

I made Nottingham a place royal,  
Windsor, Eltham, and many other mo,  
Yet at the last I went from them all.  
*Et ecce, nunc in pulvere dormio.*

Where is now my conquest and victory?  
Where is my riches and my royal array?  
Where be my coursers and my horses high?  
Where is my mirth, my solace, and play?  
As vanity, to nought all is wand' red away.  
O Lady Bess, long for me may ye call,  
For I am departed till domesday;  
But love ye that Lord that is sovereign of all.  
Where be my castles and buildings royal?  
But Windsor alone, now I have no mo,  
And of Eton the prayers perpetual.  
*Et ecce, nunc in pulvere dormio.*

Why should a man be proud or presume high?  
Saint Bernard thereof nobly doth treat,  
<Saith> a man is nothing but a sack of stercory,  
And shall return unto worm's meat.  
Why, what came of Alexander the Great  
Or else of strong Sampson who can tell?  
Were no worms ordained their flesh to frete?  
And of Salomon, that was of wit the well?  
Absolon proffered his hear for to sell,  
Yet for all his beauty worms eat him also.  
And I but late in honor did excel,  
*Et ecce, nunc in pulvere dormio.*

I have played my pageyond, now am I past.  
Ye wot well all I was of no great yeld.  
Thus all thing concluded shall be at the last.  
When Death approacheth, then lost is the field.  
Then sithen this world me no longer upheld,  
Nor nought would conserve me here in my place,  
*In manus tuas, Domine, my spirit up I yield,*  
Humbly beseeching thee, God, of <thy> grace.  
O ye curtes commons, your hearts unbrace,  
Benignly now to pray for me also,  
For right well you know your king I was,  
*Et ecce, nunc in pulvere dormio.*

## THE BOWGE OF COURT

### THE PROLOGUE

In autumpn whan the sun *in Virgine*  
By radiant heat enriped hath our corn,  
Whan Luna, full of mutability,  
As emperess the diadem hath worn  
Of our pole arctic, smiling half in scorn  
At our folly and our unsteadfastness,  
The time whan Mars to war him did dress,

I, calling to mind the great auctority  
Of poets old, which full craftily  
Under as covert terms as could be  
Can touch a truth and cloak <it> subtilly  
With fresh utterance full sententiously,  
Diverse in style, some spared not vice to write,  
Some of mortality nobly did endite—

Whereby I rede their renome and their fame  
May never die, but evermore endure—  
I was sore moved to aforce the same,  
But Ignorance full soon did me discure  
And shewed that in this art I was not sure;  
For to illumine, she said, I was too dull,  
Advising me my pen away to pull

And not to write, for he so will attain  
Exceedingly further than his cunning is;  
His heed may be hard, but feeble is <his> brain,  
Yet have I known such ere this.  
But of reproach surely he may not miss  
That climbeth higher than he may footing have;  
What and he slide down, who shall him save?

Thus up and down my mind was drawn and cast  
That I ne wist what to do was best,  
So sore enwearied that I was at the last  
Enforced to sleep and for to take some rest  
And to lie down as soon as I me dress'd.  
At Harwichport, slumb'ring as I lay  
In mine host's house called Power's Key,

Methought I saw a ship goodly of sail  
Come sailing forth into that haven broad,  
Her tackling rich and of high apparail,  
She cast an anchor, and there she lay at road;  
Marchants her boarded to see what she had <load>;  
Therein they found royal marchandise  
Fraighted with pleasure of what ye could devise.

But than I thought I would not dwell behind;  
Among all other I put myself in prece.  
Than there could I none acquaintance find;  
There was much noise; anon one cried, "Cease,"  
Sharply commanding each man hold his peace.  
"Maisters," he said, "the ship that ye here see,  
The Bowge of Court it hight for certainty.

"The owner thereof is lady of estate  
Whose name to tell is Dame Sans Peer;  
Her marchandise is rich and fortunate,  
But who will have it must pay therefore dear.  
This royal chaffer that is shipped here  
Is called favor, to stond in her good grace."  
Than should ye see there, pressing in apace,

Of one and other that would this lady see,  
Which sat behind a traves of silk fine,  
Of gold of tessew the finest that might be,  
In a trone which far clearer did shine  
Than Phebus in his sphere celestine;  
Whose beauty, honor, goodly port  
I have too little cunning to report.

