

John Skelton (1460?–1529)

Although there is little reliable information about Skelton's early life, he appears to have studied at both Cambridge and Oxford, where he was awarded the title of "laureate" (an advanced degree in rhetoric) in 1488; he later received the same honor from the universities of Cambridge and Louvain. Some time in the 1490s, he went up to London and the court, where he wrote some occasional poems and dramatic entertainments. In 1498, Skelton took holy orders and soon after became the tutor of Prince Henry (later King Henry VIII). When Erasmus visited England in 1499, he described Skelton as *unum Britannicarum litterarum lumen ac decus* ("the singular light and glory of British letters"); while he had his detractors as well, this shows that Skelton was an established poet and scholar and he has always been considered the most important English poet of the generation before Wyatt. In recognition of his royal service, he was made rector of Diss, near the border of Suffolk and Norfolk. In 1512, he was given the title *orator regius* ("royal orator") by Henry VIII.

Skelton was a tremendously versatile poet: he used established verse forms, such as the poetic dream vision of *The Garland of Laurel*, which is reminiscent of Chaucer, but also experimented with new forms and created his own (the "Skeltonic," which consists of lines with two or three accents that rhyme successively; see "Philip Sparrow" below). He wrote celebratory poems for his royal employers ("A Lawde and Prayse Made for Our Sovereigne Lord the Kyng") and sharp satires against courtly hypocrisy and, in particular, Cardinal Wolsey ("Speke Parrot," "Collyn Clout," and "Why Come Ye Nat to Courte?"). He wrote sincere devotional poetry

and vulgar erotic verse ("The Tunning of Elynour Rummyng"). During his rectorship he also wrote two comic Latin epitaphs on members of his congregation ("Epitaph for Adam Udersall" and "A Devout Trental for Old John Clarke") which anticipate the satirical vein of his later poetry. He also wrote Latin verse and made some translations from Latin. The tone and themes of his poems vary wildly within as well as between them, and he excels at using commonplace situations as comic vehicles for learned disputes or reflections. A good example is "Ware the Hawk," a poem about a neighboring curate who has been hunting with his hawk in Skelton's church at Diss. The bird's fouling of the altar, chalice, and host becomes the occasion for a poetic sermon (carefully divided into named sections) and a table of conclusions for the erring hawk-owner to follow. In his last major poem – "A Replication Against Certain Young Scholars Abjured of Late" (1528) – Skelton put aside his old conflict with Wolsey to join him in combating what they both saw as the heresy of Lutheranism, which was beginning to be debated at Cambridge in the mid-1520s (see Walker).

"Philip Sparrow" is a fine example of Skelton's metrical skill and his flair for combining the traditional and the new. The poem celebrates a mock mass – much as children sometimes elaborately bury their dead pets – for Jane Scrope's sparrow, killed by a Carrow Abbey cat. The poem is in two parts: the first is the girl's lament, in her own voice, for Philip; and the second is the poet's commendation of Jane's beauty. Fifteen years after composing the poem, Skelton wrote an additional section, replying to those who raised moral objections about part two. While part two is an intricately

sensual application of the art of rhetoric, making explicit use of terminology from classical handbooks, its learning is undercut in part one by the girl's polymathic knowledge, which weaves together bird lore, musicology, the language of the Bible and the Office for the Dead, English literary history, and classical learning. Because of its complex treatment of female sexuality, from the fictionalized points of view of Jane and the poet himself, the poem and the history of its reception have recently received sustained attention from feminist critics (see Barnes and Schibanoff).

Text

The Complete English Poems, ed. John Scattergood (spelling modernized).

Reading

A. W. Barnes, "Constructing the Sexual Subject of John Skelton."

Arthur F. Kinney, *John Skelton, Priest as Poet: Seasons of Discovery*.

John Scattergood, "John Skelton's Lyrics: Tradition and Innovation."

Susan Schibanoff, "Taking Jane's Cue: *Phyllyp Sparowe* as a Primer for Women Readers."

Greg Walker, *John Skelton and the Politics of the 1520s*.

Philip Sparrow [Part I]

*Pl a ce bo!*¹
 Who is there, who?
*Di le xi!*²
 Dame Margery,³
Fa, re, my, my.
 Wherefore and why, why?
 For the soul of Philip Sparrow
 That was late slain at Carrow
 Among the Nuns Black.
 10 For that sweet soul's sake,
 And for all sparrows' souls
 Set in our bead-rolls,⁴
*Pater noster qui,*⁵
 With an *Ave Mari,*⁶
 And with the corner of a Creed,
 The more shall be your meed.⁷

When I remember again
 How my Philip was slain,
 Never half the pain
 20 Was between you twain,
 Pyramus and Thisbe,⁸
 As then befell to me.

I wept and I wailed,
 The tears down hailed;
 But nothing it availed
 To call Philip again
 Whom Gib our cat hath slain.
 Gib, I say, our cat
 Worried⁹ her on that
 30 Which I loved best.
 It cannot be expressed
 My sorrowful heaviness,
 But all without redress;
 For within that stound,¹⁰
 Half slumbering, in a sound
 I fell downe to the ground.
 Unneth¹¹ I cast mine eyes
 Toward the cloudy skies;
 But when I did behold
 40 My sparrow dead and cold,
 No creature but that would
 Have rued¹² upon me,
 To behold and see
 What heaviness did me pang:
 Wherewith my hands I wrang,
 That my sinews cracked

Notes

PHILIP SPARROW

¹ From the opening of the antiphon of the Vespers for the Office of the Dead. The syllabic divisions suggest plainsong.

² From Vulgate Psalm 114 (Psalm 115), the first psalm in the Office of the Dead. The syllabic divisions suggest plainsong.

³ The head nun at the abbey of Carrow, just outside.

⁴ Lists of the dead for whom prayers were to be offered.

⁵ "Our Father which . . ."

⁶ "Hail Mary."

⁷ reward.

⁸ Tragic lovers in a tale by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*.

⁹ i.e. bit on the throat.

¹⁰ moment and/or sudden shock.

¹¹ barely.

¹² pitied.

As though I had been racked,
 So pained and so strained
 That no life well nigh remained.
 50 I sighed and I sobbed,
 For that I was robbed
 Of my sparrow's life.
 O maiden, widow, and wife,
 Of what estate¹³ ye be,
 Of high or low degree,
 Great sorrow then ye might see,
 And learn to weep at me!
 Such pains did me fret
 That mine heart did beat,
 60 My visage pale and dead,
 Wan, and blue as lead:
 The pangs of hateful death
 Well nigh had stopped my breath.

