

John Skelton's Phyllyp Sparowe as satire: A revaluation

by

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INTRODUCTION: PHYLLYP SPAROWE AND THE CRITICS

In his 1950 Aldeburgh Lecture, E. M. Forster calls Phyllyp Sparowe the "pleasantest [poem] Skelton ever wrote . . . but," Forster continues, "there is an uncertainty of touch about it which we find hard to discount. Is he being humorous? Undoubtedly, but where are we supposed to laugh? Is he being serious? If so, where and how much?"¹ Forster himself offers no answers to these questions because he believes the poem, rather than expressing a deliberate tension between the humorous and the serious, merely reflects the uncertainty Skelton found in the world around him. "Skelton," he says, "belongs to an age of break-up . . . he belongs to a period when England was trying to find herself. . . . The solidity of the middle ages was giving way beneath his feet, and he did not know the Elizabethan age was coming." Though Forster draws no direct parallel between the cause for Skelton's "uncertain touch" and his purpose in writing Phyllyp Sparowe, he nevertheless implicitly admits the possibility of a serious theme underlying the poem's lighthearted facade, and he suggests that this theme might have a basis in the socio-cultural milieu in which Skelton lived.

Forster's suggestion is significant because, traditionally, critics have minimized, at times overtly denied, the presence of such themes in the poem. From the moment Alexander Barclay listed Skelton among those "relygious men" who "abuseth their relygion" because he dared allow Jane Scrope to recite the Office for the Dead for her deceased pet and labeled him as one of those "wylde people" who "love . . . wantonness"² because

he dared celebrate her maiden charms in an honest and open way, critics have virtually ignored the historical context in which Phyllyp Sparowe was written. They have concentrated instead on a kind of biographical criticism which does little more than explore the personal relationship which existed between the poet and young Jane as it is revealed in the poem. Like Barclay, these critics focus only on interpreting the surface level of the poem--that dramatic situation which is the starting point of all poems. The very fact that Skelton's acquaintance with Jane Scrope can be so easily ascertained and that Phyllyp Sparowe is an actual response to her request for an elegy to her pet has led many critics to assume Skelton simply meant the poem to express his sympathy with the girl's predicament and his personal attraction to her. Generally, each of these purposes is neatly ascribed to its own section of the poem: the "Lamentation," which illustrates Jane's sorrows, and the "Commendations," which celebrates her beauty. Such is the attitude of Edmund Blunden who summarizes Phyllyp Sparowe as a poem which "combines a dirge for a pet with a song in honor of the bird's owner."³ This bipartite analysis often leads critics to agree with the conclusion John M. Berdan reached in 1920, when he stated that there is "no organic relation" between Jane's "dramatic monologue" and Skelton's "commendation of the suppositious author of the first part."⁴

More recently, Ian Gordon went a step further when he said, "Phyllyp Sparowe is best regarded as two related poems" because the two parts are so different "in mood and manner" that "they form a sequel rather than a continuation."⁵ The difficulty, for these critics, lies in the sudden shift in point of view from Jane in the first part of the poem to a persona called Skelton in the second. Though all concede that this shift

allows Skelton to end on a "happy impulse," as Blunden describes the "Commendations" (p. 21), none satisfactorily explain Skelton's technique within the narrative framework of the poem as they interpret it. For them, the poem, though it is a "pretty" one, is at best a "rambling affair."⁶ Their discussions of Phyllyp Sparowe often imply a belief that Skelton should have woven his themes of love and sympathy together more closely than he did.

Two other critics, however, argue that the unity of Phyllyp Sparowe stems from that very contrast which so disturbs their colleagues. They also subscribe to the theory that Skelton's only purpose was to celebrate his love for Jane.

For J. Swart, Phyllyp Sparowe is a "playful piece of ingenuity" in which the poet first writes the "Lamentation" in a "fictitious context, namely that of the owner of the bird," and then writes the "Commendations" in his own voice. There, Swart says, Skelton makes Jane "his bird" and proceeds to "sing her praises." By comparing Jane to "a lovable little bird to be petted and admired," Skelton creates a "parallelism between the two parts of the poem," and that parallelism, he says, holds Phyllyp Sparowe together.⁷

The "starting point" of the poem, Swart believes, is "obviously to be found in St. Matthew, X.29: 'Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.'" This verse, Swart contends, provides "justification" for the liturgical services offered for Phyllyp. Reacting to critics who have called Skelton's use of the liturgy sacrilegious, Swart says: "Whether or not sparrows are supposed to have souls is immaterial, since the formal phrases reflect

the sincere grief of Jane Scrope whose pet the bird was" (p. 161). If Matthew X is the basis for the "Lamentation," Swart argues, Skelton's substitution of Jane's commendation for Phyllyp's is logical, since it makes the second part of the poem also reflect that gospel. In particular, it brings to mind this phrase: "Ye are of more value than many sparrows." Swart believes that in light of this parallel the "commendation . . . might be argued as made for the girl's soul, much as masses can be read for the deliverance of the soul of one not yet departed. . . . The poem is for Philip and for Jane; may the Lord give them and all his creatures peace at the end of their days" (p. 162).

Swart continues his analysis by claiming that given this "general framework" the poem should be read as fundamentally serious and dignified, and the "lighter, more realistic even satiric passages" should be interpreted as nothing more than techniques Skelton used "to maintain the general impression of high style which is necessary if the poem is to have its true effect." Significantly, in order to justify his own "biographical" theory through which he interprets Skelton's motives in writing Phyllyp Sparowe as purely personal, Swart must find excuses to dismiss those aspects of the poem which exhibit that "uncertainty of touch" Forster felt was an integral part of the poem. It is more interesting still that the "general framework" of Matthew X.²⁹ which Swart uses as the basis of his argument for unity in the poem is not manifested in the poem itself. The reference to the sparrow comes from two main sources: primarily from the occasion of the poem in reality, Phyllyp's unfortunate demise, and secondarily from the opening lines of Catullus' Luctus in Morte Passeris.⁸

There are no references which can convincingly be linked to the Gospel of St. Matthew; so, Swart's arguments for the unity of the poem on the basis of his strained and narrow thematic interpretation seem based on tenuous grounds. By limiting his analysis to the dramatic situation which inspired the poem initially, Swart sacrifices a great deal of the poem's meaning in order to justify his own thesis.

A more plausible argument for the artistic unity of Phyllyp Sparowe is made by Stanley Fish in his study, John Skelton's Poetry. Fish argues quite convincingly that Phyllyp Sparowe is a "comparative study of innocence and experience, built around the contrasting reactions of its two personae to a single event, the death of its title figure."⁹ Fish links the difference in style, mood, and tone between the "Lamentation" and the "Commendations" to a deliberate rhetorical strategy through which the poet first discovers his love for Jane and then realizes the futility of that love. The stumbling block to the relationship is Jane's immaturity: that simplicity which is so poignantly illustrated in her sincere lament and so pointedly contrasted with the poet's worldliness and sophistication which is revealed (Fish says) in Skelton's "interminable compliment" to her.