But of each thing there, as I took heed,  
Among all other was written in her trone  
In gold letters this word which I did read:  
*Gardez le fortune qui est mauvelz et bone!*  
And, as I stood reading this verse myself alone,  
Her chief gentlewoman, Danger by her name,  
Gave me a taunt and said I was to blame

To be so pert to prese so proudly up.  
She said she trowed that I had eaten sauce;  
She asked if ever I drank of sauce's cup.  
And I than softly answered to that clause  
That, so to say, I had given her no cause;  
Than asked she me, "Sir, so God thee speed,  
What is thy name?" And I said it was Drede.

"What moved thee," quod she, "hiddere to come?"  
"Forsooth," quod I, "to buy some of your ware."  
And with that word on me she gave a glome  
With brows bent, and gan on me to stare  
Full dainously, and fro me she did fare,  
Leaving me standing as a mazed man,  
To whom there came another gentlewoman.

Desire her name was, and so she me told,  
Saying to me, "Brother, be of good cheer,  
Abash you not, but hardely be bold;  
Avance yourself to approach and come near.  
What though our chaffer be never so dear,  
Yet I advise you to speak, for ony drede.  
Who spareth to speak, in faith, he spareth to speed."

"Maistress," quod I, "I have none acquaintance  
That will for me be mediator and mean,  
But this another, I have but small substance."  
"Peace," quod Desire, "ye speak not worth a bean."  
If ye have not, in faith, I will you lene  
A precious jewel, no richer in this lond.  
Bon Aventure have here now in your hond.

"Shift now therewith, let see, as ye can  
In Bowge of Court chevisance to make,  
For I dare say that there nis earthly man  
But, and he can Bon Aventure take,  
There can no favor nor friendship him forsake.  
Bon Aventure may bring you in such case  
That ye shall stond in favor and in grace.

"But of one thing I warn you ere I go:  
She that steereth the ship, make her your friend."  
"Maistress," quod I, "I pray you tell me why so,  
And how I may that way and means find."  
"Forsooth," quod she, "however blow the wind,  
Fortune guideth and ruleth all our ship;  
Whom she hateth shall over the shipboard skip;

"Whom she loveth, of all pleasure is rich,  
Whiles she laugheth and hath lust for to play;  
Whom she hateth she casteth in the dich,  
For whan she frowneth she thinketh to make a fray.  
She cherisheth him, and him she chaseth away."  
"Alas," quod I, "how might I have her sure?"  
"In faith," quod she, "by Bon Aventure."

Thus in a row of marchants a great rout  
Sued to Fortune that she would be their friend;  
They throng in fast and flocked her about,  
And I with them prayed her to have in mind.  
She promised to us all she would be kind;  
Of Bowge of Court she asketh what we would have,  
And we asked favor, and favor she us gave.

*Thus endeth the prologue*

DREDE

The sail is up, Fortune ruleth our helm,  
We want no wind to pass now over all;  
Favor we have tougher then any elm,  
That will abide and never from us fall.  
But under honey oftime lieth bitter gall,  
For, as methought, in our ship I did see  
Full subtle persons, in number four and three.

The first was Favel, full of flattery,  
With fables false that well could feign a tale;  
The second was Suspect, which that daily  
Misdempt each man, with face deadly ana pale;  
And Harvey Hafter, that well could pick a male  
With other four of their affinity,  
Disdain, Riot, Dissimuler, Subtilty.

Fortune their friend, with whom oft she did dance,  
They could not fail, they thought, they were so sure;  
And oftentimes I would myself avance  
With them to make solace and pleasure.  
But my disport they could not well endure;  
They said they hated for to deal with Drede.  
Than Favel gan with fair speech me to feed.

FAVEL

"Nothing earthly that I wonder so sore  
As of your cunning, that is so excellent.  
Dainty to have with us such one in store,

So virtuously that hath his days spent.  
 Fortune to you gifts of grace hath lent.  
 Lo, what it is a man to have cunning!  
 All earthly treasure it is surmounting.

"Ye be an apt man as ony can be found  
 To dwell with us and serve my lady's grace;  
 Ye be to her, yea, worth a thousand pound.  
 I heard her speak of you within short space,  
 When there were diverse that sore did you menace,  
 And, though I say it, I was myself your friend, 160  
 For here be diverse to you that be unkind.