Heu, heu, me,
 That I am woe for thee!
*Ad Dominum, cum tribularer, clamavi.*¹⁴
 Of God nothing else crave I
 But Philip's soul to keep
 From the mares¹⁵ deep
 70 Of Acherontes¹⁶ well,
 That is a flood of hell;
 And from the great Pluto,¹⁷
 The prince of endless woe;
 And from foul Alecto,¹⁸
 With visage black and blue;
 And from Medusa,¹⁹ that mare,²⁰
 That like a fiend doth stare;
 And from Megaera's²¹ adders
 For ruffling of Philip's feathers,
 80 And from her fiery sparklings,
 For burning of his wings;

And from the smokes sour
 Of Proserpina's²² bower;
 And from the dens dark
 Where Cerberus²³ doth bark,
 Whom Theseus²⁴ did affray,²⁵
 Whom Hercules²⁶ did outray,²⁷
 As famous poets say;
 From that hell-hound
 90 That lieth in chains bound,
 With ghastly heads three;
 To Jupiter pray we
 That Philip preserved may be!
 Amen, say ye with me!

Do mi nus,
 Help now sweet Jesus!
*Levavi oculos meos in montes.*²⁸
 Would God I had Zenophontes,²⁹
 Or Socrates the wise,
 100 To show me their device³⁰
 Moderately to take
 This sorrow that I make
 For Philip Sparrow's sake!
 So fervently I shake,
 I feel my body quake;
 So urgently I am brought
 Into careful thought.
 Like Andromach,³¹ Hector's wife,
 Was weary of her life,
 110 When she had lost her joy,
 Noble Hector of Troy;
 In like manner also
 Increaseth my deadly woe,
 For my sparrow is go.
 It was so pretty a fool,
 It would sit on a stool,

Notes

¹³ social standing.

¹⁴ "Woe, woe is me . . . In my distress, I cried unto the Lord" (second antiphon and Vulgate Psalm 119 from the Vespers).

¹⁵ marsh.

¹⁶ Acheron, one of the rivers of the Underworld in Greek myth.

¹⁷ Roman god of the Underworld, whose other name is Dis (see gazetteer). There is a pun running through this section on Diss, where Skelton was rector. In Roman literature Dis was a symbol of death.

¹⁸ One of the Furies (see gazetteer).

¹⁹ Mythical Greek monster whose hideous appearance turned anyone who looked at it to stone.

²⁰ hag.

²¹ One of the Furies, who had adders for hair.

²² Goddess of the Underworld (see gazetteer under "Persephone").

²³ Monstrous three-headed dog who guarded the entrance to the Underworld.

²⁴ Mythical king of Athens (see gazetteer).

²⁵ frighten.

²⁶ Mythical Greek demi-god and hero (see gazetteer).

²⁷ vanquish.

²⁸ "Lord . . . I lifted up my eyes unto the hills" (third antiphon and Psalm of the Vespers).

²⁹ Xenophon, an ancient Greek writer and admirer of Socrates (see gazetteer).

³⁰ advice.

³¹ Andromache, wife of the Trojan hero Hector (see gazetteer and *Iliad* 25.725 ff.).

And learned after my school
 For to keep his cut,³²
 With 'Philip, keep your cut!'
 120 It had a velvet cap,
 And would sit upon my lap,
 And seek after small worms,
 And sometime white bread-crumbs;
 And many times and oft
 Between my breasts soft
 It would lie and rest –
 It was proper and prest.³³
 Sometime he would gasp
 When he saw a wasp;
 130 A fly or a gnat,
 He would fly at that;
 And prettily he would pant
 When he saw an ant;
 Lord, how he would pry
 After the butterfly!
 Lord, how he would hop
 After the gressop!³⁴
 And when I said, 'Phip, Phip!'
 Then he would leap and skip,
 140 And take me by the lip.
 Alas, it will me slo³⁵
 That Philip is gone me fro!

Si in i qui ta tes
 Alas, I was evil at ease!
*De pro fun dis cla ma vi*³⁶
 When I saw my sparrow die!

 Now, after my doom,³⁷
 Dame Sulpicia³⁸ at Rome,
 Whose name registered was
 150 For ever in tables of brass,
 Because that she did pass
 In poesy to indite³⁹
 And eloquently to write,
 Though she would pretend
 My sparrow to commend,

I trow⁴⁰ she could not amend
 Reporting the virtues all
 Of my sparrow royal.
 For it would come and go,
 160 And fly so to and fro;
 And on me it would leap
 When I was asleep,
 And his feathers shake,
 Wherewith he would make
 Me often for to wake,
 And for to take him in
 Upon my naked skin.
 God wot,⁴¹ we thought no sin –
 What though he crept so low?
 170 It was no hurt, I trow.
 He did nothing, perdee,⁴²
 But sit upon my knee.
 Philip, though he were nice,⁴³
 In him it was no vice;
 Philip had leave to go
 To pick my little toe,
 Philip might be bold
 And do what he would:
 Philip would seek and take
 180 All the fleas black
 That he could there espy
 With his wanton eye.

O pe ra:⁴⁴
La, sol, fa, fa,
Confitebor tibi, Domine, in toto corde
*meo.*⁴⁵

 Alas, I would ride and go
 A thousand mile of ground,
 If any such might be found!
 It were worth an hundred pound
 190 Of King Croesus'⁴⁶ gold,
 Or of Attalus the old,
 The rich prince of Pergame,⁴⁷
 Whoso list⁴⁸ the story to see.

Notes

³² i.e. to keep his place and behave properly.

³³ eager.

³⁴ grasshopper.

³⁵ slay.

³⁶ "If iniquities . . . Out of the depths have I cried" (fourth antiphon and Psalm of the Vespers).

³⁷ judgment.

³⁸ The name of two female poets from ancient Rome.

³⁹ compose.

⁴⁰ believe.

⁴¹ knows.

⁴² By God!

⁴³ lustful (sparrows were proverbially lascivious birds).

⁴⁴ "The works [of the Lord]"

⁴⁵ "I will confess to thee, Lord, with my whole heart" (Vulgate Psalm 85:12, from the fifth antiphon of the Vespers).

⁴⁶ Ancient king of Lydia, known for his great wealth.

⁴⁷ Pergamum, ancient city in Asia Minor, which reached the height of its splendor under the Attalids.

⁴⁸ wishes.