Of all the biographical criticism written on Phyllyp Sparowe, Fish's study seems the most complete, the one most reliant on the text for support. But his analysis never touches on, and therefore does not account for, those elements in the poem which are obvious allusions to the world Skelton lived in. Fish never discusses matters outside the realm of Skelton's romantic interest in Jane, and it is this aspect of Phyllyp Sparowe which has not yet been given adequate treatment, as was suggested earlier.

E. M. Forster was not the only critic to suggest the presence of

social themes in Phyllyp Sparowe. As early as 1844 a reader commented that the poem is "illustrative of clerical and conventual manners."¹⁰ More recently Maurice Pollet called the poem a "brilliant clerical parody which is fundamentally burlesque."¹¹ A number of other critics, usually after noting the disparity between the subject matter and the form of the poem (a Requiem for a pet does seem excessive) have identified burlesque, parodic, and even satiric elements in Phyllyp Sparowe.¹² Yet none has explained the significance of these elements to the poem as a whole. In fact, the satiric passages, these critics say, fragment the poem because they do not contribute to Skelton's primary concern, which is, in their estimations, his sympathy for Jane. It seems, however, that those critics who admit to hints of mockery or satire in Phyllyp Sparowe and at the same time refuse to look beyond a straightforward narrative interpretation of the poem are, in reality, reacting to that unmistakable sense of "uncertainty" Forster mentioned.

Other critics, however, explicitly deny that Phyllyp Sparowe is either satiric or parodic.¹³ The only full-length study on Skelton as satirist specifically eliminates Phyllyp Sparowe from the ranks of satire. A. R. Heiserman says in Skelton and Satire that the poem appears at "first glance" to be satire. But, he continues, "the very presence of phrases from the Mass expresses the depth of a well bred young lady's grief. Poet and reader smile and perhaps sympathize with this grief. But sweet young Jane hardly elicits our indignation and even the most cursory reading shows that the Rev. John Skelton is not using Jane to parody the Mass. Phyllyp Sparowe, then, attacks nothing . . . it is comedy."¹⁴

Heiserman, too, it seems, reacts only to one level of the poem. All

he sees is Skelton's sympathy for Jane, and therefore he only responds to that aspect of the poem which is indeed comedy, in the sense of the genre, not merely the mood. Part of the reason behind Heiserman's response is his assumption that satire must be a direct, aggressive attack. But satire can also be indirect and gentle. Its tone can be poignant rather than vicious, and its targets need not always be the main subjects of the work.

In this thesis I propose that once interpretation of Phyllyp Sparowe moves beyond a discussion of the dramatic situation Skelton presents and toward an examination of the historical and cultural environment which the poem reflects, another theme will emerge. This theme will reveal a basic unity in the poem; it will also show just where Skelton meant his reader to laugh, how much, and even at whom.

PHYLLYP SPAROWE AND THE TEMPER OF THE TIMES

E. M. Forster characterized the times in which Skelton lived as an "age of break-up." Nowhere was this break-up more apparent than within the single most powerful institution of the middle ages, the Catholic Church. For centuries the Church had become more and more involved in governmental and economic affairs. In the eyes of many, Skelton included, this attention to non-spiritual matters led some clerics and Church officials to neglect their real duties, the careful spiritual and moral guidance of the people.

Judging from Skelton's canon, he became acutely aware of this problem when he faced his first clerical duties as Rector of Diss, a small-town parish in Norfolk, in 1504. Until that time he had spent the major portion of his career in the environs of the London court and focused his work mainly on the problem of court society. As he became increasingly concerned with the neglect many people suffered from those whose duty it was to provide them with religious training, his work reflected more and more criticisms of those clergymen, priests and mendicants, who shirked their pastoral responsibilities.

This problem still weighed on Skelton's mind ten years after he left Diss, when, in Colyn Cloute, he charged those clergymen who ignored their duties as prelates and strove instead for material wealth and social power with "vanyte" and "couetousness."¹⁵ He claimed that this reversal of priorities had turned the clergy's interest away from the study of scripture, doctrine, and tradition to the extent that many of them had become "bestial and vntought" (l. 230). In Colyn Cloute Skelton asked how the

laity could come to know and understand their liturgy if the priests themselves

. . . woteth neuer what thei rede,
 Paternoster, Ave, nor Crede;
 Construe not worth a whystle
 Nether Gospell nor Pystle;
 Theyr Mattyns madly sayde,
 Nothyng deuoutly prayde;
 Theyr lernynge is so small,
 Theyr pryms and houres fall
 And lepe out of theyr lyppes
 Lyke sawdust or drye chyppes.
 (ll. 236-45)

As James Hixon observes in his study "John Skelton: Social Satirist," Colyn Cloute shows that Skelton recognized that "the people were awake to their need to know more about the scriptures and to understand the services of the Church" and was concerned that the Church often failed to provide her people with instruction they needed.¹⁶

Though these concerns are most vociferously stated in Colyn Cloute, they begin to appear in the works he wrote just after moving to Diss. Two poems, probably written around 1506 (two years before Phyllyp Sparowe), already foreshadow the themes of Colyn Cloute. The "Epithaphe" of John Clark and Adam Uddersall attacks the "sordid impiety of two parishioners who held prestigious positions in Skelton's parish" (Pollet, p. 187). Shortly thereafter, in "Ware the Hauke," Skelton shifts his attention to the clergy itself as he attacks "such mysaduysed parsons"¹⁷ who give bad example to parishioners through their own sacrilegious conduct. These poems show, as Maurice Pollet explains, that "Skelton's professional duties led him continually to diatribe" and that "as a poet of action he took up arms against the unruly, the rebellious and the recalcitrant" (p. 45). In all three poems, Skelton's purpose was to protect the integrity of the

Church and the welfare of her constituents.