"But this one thing, ye may be sure of me;  
 For by that Lord that bought dear all mankind,  
 I cannot flatter, I must be plain to thee,  
 And ye need ought, man, shew to me your mind,  
 For ye have me whom faithful ye shall find.  
 Whiles I have ought, by God, thou shalt not lack,  
 And if need be, a bold word I dare crack.

"Nay, nay, be sure, whiles I am on your side,  
 Ye may not fall, trust me, ye may not fail. 170  
 Ye stand in favor, and Fortune is your guide;  
 And as she will, so shall our great ship sail.  
 These lewd cockwats shall nevermore prevail  
 Against you hardely; therefore be not afraid.  
 Farewell till soon—but no word that I said!"

## DREDE

Than thanked I him for his great gentleness,  
 But, as methought, he ware on him a cloak  
 That lined was with doubtful doubleness;  
 Methought of words that he had full a poke;  
 His stomach stuffed oftentimes did reboke. 180  
 Suspicion, methought, met him at a braid,  
 And I drew near to herk what they two said.

"In faith," quod Suspect, "spake Drede no word of me?"  
 "Why, what than? Wilt thou let men to speak?  
 He saith he cannot well accord with thee."  
 "Twish," quod Suspect, "go play, him I ne reke."  
 "By Christ," quod Favel, "Drede is sullen freak.  
 What, let us hold him up, man, for a while!"  
 "Ye so," quod Suspect, "he may us both beguile."

And whan he came walking soberly, 190  
 With "whom" and "ha," and with a crooked look,  
 Methought his heed was full of jealousy,  
 His eyen rolling, his honds fast they quoke,  
 And to meward the straight way he took.  
 "Godspeed, brother," to me quod he than,  
 And thus to talk with me he began.

## SUSPICION

"Ye remember the gentleman right now  
 That commaund with you, methought a <pretty space>  
 Beware of him, for, I make God avow,  
 He will beguile you and speak fair to your face. 200  
 Ye never dwelt in such another place,  
 For here is none that dare well other trust,  
 But I would tell you a thing and I durst.

"Spake he, a-faith, no word to you of me?  
 I wote and he did ye would me tell.  
 I have a favor to you, whereof it be  
 That I must shew you much of my counsel.  
 But I wonder what the devil of hell  
 He said of me whan he with you did talk.  
 By mine advise, use not with him to walk. 210

"The sovereign'st thing that any man may have  
 Is little to say, and much to hear and see;  
 For, but I trusted you, so God me save,  
 I would nothing so plain be;  
 To you only, methink, I durst shrive me,  
 For now am I plenarly disposed  
 To shew you things that may not be disclosed."

## DREDE

Than I assured him my fidelity  
 His counsel secret never to discure, 220  
 If he could find in heart to trust me;  
 Else I prayed him, with all my besy cure,  
 To keep it himself, for than he might be sure  
 That no man earthly could him bewray,  
 Whiles of his mind it were lock'd with the key.

"By God," quod he, "this and thus it is!"  
 And of his mind he shewed me all and some.  
 "Farewell," quod he, "we will talk more of this."  
 So he departed there he would be come.  
 I dare not speak, I promised to be dumb,  
 But as I stood musing in my mind, 230  
 Harvey Hafter came leaping, light as lind.

Upon his breast he bare a versing-box,  
 His throat was clear, and lustily could feign.  
 Methought his gown was all furred with fox,  
 And ever he sang, "Sith I am nothing plain."  
 To keep him from picking it was a great pain.  
 He gazed on me with his goatish beard;  
 Whan I looked on him, my purse was half afraid.

## HARVEY HAFTER

"Sir, God you save! Why look ye so sad?  
 What thing is that I may do for you? 240  
 A wonder thing that ye wax not mad,

For, and I study should as ye do now,  
My wit would waste, I make God avow.  
Tell me your mind. Methink ye make a verse;  
I could it scan, and ye would <it> rehearse.

"But to the point shortly to proceed,  
Where hath your dwelling been ere ye came here?  
For, as I trow, I have seen you indeed  
Ere this, whan that ye made me royal cheer. 250  
Hold up the helm, look up, and let God steer!  
I would be merry, what wind that ever blow!  
'Heave and ho rumbelow, row the boat, Norman, row!'