- Cadmus,⁴⁹ that his sister sought,
 And he should be bought
 For gold and fee,
 He should over the sea
 To weet⁵⁰ if he could bring
 Any of the offspring
 200 Or any of the blood.
 But whoso understood
 Of Medea's⁵¹ art,
 I would I had a part
 Of her crafty magic!
 My sparrow then should be quick⁵²
 With a charm or twain,
 And play with me again.
 But all this is in vain
 Thus for to complain.
 210 I took my sampler once
 Of purpose, for the nonce,⁵³
 To sew with stitches of silk
 My sparrow white as milk,
 That by representation
 Of his image and fashion,
 To me it might import
 Some pleasure and comfort
 For my solace and sport.
 But when I was sewing his beak,
 220 Methought my sparrow did speak,
 And opened his pretty bill,
 Saying, 'Maid, ye are in will⁵⁴
 Again me for to kill,
 Ye prick me in the head!
 With that my needle waxed red,
 Methought, of Philip's blood.
 Mine hair right upstood,
 I was in such a fray
 My speech was taken away.
 230 I cast down that there was,
 And said, 'Alas, alas,
 How cometh this to pass?'
 My fingers, dead and cold,
 Could not my sampler hold;
 My needle and thread
- I threw away for dread.
 The best now that I may
 Is for his soul to pray:
 A *porta inferi*,⁵⁵
 240 Good Lord, have mercy
 Upon my sparrow's soul,
 Written in my bead-roll!
 Au *di vi vo cem*,⁵⁶
 Japhet, Ham, and Shem,⁵⁷
 Ma *gni fi cat*,⁵⁸
 Show me the right path
 To the hills of Armony,⁵⁹
 Whereon the boards yet cry
 Of your father's boat,
 250 That was sometime afloat,
 And now they lie and rot;
 Let some poets write
 Deucalion's⁶⁰ flood it hight.⁶¹
 But as verily as ye be
 The natural sons three
 Of Noah the patriarch,
 That made that great ark,
 Wherein he had apes and owls,
 Beasts, birds, and fowls,
 260 That if ye can find
 Any of my sparrow's kind,
 (God send the soul good rest!)
 I would have yet a nest
 As pretty and as prest
 As my sparrow was.
 But my sparrow did pass
 All sparrows of the wood
 That were since Noah's flood;
 Was never none so good.
 270 King Philip of Macedony⁶²
 Had no such Philip as I,
 No, no, sir, hardily!
 That vengeance I ask and cry,
 By way of exclamation,
 On all the whole nation
 Of cats wild and tame;
 God send them sorrow and shame!

Notes

⁴⁹ Legendary founder of Thebes, who searched for his sister Europa, who had been carried off by Zeus in the form of a bull (see "Thebes" in the gazetteer).

⁵⁰ know.

⁵¹ A magician who helped Jason (see gazetteer) recover the Golden Fleece and restored the youth of his father Aeson.

⁵² alive.

⁵³ for the present.

⁵⁴ intending.

⁵⁵ "From the gates of hell" (antiphon).

⁵⁶ "I heard a voice" (antiphon, Rev. 14:12).

⁵⁷ Sons of Noah from Genesis.

⁵⁸ "Magnify," as in "My soul magnifies the Lord" (Luke 1:46).

⁵⁹ Noah's ark came to rest in Armenia on Mt. Ararat.

⁶⁰ The flood-myth protagonist in Greek mythology.

⁶¹ is called.

⁶² Philip II, king of Macedon and father of Alexander the Great.

- That cat specially,
That slew so cruelly
280 My little pretty sparrow
That I brought up at Carrow.
O cat of churlish kind,
The fiend was in thy mind
When thou my bird untwined!
I would thou hadst been blind!
The leopards savage,
The lions in their rage,
Might catch thee in their paws,
And gnaw thee in their jaws!
290 The serpents of Libany⁶³
Might sting thee venomously!
The dragons with their tongues
Might poison thy liver and lungs!
The manticores⁶⁴ of the mountains
Might feed them on thy brains!
Melanchaetes, that hound
That plucked Actacon to the
ground,⁶⁵
Gave him his mortal wound,
Changed to a deer,
300 The story doth appear,
Was changed to an hart:
So thou, foul cat that thou art,
The selfsame hound
Might thee confound,
That his own lord bote,⁶⁶
Might bite asunder thy throat!
Of Ind⁶⁷ the greedy grypes⁶⁸
Might tear out all thy tripes!
Of Arcady the bears
310 Might pluck away thine ears!
The wild wolf Lycaon⁶⁹
Bite asunder thy backbone!
Of Etna⁷⁰ the burning hill,
That day and night burneth still,
Set in thy tail a blaze
That all the world may gaze
And wonder upon thee,
- From Ocean the great sea
Unto the Isles of Orcady,⁷¹
320 From Tilbury Ferry
To the plain of Salisbury!⁷²
So traitorously my bird to kill
That never ought⁷³ thee evil will!
Was never bird in cage
More gentle of courage
In doing his homage
Unto his sovereign.
Alas, I say again,
Death hath departed us twain!
330 The false cat hath thee slain:
Farewell, Philip, adieu;
Our Lord thy soul rescue!
Farewell without restore,
Farewell for evermore!
And it were⁷⁴ a Jew,
It would make one rue
To see my sorrow new.
These villainous false cats
Were made for mice and rats,
340 And not for birds small.
Alas, my face waxeth pale,
Telling this piteous tale,
How my bird so fair,
That was wont to repair,
And go in at my spare,⁷⁵
And creep in at my gore⁷⁶
Of my gown before,
Flickering with his wings.
Alas, my heart it stings,
350 Remembering pretty things!
Alas, mine heart it slaith,
My Philip's doleful death!
When I remember it,
How prettily it would sit
Many times and oft,
Upon my finger aloft!
I played with him tittle-tattle,⁷⁷
And fed him with my spittle,

Notes

⁶³ Libya, or Africa as a whole.

⁶⁴ Ancient mythical monster with the head of a man, the body of a lion, and the tail of a scorpion.

⁶⁵ See gazetteer under "Actaeon."

⁶⁶ i.e. bitten.

⁶⁷ India.

⁶⁸ griffins.

⁶⁹ In Ovid, Lycaon of Arcadia was transformed into a wolf.

⁷⁰ Etna, Europe's highest active volcano, located in Sicily.

⁷¹ Orkney Islands, north of Scotland.

⁷² Tilbury is on the Thames near London; Salisbury Plain is in the west of England.

⁷³ i.e. bore.

⁷⁴ i.e. If it were . . .

⁷⁵ An opening or slit in a gown.

⁷⁶ petticoat.

⁷⁷ gossip.

- With his bill between my lips,
 360 It was my pretty Phips!
 Many a pretty kiss
 Had I of his sweet muss!⁷⁸
 And now the cause is thus,
 That he is slain me fro,
 To my great pain and woe.
 Of fortune this the chance
 Standeth on variance:
 Oft time after pleasance,
 Trouble and grievance.
 370 No man can be sure
 Always to have pleasure.
 As well perceive ye may
 How my disport and play
 From me was taken away
 By Gib, our cat savage,
 That in a furious rage
 Caught Philip by the head,
 And slew him there stark dead!
Kyrie, eleison,
 380 *Christe, eleison,*
*Kyrie, eleison!*⁷⁹
- For Philip Sparrow's soul,
 Set in our bead-roll,
 Let us now whisper
 A *Paternoster*.⁸⁰
*Lauda, anima mea, Dominum!*⁸¹
 To weep with me look that ye
 come⁸²
 All manner of birds in your kind;
 See none be left behind.
 390 To mourning look that ye fall
 With dolorous songs funeral,
 Some to sing, and some to say,
- Some to weep, and some to pray,
 Every bird in his lay:⁸³
 The goldfinch, the wagtail;
 The jangling jay to rail,
 The flecked pie⁸⁴ to chatter
 Of this dolorous matter.
 And Robin Redbreast,
 400 He shall be the priest,
 The requiem mass to sing,
 Softly warbling,
 With help of the reed sparrow
 And the chattering swallow,
 This hearse for to hallow.
 The lark with his long toe;
 The spink,⁸⁵ and the martinet⁸⁶ also;
 The shoveller⁸⁷ with his broad beak;
 The dotterel,⁸⁸ that foolish peke,⁸⁹
 410 And also the mad coot,
 With bald face to toot;⁹⁰
 The fieldfare and the snite;⁹¹
 The crow and the kite;
 The raven, called Rolfe,
 His plain-song to sol-fa;⁹²
 The partridge, the quail;
 The plover with us to wail;
 The woodhack,⁹³ that singeth 'chur,'
 Hoarsely, as he had the mur;⁹⁴
 420 The lusty chanting nightingale;
 The popinjay to tell her tale,
 That toteth⁹⁵ oft in a glass,
 Shall read the Gospel at mass;
 The mavis⁹⁶ with her whistle
 Shall read there the epistle.
 But with a large and a long
 To keep just plain-song,
 Our chanters shall be the cuckoo,

Notes

⁷⁸ mouth.