In the only other major poem he wrote while at Diss, Phyllyp Sparowe, Skelton does not engage in diatribe. However, though it seems at first glance to be a kind of love poem, a closer analysis suggests that it, too, is satiric. Like the other poems from Skelton's Diss years, Phyllyp Sparowe reflects Skelton's concern with the spiritual welfare of the members of his Church. And, though its tactics are different, Phyllyp Sparowe conforms to Skelton's usual satiric stance in one significant way. Like all his other satires, it calls attention to man's propensity for immoderate behavior. Just as Bowge of Courte comments on the excessive pride exhibited in the social habits of the nobility (Heiserman, p. 51), and as Speke, Parrot questions the "excessive dependence of kings on their ministers" (Heiserman, p. 133), and as Colyn Cloute attacks the excessive worldliness of the clergy (Heiserman, pp. 202-03), so Phyllyp Sparowe castigates, although in a very subtle way, the excessive forms of worship and prayer which replaced what Skelton championed in his other works, "the simpler but more sincere religion upon which Catholicism was founded" (Hixon, p. 43). At the same time, Phyllyp Sparowe seems to satirize what Skelton sees as the excessive solution to this problem proposed by some humanistic thinkers of the time--the de-emphasis of all religious ritual and ceremony and the increased study of the classics as a means of discovering true Christian values. In Phyllyp Sparowe, rather than "shifting from satire to fantasy" (Pollet, p. 42), Skelton actually uses this "fantasy," Jane's story, to comment on a most controversial problem in the early sixteenth century--the nature and function of Church art forms--both liturgical and devotional. In the process, he also reveals some of his

own views on secular art.

Just how Skelton achieves this will be discussed later. First, since Phyllyp Sparowe is not usually read as satire, its narrative level must be examined to establish the basis for such an analysis.

It is tempting to read Phyllyp Sparowe simply as narrative. The story itself is charming; Jane is enchanting and her lost Phyllyp endearing. Because Skelton has portrayed her so realistically, we sympathize readily with Jane's grief and, with Skelton, we appreciate her beauty. On a more intellectual plane, we marvel at how skillfully the poet weaves innumerable Christian and classical allusions into a complex poem that seems as light and airy as the movements of the pet sparrow it eulogizes. On the surface the poem is certainly "perfection in light poetry," as C. S. Lewis has claimed.¹⁸ But though Phyllyp Sparowe is obviously meant for enjoyment, as the epigram to the "Commendations," "Rien que Playsire," suggests,¹⁹ it is also intended to project a serious message which Skelton took precaution to see was not overlooked. Like many medieval authors, he includes in his poem the conventional protestation that his work has serious import. Significantly, he also reminds us of this in the epigrams to both halves of the poem.

With these words of self-adulation Skelton ends the "Commendations":

Per me laurigerum Britonum Skeltonida vatem
 Laudibus eximiis merito haec redimita puella est:
 Formosam cecini, qua non formosior ulla est;
 Formosam potius quam commendaret Homerus.
 Sic juvat interdum rigidos recreare labores,
 Nec minus hoc titulo tersa Minerva mea est.

(11. 1261-66)

It is as though he sensed criticism would soon fly from all directions--

from the clergy, the academicians, and even Jane Scrope herself (Pollet, p. 55)--and wished to provide some hint towards fair interpretation of the work. Hidden in this proclamation that he has "sung beautifully" is a reminder that he, the loyal, doctrinaire poet, has followed Horace's dictum that good art provide both pleasure and instruction. Skelton's allusion to Minerva, goddess of wisdom, serves as yet another reminder for the reader to consider the poem as more than simply entertainment. Had this epigram contained the poem's only reference to wisdom, such emphasis on these seemingly conventional tactics might be judged excessive. However, this allusion parallels a statement made in the epigram to the "Lamentation," in which Skelton states directly that his heroine is not only beautiful but also wise:

Candida Nais erat,
Formosior ista Joanna est;
Docta Corinna fuit,
Sed magis ista sapit.
(ll. 840-43)

It seems, then, that Skelton intended his audience to view Jane as more than a young girl who over-reacted to the death of her pet or a young beauty who captured his heart and imagination. But what did Skelton want us to see? The surface level of Phyllyp Sparowe does not deal directly with the subject of Jane's wisdom. In fact, if not read closely, the narrative itself seems to illustrate her lack of it. As she sings her long and somewhat overstated dirge we are tempted to smile at the importance Jane attaches to her winged companion and at the extreme emotions she exhibits at his death. We even laugh occasionally at her account of Phyllyp's demise. The vengeance with which Jane damns Gyb, that "cat of carlyshe

kynde" (l. 282), is certainly meant to be entertaining. Meant for enjoyment, also, is the Mass in which seventy-odd birds are turned into clerics who officiate at Phyllyp's Requiem. Here, the sad occasion is almost forgotten as "all maner of byrdes" (l. 387) imitate all manner of clergymen. As the list of bird-clergy grows, so does our mirth, for every type of cleric has been cleverly stereotyped in this adaptation of the medieval Mass of the Birds.

But beneath the humor lies a serious theme. Though the narrative revolves around the death of a pet, Skelton treats the process of Jane's consolation as an important problem. He does this by having Jane sing a double-edged lament. On the one hand it is, of course, a dirge for Phyllyp which follows all the conventions of the medieval lament for the dead. This is significant because the purpose of all medieval laments is to show the mourner's "attempt to understand more fully the reasons and meaning of death" and eventually his movement toward a "rational acceptance of the loss."²⁰ That Skelton followed the pattern of the medieval lament so closely suggests he wanted his reader to consider seriously Jane's long and difficult struggle with her emotions. It is this theme--her quest for consolation--which comprises the other half of her lament, and it is from this theme that Skelton's satire evolves.

Early in the poem, amid despairing wails, Jane makes an exclamation which explains much of her exaggerated reaction to Phyllyp's death. As any lay nun would, she begs "swete Jesus" (l. 96) to help her accept her grief. But immediately thereafter she cries:

Wolde God I had Zenophontes,
Or Socrates the wyse,
To shew me their deuyse,

Moderatly to take
 This sorow that I make
 For Phyllip Sparowes sake!
 So feruently I shake,
 I feel my body quake;
 So vrgently I am brought
 Into carefull thought.
 Like Andromach, Hectors wyfe,
 Was wery of her lyfe,
 Whan she had lost her ioye,
 Noble Hector of Troye;
 In lyke maner also
 Encreaseth my dedly wo,
 For my sparowe is go.
 (ll. 98-114)

Here, at the beginning of the poem, Skelton weaves Jane's two laments together. While she proclaims her despair, she also admits her own realization that her outcries are excessive. By calling on Xenophon and Socrates to help her take this sorrow "moderatly" Jane implies that perhaps the Christian tradition has somehow failed to prepare her to deal with her problem. This appeal to non-Christian figures is hardly expected from a girl living in a nunnery who would normally, given her training, pray to the saints and the Blessed Virgin for guidance. But by not having Jane act in accordance with this expectation, Skelton has implied that such prayer somehow does not fit her needs. Though Skelton does not tell us directly why this is so, he illustrates the reasons quite clearly. As Jane's most extravagant outbursts parody popular religious devotions, he shows the undesirable effects such prayer can have.

