

THE DISGUISED AT
HERTFORD

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Lydgate's Disguising at Hertford Castle
by Derek Forbes with Foreword by Glynne
Wickham First published by Blot Publish-
ing, Pulborough, 1998. Pp. xiv + 82, f'piece,
and 4 plate ills. Decorated and laminated
card cover. ISBN 1 900929 03 1. Retail
price in 2000 six pounds GBP.

*PDF created by pdfbooks.co.za

Copies of the book are available from Blot Publishing, 8 Chanctonbury, Ashington, West Sussex, RH20 3QE, UK. Telephone: +44 (0)1903 893806 Email: info@blot.co.uk; Web site: <http://www.blot.co.uk>. or from the Society for Theatre Research, c/o The Theatre Museum, 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 disguising : of the
Rude upplandisse 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, weche lyke no
thing weel. Nowe in the vigyle of this nuwe
yeere Certayne sweynes, ful [froward of ther
chere], Of entent comen, [fallen on ther kne],
For to compleyne vn to yuoure 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 wood-
nesse 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 el-
las, Lyke as theos hynes, here stonde 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.... Wyle the while ellas that
he was borne. For Obbe, the Reeve, that

goother heere al to forne, [30] He pleynethe
sore, his mariage is not meete, For his wyff,
Beautyce Bittersweete, Cast vpon him an
houghly 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 dolled ale, to make hir
throthe 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
soutethe 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 ly-
tel 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 hooode.

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, pleyuely 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 Au-
dyence, 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 wit-
nesse, [80] Wordes, strookes vnhappe, and
14

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 of-
fence 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 wynne 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 oft 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 feyth-
fully. 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 hevvy of his cheer,
Compleynethe on Phelyce his wyff the wa-
furer 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 ratle 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 proteccyou.

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 modelye, 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 comp-
leynt 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 chyding 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 hous-
bandes wynne heven, [170] Mauge 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 as-
sayes. Ther pacyence was buryed long agoo,
Gresyldes story recordethe plainly soo.

It longethe to vs to clappen as a mylle,
No counseyle keepe, but the trouth oute

telle. We beo not borne by hevenly influence Of oure nature to keepe vs in sy-
lence. [180] For this is no doute, eevery prudent wyff Hathe redy aunswere in al suche
maner stryff, Thoughe 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 Iackys
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 successy-

oun 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 re-
gallye, And of his grace susteene oure par-
tye, Requering the statuyt of olde antiquy-

tee That in youre tyme it may confermed
bee.

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

This noble Prynce, moost royal of es-
tate, Having an eyeghe to this mortal de-
bate, 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 examyna-
cyoun 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 knobbes,
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,
witnessse of hir kuynde. Wher fore the Kyng
wol al this next 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: la-
cuna made up from Stow 7 fallen on ther
kne: lacuna made up from Stow 13 im-
portable = unbearable 16 dotage = feeble-
mindedness 20 woodnesse = madness 24 Re-

becke = fiddle; ellas = alas! 25 stage direc-
tion - 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
37

bloode = to chafe his blood with 54 mety-
erde = meteyard or yardstick 55 stage direc-
tion - demonstrando pictaciarium 57 preost
= priest 60 rigge = back 62 reheete = at-
tack, 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; man-

ase = menace 79 Mabye = 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 di-
rection - 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 = sur-
render 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 = some-
times 124 Thikker = more stoutly 126 wa-
furer = 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; chaump-
cloos = tilting-field 167 Iupart = 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 Pour-
posithe 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