⁷⁹ "Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy, Lord, have mercy."

⁸⁰ "Our Father."

⁸¹ "Praise the Lord, O my soul!" (Psalm 145:1, Vulgate). Skelton puns on the word *anima* ("soul")/animal here.

⁸² From here to line 575, Skelton interrupts his poetic version of the Vespers of the Office for the Dead with a memorial service sung by Philip's fellow birds. Beast fables and catalogues of animals were common devices in medieval and Renaissance literature.

⁸³ song.

⁸⁴ magpie.

⁸⁵ chaffinch.

⁸⁶ martin.

⁸⁷ spoonbill.

⁸⁸ dolt.

⁸⁹ plover.

⁹⁰ pry.

⁹¹ snipe.

⁹² "Plainsong" refers to the sung liturgies used in the Catholic and (later) Anglican church. They were unaccompanied by music, free in their rhythms. "Sol-fa" refers to the syllables that were sung when practicing major scales (do, re, me, fa, sol, la, si).

⁹³ woodpecker.

⁹⁴ catarrh.

⁹⁵ looks.

⁹⁶ song-thrush.

The culver,⁹⁷ the stockdove,⁹⁸
 430 With 'peewit' the lapwing,
 The versicles⁹⁹ shall sing.
 The bittern with his bump,¹⁰⁰
 The crane with his trump,
 The swan of Menander,¹⁰¹
 The goose and the gander,
 The duck and the drake,
 Shall watch at this wake;
 The peacock so proud,
 Because his voice is loud,
 440 And hath a glorious tail,
 He shall sing the Grail;¹⁰²
 The owl, that is so foul,
 Must help us to howl;
 The heron so gaunt,
 And the cormorant,
 With the pheasant,
 And the gagging gant,¹⁰³
 And the churlish chough;
 The knot¹⁰⁴ and the ruff;
 450 The barnacle, the buzzard,
 With the wild mallard;
 The divendop¹⁰⁵ to sleep;
 The water-hen to weep;
 The puffin and the teal,
 Money they shall deal
 To poor folk at large,
 That shall be their charge;
 The seamew¹⁰⁶ and the titmouse;
 The woodcock with the long nose;
 460 The throistle¹⁰⁷ with her warbling;
 The starling with her brabbling;
 The rook, with the osprey
 That putteth fishes to a fray;
 And the dainty curlew,
 With the turtle most true.

At this *Placebo*
 We may not well forgo
 The counterung¹⁰⁸ of the coe;¹⁰⁹
 The stork also,
 470 That maketh his nest
 In chimneys to rest;
 Within those walls
 No broken galls¹¹⁰
 May there abide
 Of cuckoldry side,
 Or else philosophy
 Maketh a great lie.
 The ostrich, that will eat
 An horseshoe so great,
 480 In the stead of meat,
 Such fervent heat
 His stomach doth fret;¹¹¹
 He cannot well fly,
 Nor sing tunably,
 Yet at a brayd¹¹²
 He hath well assayed
 To sol-fa above E-la –
Fa, lorell, fa, fa –
Ne quando
 490 *Male cantando*,¹¹³
 The best that we can,
 To make him our bell-man,
 And let him ring the bells;
 He can do nothing else.
 Chanticleer,¹¹⁴ our cock,
 Must tell what is of the clock
 By the astrology
 That he hath naturally
 Conceived and caught,
 500 And was never taught
 By Albumazer¹¹⁵
 The astronomer,

Notes

⁹⁷ dove.

⁹⁸ wild pigeon.

⁹⁹ A series of short verses sung antiphonally between a priest and congregation.

¹⁰⁰ loud call.

¹⁰¹ Following earlier writers, Skelton has here used "Menander" (an ancient Greek comic dramatist) for "Maeander" (a Greek river).

¹⁰² Gradual.

¹⁰³ gannet.

¹⁰⁴ The next two lines refer (in order) to the snipe, sand-piper, and wild goose.

¹⁰⁵ dabchick.

¹⁰⁶ gull.

¹⁰⁷ song-thrush.

¹⁰⁸ counterpoint.

¹⁰⁹ jackdaw.

¹¹⁰ i.e. no friction or irritation. There was a tradition that male storks killed or abandoned their mates if they had been unfaithful.

¹¹¹ digest.

¹¹² suddenly.

¹¹³ Lest ever by singing badly.

¹¹⁴ Chanticleer and Partelot were the names of a rooster and his hen in a wide range of French and English literary texts.

¹¹⁵ Albumazar (787–896), Ptolemy (first–2nd century), and Haly Abenragel (Abū l-Hasan 'Alī ibn Abī l-Rijāl, tenth–eleventh century) were Muslim and, in Ptolemy's case, Greek astronomical authorities. See gazetteer under "Ptolemy."

- Nor by Ptolomy
 Prince of astronomy,
 Nor yet by Haly;
 And yet he croweth daily
 And nightly the tides
 That no man abides,
 With Partlot his hen,
 510 Whom now and then
 He plucketh by the head
 When he doth her tread.
 The bird of Araby,
 That potentially
 May never die
 And yet there is none
 But one alone;
 A phoenix it is
 This hearse that must bless
 520 With aromatic gums¹¹⁶
 That cost great sums,
 The way of thurification¹¹⁷
 To make a fumigation
 Sweet of reflare,¹¹⁸
 And redolent of air,
 This corse for to cense
 With great reverence,
 As patriarch or pope
 In a blacke cope.
 530 Whiles he censeth the hearse,
 He shall sing the verse
*Libera me,*¹¹⁹
 In *de, la, sol, re,*
 Softly bemol¹²⁰
 For my sparrow's soul.
 Pliny¹²¹ showeth all
 In his *Story Natural*,
 What he doth find
 Of the phoenix kind;
 540 Of whose incineration
 There riseth a new creation
 Of the same fashion
- Without alteration,
 Saving that old age
 Is turned into courage
 Of fresh youth again;
 This matter true and plain,
 Plain matter indeed,
 Whoso list to read.
 550 But for the eagle doth fly
 Highest in the sky,
 He shall be the subdean,
 The choir to demean,¹²²
 As provost principal,
 To teach them their Ordinal;¹²³
 Also the noble falcon,
 With the ger-falcon,
 The tarsel gentil,¹²⁴
 They shall mourn soft and still
 560 In their amice¹²⁵ of gray;
 The saker¹²⁶ with them shall say
*Dirige*¹²⁷ for Philip's soul;
 The goshawk shall have a roll
 The choristers to control;
 The lanners and the merlions¹²⁸
 Shall stand in their mourning-gowns;
 The hobby and the musket¹²⁹
 The censers and the cross shall fet;¹³⁰
 The kestrel in all this work
 570 Shall be holy water clerk.
 And now the dark cloudy night
 Chaseth away Phoebus¹³¹ bright,
 Taking his course toward the west;
 God send my sparrow's soul good
 rest!
*Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine!*¹³²
Fa, fa, fa, mi, re,
*A por ta in fe ri,*¹³³
Fa, fa, fa, mi, mi.
*Credo videre bona Domini,*¹³⁴
 580 I pray God, Philip to heaven may fly.
*Domine, exaudi orationem meam,*¹³⁵