Significantly, many extra-liturgical devotions used during the time Skelton wrote were so excessively sentimental and maudlin that they were condemned as irreverent by Church reformers of the times. As J. Huizinga points out in The Waning of the Middle Ages, "The late medieval years saw

an endless growth of observances, images, religious interpretations . . . at which serious divines grew alarmed."²¹ More and more the tendency of the populace was toward the observance of devotions which embodied "holy concepts" in images, concrete as in paintings and statues, or figurative, as in hymns and prayers. Often this led to an increase in sentimentality and emotionalism in prayer and a decrease in the spiritual consciousness which prayer was intended to arouse. Ironically, improper use of affective Church art was often encouraged by members of the clergy. Unscrupulous priests, monks, and friars devised new prayers and devotional aids as an easy way to reach the populace when they found that by giving "concrete form to emotions accompanying religious thought" they could better capture and hold the attention of their congregations. Unfortunately, use of these new devotions increased until they often replaced the traditional Church liturgy. In fact, even the liturgy itself was affected by this passion for making spiritual concepts as concrete as possible when special offices and masses were created in honor of almost every aspect of Mary's life.

When these practices led people to lose sight of the spiritual nature of prayer and revel instead in almost uncontrolled emotionalism, cries for restraint poured forth. Such demands were becoming increasingly noticeable around the time Skelton moved to Diss. Some reformers dedicated to stemming the tide of growing devotional excesses were also part of the movement toward humanistic thought, and they proposed that the Church should look to the classics as a "means of implementing the Christian message."²² In 1503 a scholar and humanist well known to Skelton, Erasmus of Rotterdam, published his Enchiridion²³ which expressed precisely that view. As Huizinga

puts it, in Enchiridion Erasmus aimed "at subverting the conception of religion as a continual observance of ceremonies."²⁴ He especially attacked those devotions which appealed to the emotions--paintings, sculptures, prayers, and hymns which were outside the traditional liturgy of the Church. Erasmus even went so far as to say that any "outward show of Christian observances" was for "the simple folk" and "the weak," not for strong "adults in the faith."²⁵

As James Hixon points out in "Skelton: Social Satirist," the poet himself often criticized those religious activities which he thought worked against the spirit of Catholicism and which he believed contributed to the gathering clouds of the reformation (p. 78). He also fought against those practices he felt were detrimental to the spiritual welfare of the people. His parodies of affective devotional practices seem to be part of that battle. However, these same parodies are also devices through which Skelton criticizes the humanist position.

Skelton was staunchly orthodox in his religion, and his poetry shows that he disagrees in two respects with the kind of thinking the humanists stood for.²⁶ Both Colyn Cloute and Phyllipp Sparowe illustrate that Skelton could never believe that the liturgy was unimportant to any Christian, strong or weak. It is not without significance that Jane, after much anguish, is able to quietly "whysper/A Pater Noster" (ll. 384-85) at the close of the Office for the Dead, take solace in the Requiem said "soft and styll" (l. 559), and at last calmly pray: "God sende my sparoes sole good rest!" (l. 574). This resolution to Jane's problem suggests that the classical figures she appeals to early in the poem function as satiric devices also. Skelton has shown that the liturgy has served Jane well, while

those thoughts and actions inspired by her reflection on the classics have proved as excessive and emotional as those inspired by popular Christian devotions. Skelton's point seems clear: for Jane, who by her own admission finds the ancients too "diffuse" (l. 768), the solution suggested by the humanists is not practical because she is as easily misguided by her superficial understanding of such classical stories as Andromache's grief over Hector as she is by popular accounts of Mary's suffering at Calvary.

Jane's story, then, has much more meaning than the surface narrative suggests. Phyllip Sparowe illustrates, under the guise of a comic narrative, another aspect of Skelton's concern for the Church. This, it seems, is one reflection of the "age of break-up" E. M. Forster sensed, but couldn't identify.

PHYLLYP SPAROWE AS SATIRE

In Phyllyp Sparowe Skelton does not take his usual satiric stance, invective, the means by which he usually portrays his targets clearly and attacks them openly. The abrasive tone of his direct satires fit their social themes and secular topics. But in Phyllyp Sparowe Skelton deals with the delicate and personal matter of a young girl's response to death and the role of prayer in her consolation. His task is to comment on the act of prayer without destroying the poignancy of Jane's story and without offending the sensibility of his audience. The subjects of mourning and religious devotion do not lend themselves as readily to satiric comment as do those other social themes. Mourning and devotion are so intimate to the experience of everyone that an audience might find it difficult to gain the necessary psychological distance needed to understand the full implication of the satire.

One of the satirist's goals, according to James W. Nichols, is to "establish a vital contact with his audience, to evoke and then to shape its response toward the objects of the satire."²⁷ The final effect of satire, Nichols continues, is to establish a "community of attitude" in which the audience and satirist "together create, explore, and share the unique point of view which is the basis of any good satire" (p. 48). It is essential, then, that the satirist not turn his audience against him and that he handle his subject matter in a way which draws the reader toward his point of view rather than puts him on the defensive. Skelton accomplishes this through what Nichols, in another context, calls "oblique" or "indirect" satire (p. 14). The tactics of indirect satire make it

possible to create a light and gentle tone appropriate for sensitive topics.

A peculiarity of indirect satire is that it, much more than direct satire, relies on the reader's ability to recognize the satiric norms the artist sets up within his work. The satirist always depends on the reader to bring a particular "store of factual and historical knowledge" to the work so that he will recognize, in Nichols' words, the "intended satire" (p. 28). This becomes especially important in indirect satire where no norm is directly stated and where the critical commentary is made simply through the careful juxtaposition of specially selected details against each other within the specific context of the work itself. If the reader does not have the necessary background, it is possible that he may not recognize the satire at all, or that he may recognize the "presence of certain satiric devices, but not the object of criticism" itself.

Because modern readers have not recognized that Jane's search for consolation illustrates the basic tenets of the sixteenth-century dispute between orthodox churchmen and humanistic thinkers over the nature of prayer, the poem is generally misread to a greater or lesser degree. While the critics always find the narrative level of Phyllyp Sparowe pleasing, some scholars, after praising Skelton's skill in creating the dramatic situation, say the poem is flawed because the poet keeps "breaking in, throwing odds and ends of scholarship about, compiling catalogues and using Jane as a peg on which to hang a great deal of extraneous comment," particularly his literary allusions. Other critics have assumed that because the poem is a mock elegy Skelton's treatment of the liturgy is derisive.²⁸ However, if we recognize Jane's appeal to the classics as the clue which

provides the context in which Skelton expects his reader to interpret this poem,²⁹ it becomes apparent that Skelton actually chooses his material very carefully and arranges it in such a way that what have been traditionally viewed as "odds and ends" actually serve to create a satiric argument which draws the poem into a unified whole. A close examination of the text will also reveal how Skelton uses the liturgy not as the object of mockery or satire, but as a structural device to convey satiric meaning.

