ellas = alas!
25 stage direction - demonstrando vj Rusticos
27 traas = course
28 possible lacuna follows here?
37 bolling at the nale = quaffing at the ale-house
39 iowsy nolle = juicy noddle
40 pouped = gulped
42 dolled = mulled
44 cely = silly, i.e. simple, innocent
45 harome = harm
46 growell = gruel
48 cokkrowortes = stale brew-mash
53 to chawf with his bloode = to chafe his blood with
54 metyerde = meteyard or yardstick
55 stage direction - demonstrando pictaciarium
57 preost = priest
60 rigge = back
62 reheete = attack, scold
65 qwytt = requited; ther was no thing to seeche = it was plain to see
67 meen = middle way
68 wan = earned; clowting = mending
71 oonys = once
74 leeve = believe
77 ryveld = shrivelled
78 Wit = with; manase = menace
79 Mabyle = Mary
80 Koude yif hir list = could if it please her
84 wol be wrooke = will wreak revenge
85 thoo men = those men
87 Tendure = to endure
88 meede = reward
90 so = to?
91 stage direction - demonstrando Carnificem
95 holde chaumpartye = divide power, or resist
104 skumour = skimmer; reeche = strike; heued = head
111 qwytt him by and by = repaid him in due time
112 quarter sowde = surrender sued for
113 wt = with
115 stage direction - demonstrando the Tynker
117 styth = anvil
119 bokeller = buckler, shield
121 cleped = called

122 she nad no maner fer = she feared not
123 thakke his pilche = thwack his great-coat; stoundemel = sometimes
124 Thikker = more stoutly
126 wafurer = waferer, i.e. pastry-cook
129 or = ere
130 heres = ears
135 preued = proved
139 fetird = fettered
140 him = them
145 Regallye = regality
147 that yee list = if you please; asselen = authorize
150 medle = mingle
153 thyraunye = tyranny
156 tht = that; stage direction - distaves
157 Seothe = see
162 that gif no force = that are of no consequence
166 darrein = decide; chaumpcloos = tilting-field
167 lupart = imperil; raathe = soon
169 of = or
171 Maugre the feonde = in spite of the devil
174 assayes = attempts, i.e. attacks
177 longethe = belongs; clappen = clatter or prattle
183 dokked = trimmed
184 herdes = coarse flax, 'hards'
186 fette = fetched
192 hir = our?]
193 rent = torn
194 shent = injured
197 lowte lowe = bow, make reverence
205 leese = lose
206 gruchche = grumble; cheese = choose
218 vnavysed = unadvised
220 doome = judgment
222 paryll = peril
223 Pourposithe him = He purposeth
231 rokkes = distaffs, also as rocking, set-backs
233 Peysing = weighing
234 tht = that
239 the Kyng wol = the king wills
242 pcesse = process
248 were leuer fetterd beon = were rather to be fettered
250 suage = s(er)vage, servitude

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