Notes

¹¹⁶ perfumes.

¹¹⁷ Burning of incense.

¹¹⁸ odor.

¹¹⁹ "Deliver me" (opening of the Responsory).

¹²⁰ An obsolete name for the musical note b-flat.

¹²¹ Pliny the Elder, Roman author of the *Natural History*.

¹²² conduct.

¹²³ i.e. the order of service in church.

¹²⁴ Greenland falcon and male peregrine falcon.

¹²⁵ hood.

¹²⁶ lanner falcon.

¹²⁷ "Direct [my steps]."

¹²⁸ falcons and merlins.

¹²⁹ falcon and male sparrowhawk.

¹³⁰ i.e. shall fetch the incense censer and cross.

¹³¹ See gazetteer.

¹³² "Grant them eternal rest, O Lord!"

¹³³ "From the gates of hell."

¹³⁴ "I had thought to see the goodness of the Lord" (Psalm 26:13, Vulgate).

¹³⁵ "Lord, hear my prayer" (Psalm 102:2, Vulgate).

- To heaven he shall, from heaven he
came.
*Do mi nus vo bis cum!*¹³⁶
Of all good prayers God send him
some!
- Oremus,*
Deus, cui proprium est misereri et
*parcere,*¹³⁷
- On Philip's soul have pity!
- For he was a pretty cock,
And came of a gentle stock,
590 And wrapped in a maiden's smock,
And cherished full daintily,
Till cruel fate made him to die:
Alas, for doleful destiny!
But whereto should I
Longer mourn or cry?
To Jupiter I call,
Of heaven imperial,
That Philip may fly
Above the starry sky,
600 To tread the pretty wren
That is our Lady's hen.¹³⁸
Amen, amen, amen!
Yet one thing is behind,
That now cometh to mind:
An epitaph I would have
For Philip's grave.
But for I am a maid,
Timorous, half afraid,
That never yet assayed
610 Of Helicon's¹³⁹ well,
Where the Muses dwell;
Though I can read and spell,
Recount, report, and tell
Of the *Tales of Canterbury*¹⁴⁰
Some sad stories, some merry;
- As Palamon and Arcet,
Duke Theseus, and Parlete;
And of the Wife of Bath,¹⁴¹
That worketh much scathe¹⁴²
620 When her tale is told
Among housewives bold,
How she controlled
Her husbands as she would,
And them to despise
In the homeliest wise,
Bring other wives in thought
Their husbands to set at nought:
And though that read have I
Of Gawain, and Sir Guy,¹⁴³
630 And tell can a great piece
Of the Golden Fleece,
How Jason it won,
Like a valiant man;
Of Arthur's Round Table,
With his knights commendable,
And Dame Gaynour, his queen
Was somewhat wanton, I ween;¹⁴⁴
How Sir Lancelot de Lake
Many a spear brake
640 For his lady's sake;
Of Tristram, and King Mark,
And all the whole work
Of Belle Isold his wife,
For whom was much strife;
Some say she was light,¹⁴⁵
And made her husband knight
Of the common hall,
That cuckolds men call;
And of Sir Lybius,
650 Named Dysconius;
Of *Quater Fylz Amund*,
And how they were summoned
To Rome, to Charlemagne,

Notes

¹³⁶ "The Lord be with you."

¹³⁷ "O God, whose property it is to be merciful and to spare."

¹³⁸ By tradition, the wren was the bird associated with the Virgin Mary.

¹³⁹ See gazetteer.

¹⁴⁰ Geoffrey Chaucer (1343–1400?) is the best-known and most important medieval English poet; *The Canterbury Tales* is one of his most important works.

¹⁴¹ Characters in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.

¹⁴² harm.

¹⁴³ The next 27 lines recount well-known characters from Arthurian and chivalric literature: Gawain was one of

Arthur's knights; Guy of Warwick was a legendary English knight; Jason was a classical hero who, with the Argonauts, won the Golden Fleece; "Gaynour" is Arthur's Queen Guinevere, who fell in love with Lancelot; Tristan is the lover of Queen Isolde, wife of King Mark of Cornwall, in one of the oldest and most widely retold chivalric legends; Lybius Disconius ("the Fair Unknown") was the hero of a chivalric romance; *The Four Sons of Aymon* was a French romance that William Caxton translated into English which featured a horse named Bayard.

¹⁴⁴ believe.

¹⁴⁵ unfaithful.

- Upon a great pain,
 And how they rode each one
 On Bayard Mountalbon;
 Men see him now and then
 In the forest of Arden.
 What though I can frame
 660 The stories by name
 Of Judas Maccabeus,¹⁴⁶
 And of Caesar Julius;
 And of the love between
 Paris and Vienne;
 And of the duke Hannibal,
 That made the Romans all
 Fordread and to quake;
 How Scipion did wake
 The city of Carthage,
 670 Which by his merciful rage
 He beat down to the ground:
 And though I can expound
 Of Hector of Troy
 That was all their joy,
 Whom Achilles slew,
 Wherefore all Troy did rue;
 And of the love so hot
 That made Troilus to dote
 Upon fair Cresseid;
 680 And what they wrote and said,
 And of their wanton wills,
 Pandar bare the bills¹⁴⁷
 From one to the other;
 His master's love to further,
 Sometime a precious thing,
 A brooch or else a ring,
 From her to him again;
 Sometime a pretty chain,
 Or a bracelet of her hair,
 690 Prayed Troilus for to wear
 That token for her sake;
 How heartily he did it take
 And much thereof did make;
 And all that was in vain,
 For she did but feign;
 The story telleth plain,
 He could not obtain
 Though his father were a king;
 Yet there was a thing
 700 That made the male to wring;¹⁴⁸
 She made him to sing
 The song of lover's lay;
 Musing night and day,
 Mourning all alone,
 Comfort had he none
 For she was quite gone;
 Thus in conclusion,
 She brought him in abuson;
 In earnest and in game
 710 She was much to blame;
 Disparaged is her fame
 And blemished is her name,
 In manner half with shame;
 Troilus also hath lost
 On her much love and cost,
 And now must kiss the post;¹⁴⁹
 Pandar, that went between,
 Hath won nothing, I ween,
 But light for summer green;
 720 Yet for a special laud
 He is named Troilus' bawd;
 Of that name he is sure
 Whiles the world shall 'dure:
 Though I remember the fable
 Of Penelope¹⁵⁰ most stable,
 To her husband most true,
 Yet long-time she ne knew
 Whether he were alive or dead;
 Her wit stood her in stead
 730 That she was true and just,
 For any bodily lust,
 To Ulysses her make,
 And never would him forsake.
 Of Marcus Marcellus¹⁵¹
 A process I could tell us;