Satire has no form of its own and must achieve its purpose under the guise of other genres. Phyllyp Sparowe is a mock elegy patterned after the Office for the Dead and the Requiem Mass. The elegy begins with the first lines from the Vespers portion of the Office, and it soon becomes apparent that the poem moves along two seemingly different lines. Latin phrases from the liturgy indicate the progress of the services while the intervening English lines reflect Jane's thoughts during those services (Swart, p. 161). While funeral services for a pet seem excessive, and Jane's mournful exclamations are exaggerated, her predicament is a human one, so she draws sympathy from the reader. But the fact that the poem is a mock elegy allows the reader enough aesthetic distance to recognize the significance of the various directions her thoughts take.

What can be quickly recognized is that Jane's digressions from the liturgy are divided into three kinds. The first, her recollections of Phyllyp's antics before his death, are significant to the narrative level only. But the second and third, those thoughts which seem to be influenced by popular religious devotions and those which are inspired by classical literature, provide an organized framework for the satiric meaning of the poem.

Some of Jane's earliest words and actions are easily identified as parodies of affective devotional art forms which appeared in the middle ages and which achieved their height of popularity during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Each parody somehow reflects devotional lyrics on the suffering of Mary and Christ.

The following lines, appearing early in the poem, suggest the "Stabat Mater" lyrics which take as their theme Mary's grief as she looks upon the scene of the crucifixion:

Vnneth I kest myne eyes
 Towarde the cloudy skyes:
 But whan I dyd beholde
 My sparow dead and colde,
 No creatuer but that wolde
 Haue rewed vpon me,
 To behold and se
 What heuynesse dyd me pange;
 Wherewith my handes I wrange,
 That my senaws cracked,
 As though I had ben racked,
 So payned and so strayed,
 That no lyfe wellnye remayned.
 (ll. 39-51)³⁰

Then in the very next stanza Skelton clearly parodies the medieval Planctus Mariae "Who Cannot Weep Come Learn of Me":

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!
 (ll. 50-57)³¹

Skelton's audience would have recognized the Marian complaints parodied here as targets of the humanists' objections to formalized prayer. Skelton's lines satirize those lyrics which were intended both to arouse the

emotions of the meditator and to serve as a preliminary step to meditation, which had as its final goal the spiritual contemplation of sacred truths. Unfortunately, many clerics came to depend excessively on such lyrics and other devotional aids which provided dramatic visual imagery of the lives of Mary and Christ to arouse piety in their congregations.³² All too often, however, the laity was not taught how to move beyond the emotional experience to true spiritual prayer. As a result, "devotional understanding of the Virgin's grief [and Christ's suffering] become superficial and melodramatic" (Woolf, p. 273).

There were apparently few Christians in Skelton's day who did not engage in this kind of prayer. It was the primary instructional device used in teaching religion to the unlettered, and it was encouraged as private devotion for literate Christians who dutifully copied these lyrics into their Psalters for use in their daily prayers.³³ For this reason Skelton's use of a mock elegy to convey his attitude toward such devotions was a stroke of genius. By illustrating that Jane's overly emotional reaction to her pet's death was inspired by prayers designed to produce affective piety, Skelton is able to insinuate that these prayers are immoderate and inappropriate because of the effect they sometimes produce. He is able to convey this attitude without aiming his criticism directly at those people in his audience who practice such devotions. This is important because he aims to satirize not those individuals misled by affective devotions, but the devotional practices themselves.

To insure that his reader understands his point, Skelton makes his last satire on affective devotions in the "Lamentation" his most powerful.

As Jane attempts to capture Phyllyp's "image" on a sampler, she embroiders a likeness so realistic that it induces a kind of hallucination reminiscent of the miraculous visions experienced by over-zealous Christians for whom pictures and statues of Mary and Christ came to life as they meditated:

. . . whan I was sowing his beke,
 Methought, my sparrow did speke,

 With that my nedle waxed red,
 Methought, of Phyllyps blode;
 Mine hear ryght vpstode,
 And was in suche a pray,
 My speche was taken away.
 (ll. 219-20 and 226-30)

Rosemary Woolf explains that as affective art became more and more popular reports of religious images coming to life and speaking to the beholder became commonplace. Frequently such visions were inspired by contemplation on illustrations of the passion of Christ, and the "mystic" often believed he actually saw Christ's wounds bleed. This, Woolf says, was an "unmistakable sign of the decay of the tradition" of meditation (p. 257).

Clearly Skelton means his reader to recognize this "decay" and to realize the need for some kind of reform in this area of religious life. However, it seems he wants to caution about the dangers of over-reaction to the problem, and so he strategically balances his parodies on affective art, not only with Jane's comparison of her own sorrow to Andromache's tragedy, but also with her long curse on Gyb which is inspired by her experience with the classics. In this way Skelton is able to suggest that the study of classical literature and history as a means of developing the proper mental attitude for Christian deportment is not the answer to the Church's problem.

In her violent tirade against Gyb, Jane draws on, among other literary works, Ovid's Metamorphoses for inspiration as she wishes the hound Melanchates could "byte asondre" Gyb's "throte" (l. 306) and the wolf Lycaon could attack his "backbone" (l. 312). The list of evils she wishes on the cat is lengthy, and each curse is drawn from classical literature and legend. The emotions she displays in this passage are as untempered as those encouraged by the tradition of affective piety. Skelton's point seems obvious. Medieval religious art forms are not the only ones which can inspire emotional reaction. That is a hallmark of all art; and therefore spiritual levelheadedness must be found elsewhere, in a form designed for that purpose only.

Ironically, that form is the Sacred Liturgy, which has provided the background for Jane's lament. From the first line of the poem on, Skelton gives the reader a norm against which to measure Jane's actions. He does this in two ways. First, as was mentioned earlier, he frames her story with the Office for the Dead. While the "Commendations" seems to be made part of the Office primarily for narrative purposes (though there are other thematic links between the two sections of the poem), the liturgical setting is particularly important as a vehicle for the satiric comment Skelton makes in the "Lamentation."

The first four hundred lines of the poem are punctuated with quotations from the psalms and antiphons used in the Office. Almost all of them have been carefully selected to contrast with Jane's appeal to Socrates and Xenophon. These phrases from the Office are also appeals for guidance and comfort, but here the appeals are made to the Lord himself. A few lines

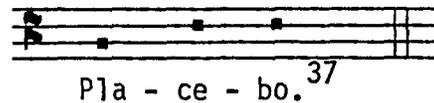
will show the pattern. In line three, "Di le xi" announces the beginning of Psalm 114, which is a request for the Lord to hear the petitioner calling on Him in "tribulation and sorrow." Similarly, line sixty-six, "Ad Dominum, cum tribularer, clamavi," the opening of Psalm 119, literally translates to "in tribulation, I cried to the Lord." By incorporating these particular passages, and others like them, from the Office into Phyllyp Sparowe, Skelton subtly reminds his readers that the Sacred Liturgy has as one of its primary purposes the guidance of worshipers toward proper, controlled prayer. He is also able to imply that alternatives to popular devotional practices do not have to be so drastic as those suggested by the humanists.

The second way in which Skelton uses the Office for the Dead to indirectly state his opinion concerning Church reform is by writing much of the "Lamentation" in a manner which intimates the rhythm and sound patterns of Latin plainsong.³⁴ The effect this creates keeps the reader constantly aware of the controlled and dignified tone of the Office so that Jane's emotional outbursts seem all the more inappropriate.

Skelton must have considered the musical aspect of the poem important because he took such care in executing it. At the beginning of Phyllyp Sparowe it becomes immediately apparent that Skelton intends his reader to chant, at least in his head, the phrases from the Office interspersed throughout the poem.³⁵ Here, as in every instance where he incorporates phrases from the antiphons into his poem, he gives the first word of the antiphon (or two if the initial word is monosyllabic) and divides it into syllables:

Pla ce bo!
(1. 1)

By spacing the syllables on the page Skelton alludes to that technique in the plainsong tradition known as intonation, which is simply the practice of indicating the mode in which a psalm and antiphon are to be chanted by setting the first few syllables of the antiphon to the opening neumes of the plainsong melody.³⁶ In early sixteenth-century liturgical texts of the Office for the Dead, such as the Manuale, for instance, each psalm is introduced by a short musical notation similar to the following phrase which announces Psalm 114:



From this, a participant in the service can determine in which mode he is to chant the psalm, for which the text, but not the complete musical notation, is provided.

Skelton, expecting his audience to recognize the allusion to intonation, adapts this musical technique to his poem in order to create a deliberate ironic structure to support his satiric theme. He knows that the syllabicated phrases of the antiphons he weaves into the poem will call to the reader's mind the entire chant for both the antiphon and its corresponding psalm. Skelton also knows that when Jane's responses to the antiphons are not what a reader familiar with the liturgy expects them to be, the melody running through his mind will keep him constantly aware of what they should be. This tension between form and content is intensified when Jane's words echo the sound, if not the sense, of the liturgical passages. The

English lines following the intonations invariably rhyme with the Latin quoted from the Office. Note for example:

Pla ce bo!
 Who is there, who?
 Di le xi!
 Dame Margery.
 (ll. 1-4)

Sometimes the echo is even stronger when the lines immediately following the intonation also mirror the plainsong beat of the Latin, as in the following instance:

Si in i qui ta tes
 Alas, i was euyll at ease!
 De pro fun dis cla ma vi,
 Whan I sawe my sparowe dye!
 (ll. 143-46)³⁸

Because Skelton generally uses the intonation technique to introduce new directions in Jane's thoughts by placing the Latin at the beginning of stanzas,³⁹ the psychological effect on the reader is marked. But he carries his strategy even further by making part of Jane's lament reflect yet another part of the Sacred Liturgy, the litanies found in the breviaries and other prayer books used by both the clergy and the laity. Again, Skelton's purpose is to allow the form of the liturgy to clash head-on with the content of his poem, as happens when Jane begs for the deliverance of Phyllyp's soul from the dangers of the underworld:

Of God nothyng e ls craue 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 the 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 sparklynge,
 For burnynge of his wynges;
 And from the smokes sowre
 Of Proserpinas bowre;
 And from the dennes darke,
 Wher Cerebus 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 preserued may be!
 Amen, say ye with me!
 (11. 67-94)

It is not an exact recreation, of course, but the resemblance to the litany of the saints is unmistakable. A quick glance at the "Letania" found in a Breviary used in Skelton's day shows that he borrows from its structure and even from its content:

Ab omni malo: Libera nos domine.
 Ab insidiis diaboli: libera.
 A peste superbie: libera. Ab
 carnalibus immundiciis mentis et
 corporis: libera Per
 mysterium sancte incarnationes
 ute: libera Ut cunctis
 fidelibus defunctis requiem
 eternam donare digneris.⁴⁰

Skelton omits the refrain, but he imitates the litany by beginning each invocation with the same phrase, "And from," and by making one petition methodically follow another with no significant variation in rhythm. In this way Skelton forces his reader to call to mind the syllabic chant used in the recitation of the litanies. Yet, considering the allusions to pagan figures, it seems almost sacrilegious to do so.

That the poet's intention to echo plainsong as a means of creating satiric comment is not more obvious can be ascribed at least in part to textual corruption. All of the earliest available editions of Phyllip Sparowe show minimal use of punctuation in the text. Endstops appear only at the conclusion of certain Latin phrases and at the end of long units of Jane's thoughts. Usually, in the English portion of the text, endstops signal the conclusion of a stanza. In his 1843 edition of the poem, now considered standard (and the text from which most critical opinion is derived), Alexander Dyce "improved" and "corrected" Skelton's poem by adding punctuation which broke Jane's long rushes of words into smaller, more manageable semantic segments. Except in rare instances to indicate emphasis, Skelton did not use commas in the English lines. He never used them within the Latin lines.⁴¹ The lack of interior punctuation allows the rhythm to move evenly from one word to another, as it would if the line were chanted. Yet Dyce, because he does not realize that Skelton meant the reader to hear the music of the lines, inserts punctuation which divides them into syntactic segments and changes their rhythmic flow. Note, for example, how Dyce edits the first clause of the introductory verse to Psalm 137:

Confitebor tibi, Domine, in toto corde meo!
(l. 185)

The commas Dyce inserts encourage a spoken rather than a musical reading of the line. Even though we cannot know the exact rhythmic interpretation given to this psalm in Skelton's day, we do know that the first dividing pause in chanting it comes after the first clause in the verse, not before it. The musical notation given for Psalm 137 in the Liber Usualis illus-

trates that Dyce's editorial practice obliterates the visibility of plain-song cadence:

Confi-tébor tibi Dómine in tóto córde mé- o: quo

ni-am audísti vérba ó-ris mé- i.⁴²

Even more evidence that Dyce was blind to the musical qualities of the poem lies in the fact that he places punctuation in those lines which indicate the exact plainsong notes Skelton wants his readers to sing.

Note, for example,

Fa, re, my, my
(l. 5)

and

Fa, fa, fa, my, re, re,
A porta in fe ri,
Fa, fa, fa, my, my.
(ll. 576-78)

Here, even without grammatical reasons to consider, Dyce interrupts, with commas, the suggested flow of one note into another. Skelton wants his audience to read each note with equal sonoric impact--to use the line as a melodic unit rather than a grammatical one. Dyce's emendations destroyed a major element in Skelton's satiric mode. It is little wonder that critical misreading followed and continues to this day.⁴³

The misreading of the Office portion of the "Lamentation" resulting from Dyce's edition of Phyllip Sparowe, combined with the modern reader's

failure to recognize the social context of the work, obfuscates the significance of the second part of the "Lamentation," the Requiem section.