Notes

¹⁴⁶ Skelton now turns to a catalogue of mainly classical and biblical heroes. Judas Maccabeus was a Jewish hero in 2 Maccabees; Paris and Vienne are the hero and heroine of a medieval romance; Hannibal was the Carthaginian general who fought the Romans in the Second Punic War (218–201 BCE); Scipio Aemilianus was the Roman general who destroyed Carthage in the Third Punic War (146 BCE); for Hector and Achilles, see the gazetteer; Troilus and Cressida were lovers in the Trojan War and the subjects of a poem by

Chaucer; Pandarus was their go-between and the origin of the term "pander."

¹⁴⁷ i.e. letters.

¹⁴⁸ i.e. caused him pain.

¹⁴⁹ i.e. kiss the post of the door that has been shut in his face.

¹⁵⁰ Faithful wife of Odysseus (Ulysses) in the *Odyssey* (see gazetteer).

¹⁵¹ Roman conqueror of Syracuse in the Second Punic War.

- And of Antiochus,¹⁵²
 And of Josephus¹⁵³
De Antiquitatibus;
 And of Mardocheus,¹⁵⁴
 740 And of great Ahasuerus,
 And of Vesca his queen,
 Whom he forsook with teen,¹⁵⁵
 And of Esther his other wife,
 With whom he led a pleasant life;
 Of King Alexander;¹⁵⁶
 And of King Evander¹⁵⁷
 And of Porsena the great,¹⁵⁸
 That made the Romans to sweat:
 Though I have enrolled
 750 A thousand new and old
 Of these historious tales,
 To fill budgets and males¹⁵⁹
 With books that I have read,
 Yet I am nothing sped,
 And can but little skill
 Of Ovid¹⁶⁰ or Virgil,
 Or of Plutarch,
 Or Francis Petrarch,
 Alcaeus or Sappho,
 760 Or such other poets mo,
 As Linus and Homerus,
 Euphorion and Theocritus,
 Anacreon and Arion,
 Sophocles and Philemon,
 Pindarus and Simonides,
 Philistion and Pherecydes;
 These poets of ancient,
 They are too diffuse for me:
 For, as I tofore have said,
 770 I am but a young maid,
- And cannot in effect
 My style as yet direct
 With English words elect;
 Our natural tongue is rude,¹⁶¹
 And hard to be ennewed¹⁶²
 With polished terms lusty;
 Our language is so rusty,
 So cankered, and so full
 Of frowards,¹⁶³ and so dull,
 780 That if I would apply
 To write ornately,
 I wot not where to find
 Terms to serve my mind.
 Gower's¹⁶⁴ English is old
 And of no value told;
 His matter is worth gold,
 And worthy to be enrolled.
 In Chaucer I am sped,
 His tales I have read;
 790 His matter is delectable,
 Solacious, and commendable;
 His English well allowed,
 So as it is enpowered,¹⁶⁵
 For as it is employed,
 There is no English void,
 At those days much commended;
 And now men would have amended
 His English wherewith they bark,
 And mar all they work;
 800 Chaucer, that famous clerk,
 His terms were not dark,
 But pleasant, easy, and plain;
 No word he wrote in vain.
 Also John Lydgate¹⁶⁶
 Writeth after an higher rate;

Notes

¹⁵² Name of several of the kings in the Seleucid empire that succeeded Alexander the Great.

¹⁵³ Flavius Josephus, a Jewish historian in the Roman empire, who wrote a history of Jewish culture called *Antiquities of the Jews* (ca. 94 CE), mentioned below.

¹⁵⁴ i.e. Mordecai, the hero of the Book of Esther in the Hebrew Bible; he enabled his orphaned cousin Esther to marry King Ahasuerus of Persia.

¹⁵⁵ suffering.

¹⁵⁶ Alexander the Great (see gazetteer).

¹⁵⁷ An early king of what later became the city of Rome in Virgil's *Aeneid* (see gazetteer).

¹⁵⁸ An ancient Italian king who supported the Roman Tarquin monarchs.

¹⁵⁹ i.e. bags and wallets.

¹⁶⁰ There follows a catalogue of Greek, Roman, and Italian poets, some perhaps legendary. For Ovid, Virgil, Plutarch, Petrarch, and Homer, see gazetteer.

¹⁶¹ See Introduction for a discussion of the early modern debates about whether English could be a literary language. Skelton comments specifically on the English of the poets he mentions below.

¹⁶² restored.

¹⁶³ i.e. inelegant words and grammar.

¹⁶⁴ A fourteenth-century English poet, best known for the *Confessio Amantis*.

¹⁶⁵ improved.

¹⁶⁶ Fifteenth-century English poet reputed to be the dullest writer in the language, author of the 36,000-line poem, *The Fall of Princes*.

It is diffuse to find
 The sentence¹⁶⁷ of his mind,
 Yet writeth he in his kind,
 810 No man that can amend
 Those matters that he hath penned;
 Yet some men find a fault,
 And say he writeth too haut.¹⁶⁸
 Wherefore hold me excused
 If I have not well perused
 Mine English half abused;
 Though it be refused,
 In worth I shall it take,
 And fewer words make.
 But, for my sparrow's sake,
 820 Yet as a woman may,
 My wit I shall assay
 An epitaph to write
 In Latin plain and light,
 Whereof the elegy
 Followeth by and by.