Most critics believe that Skelton, in writing this Requiem, merely meant to display his poetic inventiveness by adapting the medieval Bird Mass to Jane's lament. But the Mass, too, functions in the overall plan of Skelton's satire. Once again the emphasis is on the proper use of prayer as Skelton satirizes those individuals whose deportment detracts in various ways from the solemnity of the service (Swart, p. 63). The proud peacock represents the kind of priest who uses the ceremony to display his fine voice; the popingay represents those clerics whose vanity is evident in the way they perform their duties; the phoenix portrays those clerics who attach undue importance on the extrinsic form of rituals (he buys costly incense to bless the hearse). But these individuals and more are taught "theyr ordynall" (l. 555) by the eagle, whose role is to ensure that the plainsong is executed with "controll" (l. 564) and that the mourning is "soft and styl" (l. 559). Skelton underscores this little lesson he builds into the Bird Mass by having Jane sing a few lines of plainchant again, this time untarnished by the violently emotional digressions that marked her earlier behavior. So, as the Requiem draws to a close, Jane at last finds the proper outlet for her grief in the liturgy, and she commends Phyllyp's soul to heaven with quiet dignity.

In this way Skelton answers the humanist arguments against the effectiveness of formal prayer and liturgical ceremony. But before ending his poem, he turns his critical eye toward the extra-liturgical devotional lyric once again. As if to emphasize the kinds of abuses which had to be

rectified if extreme reform measures were to be averted, he concludes his poem with a satiric comment on those kinds of Marian devotions which borrow excessively from the tradition of medieval romance and the language of fine amoure. In such lyrics the poet often "praises the Virgin's beauty and virtue in terms also appropriate to an earthly mistress" (Woolf, p. 276). Often these lyrics took the form of the carol, a secular musical form often adapted to religious lyrics and one which many reformers wished to eliminate from the ranks of Church music.

Skelton has often been accused of committing sacrilege and blasphemy in writing the "Commendations" because he dared speak of Jane in terms which had come to be reserved for the Blessed Virgin.⁴⁴ But what the poet has actually done is turn the conventions of popular Marian lyrics back to their original secular purpose, the celebration of earthly love. Skelton does this by loosely structuring the "Commendations" like a carol. Though his pattern does not conform exactly to that of the carol--his stanzas are much too long--his use of a "burden" to divide his long rhapsody into shorter thought segments serves to remind the reader of the parallel. Within the framework of his "carol," Skelton uses much of the romantic imagery traditionally used in Marian lyric poetry to paint his portrait of Jane. To Skelton the poet, Jane is a "goodly floure" (l. 1055), a "blossom of fresh couloure" (l. 1054), a "radyant star" (l. 1047), a gem, to name only a few of the descriptive terms Skelton uses which appear again and again in medieval carols to Mary, but which are actually borrowed from the courtly love tradition.⁴⁵

So, even though Skelton turns phrases from the Office as well as from

popular devotions to the purpose of praising Jane, he considers this no more improper than the tactics of those poets who place the conventions of romantic, secular literature into prayers which allude to Mary as a "courtly lady."⁴⁶ Skelton's argument seems obvious. If an artist can liken Mary to an ordinary mortal without being called irreverent, how can it be deemed wrong for him to compliment a woman by comparing her to Mary? Skelton drives home this message by asking, as the cycle of stanzas draws to a close:

Wherefore shulde I be blamed,
That I Jane haue named,
And famously proclaimed?
(ll. 1255-57)

This protestation echoes a similar statement made near the beginning of the "Commendations":

I trust it is no shame,
And no man wyl me blame,
Though I register her name
In the courte of Fame.
(ll. 889-892)

The implication is clear, particularly in light of what Skelton said about affective religious art in the "Lamentation." Any reader who would call this poem improper because it deals with secular matters in sacred terms would imply that, by analogy, those religious art forms which deal with spiritual matters in excessively worldly terms might also be improper.

The "Commendations," then, like the "Lamentation" preceding it, points up the excesses of fifteenth-century religion and forces the poem even beyond satire; it almost becomes an exemplum on the need for religious reappraisal. Affective poetry and song, Skelton seems to say, need to be exorcised from the Church, as was the drama in the twelfth century, and

rededicated to the secular pursuits, like courting lovers, for which they were originally intended. The Church, thus cleansed, Skelton implies, can much better meet the spiritual needs of the souls in her care--and perhaps avert the threat of what he saw as essentially destructive reform movements fed by the philosophies of, among others, the humanists.

That threat became reality and the destruction painfully and universally felt less than two decades after Phyllyp Sparowe was written. In this light, the poem demands re-examination as a warning, perhaps even a prophecy, of what was to happen in England, ironically at the hands of Henry the Eighth, Skelton's one-time pupil.

NOTES

¹E. M. Forster, "John Skelton," in Two Cheers for Democracy (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1951), p. 140.

²Alexander Barclay, "A brefe addicion of the angularyte of some newe Folys," in The Ship of Fools (1509; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1966), II, 321.

³Edmund Blunden, "John Skelton," in Votive Tablets (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1932), p. 21.

⁴John M. Berdan, Early Tudor Poetry (New York: Macmillan, 1931), p. 213.

⁵Ian Gordon, John Skelton: Poet Laureate (1943; rpt. New York: Octagon Books, 1970), p. 132.

⁶L. J. Lloyd, John Skelton: A Sketch of His Life and Writings (Folcroft, Pa.: Folcroft Press, 1938), p. 56.

⁷J. Swart, "John Skelton's Philip Sparrow," English Studies, 65 Suppl. (1964), 161. All further references to this article will be identified in the text.

⁸Alexander Dyce, ed., in "Notes to Volume I" of The Poetical Works of John Skelton (1843; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1965), II, 120, cites Catullus as a probable source. He also mentions Ovid and Dornavus as influences. H. L. R. Edwards, in Skelton: The Life and Times of an Early Tudor Poet (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1949), p. 107, adds Martial, Statius, and Caxton to the list of sources.

⁹Stanley Eugene Fish, John Skelton's Poetry (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), p. 99. All further references to this work are indicated in the text.

¹⁰Anon., rev. of The Poetical Works of John Skelton, ed. Alexander Dyce, Quarterly Review, 73 (1844), 517.

¹¹Maurice Pollet, John Skelton: Poet of Tudor England, trans. John Warrington (London: J. M. Dent, 1971), p. 48. All further references to this work are indicated in the text.

¹²For similar opinions see Robert Graves, "The Dedicated Poet," Encounter, 17 (1961), 15; Maurice Evans, English Poetry in the Sixteenth Century (London: Hutchinson Univ. Library, 1967), p. 43; and Robert S. Kinsman, "Phyllip Sparowe: Titulus," Studies in Philology, 7 (1950), 473-84.

¹³Some critics expressing these opinions are Nan Cooke Carpenter, John Skelton, Twayne's English Authors Series, No. 61 (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1967), p. 65; Eleanor Prescott Hammond, English Verse Between Chaucer and Surrey (New York: Octagon Books, 1965), p. 340; Fish, p. 102; Swart, p. 162.

¹⁴A. R. Heiserman, Skelton and Satire (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 297-98. All further references to this work will be identified in the text.

¹⁵Skelton, Colyn Cloute, in Poetical Works, I, 313, l. 61. All further references to this poem will be identified in the text.

¹⁶James C. Hixon, "Skelton: Social Satirist," Master's thesis, Univ. of Iowa, August, 1939, p. 62. All further references to this study will be identified in the text.

¹⁷Skelton, "Ware the Hauke," in Poetical Works, I, 56, ll. 21-22.

¹⁸C. S. Lewis, English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Vol. III, Oxford History of English Literature, ed. F. P. Wilson and Bonamy Dobree (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), p. 138.

¹⁹Skelton, Phyllip Sparowe, in Poetical Works, I, 90, l. 1267. All further references to this poem will be identified in the text.

²⁰Velma Richmond, Laments for the Dead in Medieval Narrative (Pittsburgh: Duquesne Univ. Press, 1966), p. 29.

²¹J. Huizinga, The Waning of the Middle Ages (1949; rpt. Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, Anchor Books, 1954), pp. 151-54.

²²C. Harold King, et al., A History of Civilization: The Story of Our Heritage (New York: Scribner's, 1969), p. 350.

²³Desideramus Erasmus, The Enchiridion Militis Christiani, trans. and ed. Raymond Himelick (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1963), pp. 101-30, passim.

²⁴J. Huizinga, Erasmus and the Age of Reformation (1924; rpt. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), pp. 50-51.

²⁵Erasmus, Enchiridion, p. 114.

²⁶The extent of Skelton's orthodoxy is illustrated by A Replycacion Agaynst Certayn Yong Scolers Abiured of Late, &c in which he defends the worship of Mary and the saints as well as the use of hymns, poetry, and statues as devotional aids. Skelton substantiates his argument by referring to the Council of Nicaea, which "had distinguished three degrees of worship: latria, the supreme worship due to God alone; dulia, the veneration due to his servants, the angels and the saints; and hyperdulia, the special veneration due to the Virgin Mary" (Pollet, p. 158). Arguing against what some reformers called the "idolatry" of such worship, Skelton reminds his audience of St. Jerome's campaign against Jovinian and the notion of Christian asceticism.

We must remember, however, that Replycacion is a public attack against young scholars who were preaching the doctrines of Luther and Wycliff and who were fighting to purge the Church of all worship of Mary and the saints. These same reformers also objected to most outward forms of devotion. Their position was heretical in Skelton's eyes. It is significant that Skelton cites David's Psalms as examples of religious poetry at its best. The Psalms have always been considered the highest form of spiritual prayer. It is interesting, also, that the Christian Fathers cited by Skelton (St. Augustine, St. Gregory, and St. Jerome) all contributed to the body of the Sacred Liturgy--Jerome and Augustine with their hymns, Gregory with his plainchant. Their work grew from and added to the Sacred Liturgy. Their music is not part of the popular devotional tradition Skelton satirizes in Phyllyp Sparowe.

²⁷James W. Nichols, Insinuation: The Tactics of English Satire (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), p. 47. Whenever possible, further references to this work will be identified in the text.

²⁸Gordon, p. 123. See also Phillip Henderson's introduction to his edition of The Complete Poems of John Skelton, Laureate (London: J. M. Dent, 1959), xiii.

²⁹Nichols, p. 39, says that all indirect satire has such a clue; he calls it "satiric shock." Nichols does not consider Phyllyp Sparowe in his discussion of satire.

³⁰Rosemary Woolf, "Lyrics on the Compassion of the Blessed Virgin," in The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 242. Woolf gives a good discussion of these lyrics, complete with examples, on pp. 239-73. All further references to this work will be identified in the text.

³¹Pollet, p. 51, identifies this parody also, but he does not see it as part of an overall satiric plan. Woolf also mentions this "satiric pastiche of the diction and formulas of the planctus" (p. 273).

³²Douglas Gray, Themes and Images in the Medieval English Religious Lyric (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 43.

³³Gray, pp. 25-31.

³⁴Pollet, p. 55, mentions in passing that Skelton wrote Phyllyp Sparowe in the rhythm of the funeral service, but his assessment of Skelton's purpose in doing so is quite different from mine.

³⁵This has been suggested by a number of critics. See Carpenter, p. 118; Henderson's note to Phyllyp Sparowe, p. 60; also Robert S. Kinsman, ed., John Skelton: Poems (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 143.

³⁶The Liber Usualis, ed. The Benedictines of Solesmes (Tournais, Belgium: Desclée and Sons, 1947), xxxij.

³⁷Manuale et Processionale ad Usum Insignis Ecclesiae Eboracensis, Publications of the Surtees Society of Durham, Vol. 63 (1875), p. 60. This work is a nineteenth-century edition of the Manuale in the York rite used in the early sixteenth-century and probably used by Skelton.

³⁸Gordon, p. 143, also identifies this parody, but in a different context.

³⁹Anon., rev. of Skelton: A Selection from The Poetical Works of John Skelton, ed. W. H. Williams, Athenaeum, Aug. 1, 1903, p. 154.

⁴⁰Brevarium Ad Usum Insignis Ecclesiae Eboracensis, Publications of the Surtees Society of Durham, Vol. 75 (1882), cols. 934-36.

⁴¹An examination of a microfilm copy of Here after foloweth the boke of Phyllyp Sparowe compyled by mayster Skelton Poete Laureate, ed. R. Kele, 1545, obtained through the courtesy of Huntington Library, shows this to be the case. Though published after Skelton's death, Kele's edition is more likely to reflect Skelton's intentions than Dyce's, which was published three centuries later.

⁴²Liber Usualis, "Vespers," Office for the Dead, p. 1775.

⁴³Dyce's edition, in fact, seems to have been the source of all editions down to the present time. The need for a modern standard text goes without saying.

⁴⁴Edwards, p. 110.

⁴⁵Gray, pp. 74-96, discusses the imagery used in these Marian devotions and gives their sources.

⁴⁶Gray, p. 56, tells of those lyrics in which "we find rather worldly-sounding descriptions of the Virgin's beauty, and affirmations of the ideal of service, phrased in the traditional feudal terms."

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