Flos volucrum formose, vale!
Philippe, sub isto
Marmore iam recubas,
Qui mihi carus eras.
 830 *Semper erunt nitido*
Radiantia sidera cælo;
Impressusque meo
*Pectore semper eris.*¹⁶⁹
Per me laurigerum
Britanum Skeltonida vatem
Haec cecinisse licet
Ficta sub imagine texta.
Cuius eris volucris,
Prestanti corpore virgo:
 840 *Candida Nais erat,*
Formosior ista Joanna est:
Docta Corinna fuit,
Sed magis ista sapit.
*Bien men souvient.*¹⁷⁰

The Commendations

Beati im ma cu la ti in via,
*O gloriosa femina!*¹⁷¹
 Now mine whole imagination
 And studious meditation
 Is to take this commendation
 850 In this consideration;
 And under patient toleration
 Of that most goodly maid
 That *Placebo* hath said,
 And for her sparrow prayed
 In lamentable wise.
 Now will I enterprise,
 Through the grace divine
 Of the Muses nine,
 Her beauty to commend,
 860 If *Arethusa*¹⁷² will send
 Me influence to indite,
 And with my pen to write;
 If *Apollo* will promise
 Melodiously it to devise
 His tunable harp strings
 With harmony that sings
 Of princes and of kings
 And of all pleasant things,
 Of lust¹⁷³ and of delight,
 870 Through his godly might;
 To whom be the laud ascribed
 That my pen hath imbibed
 With the aureate drops,
 As verily my hope is,
 Of *Tagus*, that golden flood,¹⁷⁴
 That passeth all earthly good;
 And as that flood doth pass
 All floods that ever was
 With his golden sands,
 880 Whoso that understands
Cosmography, and the streams,
 And the floods in strange reams,¹⁷⁵

Notes

¹⁶⁷ meaning.

¹⁶⁸ i.e. in too lofty a style.

¹⁶⁹ "Farewell, sweet bird. Philip, beneath that marble you lie; you who were dear to me. So long as the stars shine in the sky will your image be graven on my heart."

¹⁷⁰ "By me Skelton, the poet laureate of Britain, these inventions could be sung under an assumed likeness. She whose pet you were was a virgin of great beauty: the naiad was beautiful, but Jane is more beautiful; Corinna was learned, but Jane knows more. I remember it well."

¹⁷¹ "Blessed are the unspotted in the way, O glorious woman!" The first line comes from the psalm used in the *Commendations of the Soul*.

¹⁷² A classical Greek nymph who was changed into a river in order to escape the river god *Alpheus*. Skelton's use of her as a Muse echoes Virgil's *Eclogues* 10.

¹⁷³ i.e. pleasure. This word did not necessarily have erotic or negative connotations in this period.

¹⁷⁴ A river in Portugal where people have panned for gold since ancient times.

¹⁷⁵ i.e. realms.

- Right so she doth exceed
 All other of whom we read,
 Whose fame by me shall spread
 Into Persia and Mede,¹⁷⁶
 From Britain's Albion
 To the Tower of Babylon.
 I trust it is no shame,
 890 And no man will me blame,
 Though I register her name
 In the court of Fame;
 For this most goodly flower,
 This blossom of fresh colour,
 So Jupiter me succour,
 She flourisheth new and new
 In beauty and virtue.
Hac claritate gemina
O gloriosa femina,
 900 *Retribue servo tuo, vivifica me!*
*Labia mea laudabunt te.*¹⁷⁷
 But enforced am I
 Openly to ascry¹⁷⁸
 And to make an outcry
 Against odious Envy,
 That evermore will lie
 And say cursedly;
 With his lither¹⁷⁹ eye,
 And cheeks dry;
 910 With visage wan,
 As swart¹⁸⁰ as tan;
 His bones creak,
 Lean as a rake;
 His gums rusty
 Are full unlusty;
 His heart withal
 Bitter as gall;
 His liver, his lung
 With anger is wrung;
 920 His serpent's tongue
 That many one hath stung;
 He frowneth ever;
 He laugheth never,
 Even nor morrow,
 But other men's sorrow
 Causeth him to grin
 And rejoice therein;
- No sleep can him catch,
 But ever doth watch,
 930 He is so beat¹⁸¹
 With malice, and fret
 With anger and ire,
 His foul desire
 Will suffer no sleep
 In his head to creep;
 His foul semblant¹⁸²
 All displeasant;
 When other are glad,
 Then is he sad,
 940 Frantic and mad;
 His tongue never still
 For to say ill,
 Writhing and wringing,
 Biting and stinging;
 And thus this elf
 Consumeth himself,
 Himself doth slo
 With pain and woe.
 This false Envy
 950 Saith that I
 Use great folly
 For to indite,
 And for to write,
 And spend my time
 In prose and rhyme,
 For to express
 The nobleness
 Of my mistress,
 That causeth me
 960 Studious to be
 To make a relation
 Of her commendation;
 And there again
 Envy doth complain,
 And hath disdain;
 But yet certain
 I will be plain,
 And my style dress
 To this process.
 970 Now Phoebus me ken¹⁸³
 To sharp my pen,
 And lead my fist

Notes

¹⁷⁶ A region in northern Iran.

¹⁷⁷ "O doubly renowned, O glorious woman! Reward your servant, enliven me! My lips shall praise you." The Latin passages from here on are adapted from the Vulgate Psalms.

¹⁷⁸ exclaim.

¹⁷⁹ wicked.

¹⁸⁰ dark.

¹⁸¹ assailed.

¹⁸² appearance and/or disposition.

¹⁸³ teach.

As him best list,
 That I may say
 Honour alway
 Of womankind!
 Truth doth me bind
 And loyalty
 Ever to be
 980 Their true beadle¹⁸⁴
 To write and tell
 How women excel
 In nobleness;
 As my mistress,
 Of whom I think
 With pen and ink
 For to compile
 Some goodly style;
 For this most goodly flower,
 990 This blossom of fresh colour,
 So Jupiter me succour,
 She flourisheth new and new
 In beauty and virtue:
Hac claritate gemina,
O gloriosa femina,
Legem pone mihi, domina, in viam
justificationem tuarum!
Quemadmodum desiderat cervus
*ad fontes aquarum.*¹⁸⁵
 How shall I report
 All the goodly sort
 1000 Of her features clear,
 That hath none earthly peer?
 Her favour of her face
 Ennewed all with grace,
 Comfort, pleasure, and solace.
 Mine heart doth so embrace,
 And so hath ravished me
 Her to behold and see,
 That in words plain
 I cannot me refrain
 1010 To look on her again.
 Alas, what should I feign?
 It were a pleasant pain¹⁸⁶

With her aye to remain.
 Her eyen grey and steep¹⁸⁷
 Causeth mine heart to leap;
 With her brows bent
 She may well represent
 Fair Lucrece,¹⁸⁸ as I ween,
 Or else fair Polixene,
 1020 Or else Calliope,
 Or else Penelope;
 For this most goodly flower,
 This blossom of fresh colour,
 So Jupiter me succour,
 She flourisheth new and new
 In beauty and virtue:
Hac claritate gemina,
O gloriosa femina,
Memor esto verbi tui servo tuo!
 1030 *Servus tuus sum ego.*¹⁸⁹
 The Indy sapphire blue
 Her veins doth ennew;
 The orient pearl so clear,
 The whiteness of her leer;¹⁹⁰
 Her lusty ruby ruds¹⁹¹
 Resemble the rose buds;
 Her lips soft and merry
 Enbloomed like the cherry,
 It were an heavenly bliss
 1040 Her sugared mouth to kiss.
 Her Beauty to augment,
 Dame Nature hath her lent
 A wart upon her cheek,
 Whoso list to seek
 In her visage a scar
 That seemeth from afar
 Like to the radiant star,
 All with favour fret,
 So properly it is set:
 1050 She is the violet,
 The daisy delectable,
 The columbine commendable
 The jelofer¹⁹² amiable;
 This most goodly flower,

Notes

¹⁸⁴ herald.

¹⁸⁵ "Provide me with the rule, Lady, to justify your ways. As the hart pants for the fountains of water."

¹⁸⁶ labor.

¹⁸⁷ shining.

¹⁸⁸ Lucrece, Polyxena, and Penelope were classical ideals of modesty, steadfastness, and beauty. Calliope was the Muse of epic poetry.

¹⁸⁹ "Remember your word to your servant. I am your servant."

¹⁹⁰ complexion.

¹⁹¹ cheeks.

¹⁹² gillyflower.

This blossom of fresh colour,
 So Jupiter me succour,
 She flourisheth new and new
 In beauty and virtue:
Hac claritate gemina,
 1060 *O gloriosa femina,*
Bonitatem fecisti cum servo tuo,
domina,
*Et ex precordiis sonant preconia.*¹⁹³
 And when I perceived
 Her wart and conceived,
 It cannot be denied
 But it was well conveyed,
 And set so womanly,
 And nothing wantonly,
 But right conveniently,
 1070 And full congruently,
 As Nature could devise,
 In most goodly wise.
 Whose list behold,
 It maketh lovers bold
 To her to sue for grace,
 Her favour to purchase.
 The scar upon her chin
 Enhatched on her fair skin,
 Whiter than the swan,
 1080 It would make any man
 To forget deadly sin
 Her favour to win;
 For this most goodly flower,
 This blossom of fresh colour,
 So Jupiter me succour,
 She flourisheth new and new
 In beauty and virtue:
Hac claritate gemina,
O gloriosa femina,
 1090 *Defecit in salutare tuum anima mea;*
Quid petis filio, mater dulcissima? Ba
*ba!*¹⁹⁴

Soft, and make no din,
 For now I will begin
 To have in remembrance
 Her goodly dalliance,
 And her goodly pastance:¹⁹⁵

So sad¹⁹⁶ and demure,
 Behaving her so sure,
 With words of pleasure
 1100 She would make to the lure
 And any man convert
 To give her his whole heart.
 She made me sore amazed
 Upon her when I gazed,
 Methought mine heart was crazed,
 My eyen were so dazed;
 For this most goodly flower,
 This blossom of fresh colour,
 So Jupiter me succour,
 1110 She flourisheth new and new
 In beauty and virtue:
Hac claritate gemina,
O gloriosa femina,
Quomodo dilexi legem tuam, domina!
*Recedant vetera, nova sunt omnia.*¹⁹⁷
 And to amend her tale,
 When she list to avail,
 And with her fingers small,
 And hands soft as silk,
 1120 Whiter than milk,
 That are so quickly veined,
 Wherewith my hand she strained,
 Lord, how I was pained!
 Unneth I me refrained,
 How she me had reclaimed,
 And me to her retained,
 Embracing therewithall
 Her goodly middle small
 With sides long and straight;
 1130 To tell you what conceit
 I had then in a trice,
 The matter were too nice,¹⁹⁸
 And yet there was no vice,
 Nor yet no villainy,
 But only fantasy;
 For this most goodly flower,
 This blossom of fresh colour,
 So Jupiter me succour,
 She flourisheth new and new
 1140 In beauty and virtue:

Notes

¹⁹³ “You have dealt generously with your servant, Lady, and from his heart your praises sound.”

¹⁹⁴ “My soul grows weak for your salvation; what do you seek for your son, sweetest mother?”

¹⁹⁵ recreation.

¹⁹⁶ steadfast.

¹⁹⁷ “O how I love your law, Lady! Old ways are fading away, all things are made new.”

¹⁹⁸ Skelton has deliberately used a word that can mean many things in this context: “complex,” “delicate,” and “lustful” are all possible meanings for the word (though the speaker denies the last).

- Hac claritate gemina,
O gloriosa femina,
Iniquos odio habui!
Non calumnientur me superbi.*¹⁹⁹
But whereto should I note
How often did I toot²⁰⁰
Upon her pretty foot?
It razed mine heart root
To see her tread the ground
1150 With heels short and round.
She is plainly express
Egeria, the goddess,²⁰¹
And like to her image,
Emportured²⁰² with courage,
A lover's pilgrimage.
There is no beast savage,
Ne no tiger so wood,
But she would change his mood,
Such relucant²⁰³ grace
1160 Is formed in her face;
For this most goodly flower,
This blossom of fresh colour,
So Jupiter me succour,
She flourisheth new and new
In beauty and virtue:
*Hac claritate gemina
O gloriosa femina,
Mirabilia testimonia tua!
Sicut novellae plantationes in juventute
sua.*²⁰⁴
- 1170 So goodly as she dresses,
So properly she presses
The bright golden tresses
Of her hair so fine,
Like Phoebus' beams shine.
Whereto should I disclose
The gartering of her hose?
It is for to suppose
How that she can wear
Gorgeously her gear;
1180 Her fresh habiliments
With other implements
- To serve for all intents,
Like Dame Flora,²⁰⁵ queen
Of lusty summer green;
For this most goodly flower,
This blossom of fresh colour,
So Jupiter me succour,
She flourisheth new and new
In beauty and virtue:
1190 *Hac claritate gemina,
O gloriosa femina,
Clamavi toto corde, exaudi me!
Misericordia tua magna est super me.*²⁰⁶
Her kirtle²⁰⁷ so goodly laced,
And under that is braced
Such pleasures that I may
Neither write nor say;
Yet though I write not with ink,
No man can let²⁰⁸ me think,
1200 For thought hath liberty,
Thought is frank and free;
To think a merry thought
It cost me little or nought.
Would God mine homely style
Were polished with the file
Of Cicero's²⁰⁹ eloquence,
To praise her excellence!
For this most goodly flower,
This blossom of fresh colour,
1210 So Jupiter me succour,
She flourisheth new and new
In beauty and virtue:
*Hac claritate gemina,
O gloriosa femina,
Principes persecuti sunt me gratis!
Omnibus consideratis,
Paradisus voluptatis
Hec virgo est dulcissima.*²¹⁰
My pen it is unable,
1220 My hand it is unstable,
My reason rude and dull
To praise her at the full;
Goodly Mistress Jane,

Notes

¹⁹⁹ "I have hated the unjust! Let not the proud falsely accuse me."

²⁰⁰ gaze.

²⁰¹ An ancient Roman nymph who married the king of Rome and was famous for her wise advice to him.

²⁰² Meaning unknown.

²⁰³ shining.

²⁰⁴ "Wonderful are your testimonies! As plants flourish in their youth."

²⁰⁵ Roman goddess of flowers.

²⁰⁶ "I have cried with my whole heart, hear me! Great is your mercy to me."

²⁰⁷ gown.

²⁰⁸ prevent.

²⁰⁹ See gazetteer.

²¹⁰ "Princes have persecuted me freely. All things considered, this sweetest of girls is a paradise of delights."

²¹¹ i.e. Athena.