"'Princes of Yought' can ye sing by rote?  
Or 'Shall I Sail with You' a fellowship assay?  
For on the book I cannot sing a note.  
Would to God it would please you some day  
A ballad book before me for to lay  
And learn me to sing re-mi-fa-sol!  
And, when I fail, bob me on the noll. . . .

"For, as for me, I served here many a day, 260  
And yet unneth I can have my living.  
But I require you no word that I say,  
For, and I know ony earthly thing  
That is again you, ye shall have weeting.  
And ye be welcome, sir, so God me save.  
I hope hereafter a friend of you to have."

## DREDE

With that, as he departed so fro me,  
Anon there met with him, as methought,  
A man, but wonderly beseen was he. 270  
He looked haughty; he set each man at nought;  
His gaudy garment with scorns was all wrought;  
With indignation lined was his hood;  
He frowned as he would swear by Cock's blood.

He bote the lip; he looked passing coy;  
His face was belimmed as bees had him stung:  
It was no time with him to jape nor toy;  
Envy hath wasted his liver and his lung;  
Hatred by the heart so had him wrung  
That he looked pale as ashes to my sight. 280  
Disdain, I ween, this comerous crab's hight.

To Harvey Hafter than he spake of me,  
And I drew near to hark what they two said.  
"Now," quod Disdain, "as I shall saved be,  
I have great scorn and am right evil apayed."  
Than quod Harvey, "Why art thou so dismay'd?"  
"By Christ," quod he, "for it is shame to say:  
To see Johan Dawes, that came but yesterday,

"How he is now taken in conceit.  
This Doctor Dawcock, Drede, I ween, he hight!  
By God's bones, but if we have some sleight 290  
It is like he will stond in your light."  
"By God," quod Harvey, "and it so happen might.  
Let us therefore shortly, at a word,  
Find some mean to cast him over the bord."

"By Him that me bought," than quod Disdain,  
"I wonder sore he is in such conceit."  
"Turd!" quod Hafter, "I will thee nothing sain:  
There must for him be laid some pretty bait.  
We twain, I trow, be not without disceit. 300  
First pick a quarrel and fall out with him then,  
And so outface him with a card of ten."

Forthwith he made on me a proud assawt,  
With scornful look meved all in mood;  
He went about to take me in a fawt:  
He frown'd, he stared, he stamped where he stood.  
I looked on him, I wend he had be wood.  
He set the arm proudly under the side,  
And in this wise he gan with me to chide.

## DISDAIN

"Rememb' rest thou what thou said yesternight?  
Wilt thou abide by the words again? 310  
By God, I have of thee now great dispite!  
I shall thee anger ones in every vein;  
It is great scorn to see such an hain  
As thou art, one that came but yesterday,  
With us old servants such maisters to play. . . ."

## DREDE

With that came Riot rushing all at ones,  
A rusty galland, to-ragged and to-rent,  
And on the bord he whirled a pair of bones,  
"Quarter-trey-deuce," he clattered as he went;  
"Now have at all, by Saint Thomas of Kent!" 320  
And ever he threw and kyst I wote ne'er what;  
His hair was grown thorow out his hat.

Than I behild how he disguised was:  
His heed was heavy for watching overnight,  
His eyen bleared, his face shone like a glass;  
His gown so short that it ne cover might  
His rump, he went so all for summer light;  
His hose was garded with a list of green,  
Yet at the knee they were broken, I ween. . . .

What should I tell more of his ribaudry? 330  
I was ashamed so to hear him prate;  
He had no pleasure but in harlotry.  
"Ay," quod he, "in the Devil's date,

What art thou? I saw thee now but late."  
 "Forsooth," quod I, "in this court I dwell now."  
 "Welcome," quod Riot, "I make God avow."

## RIOT

"And, sir, in faith, why com'st not us among  
 To make thee merry, as other fellows done?  
 Thou must swear and stare, man, all day long,  
 And wake all night, and sleep till it be noon.  
 Thou may'st not study or muse on the moon;  
 This world is nothing but eat, drink, and sleep,  
 And thus with us good company to keep. . . ."

340

## DREDE

Gone is this knave, this ribaud foul and lewd.  
 He ran as fast as ever that he might.  
 Unthriftiness in him may well be shewed,  
 For whom Tyburn groaneth both day and night.  
 And as I stood and cast aside my sight,  
 Disdain I saw with Dissimulation  
 Standing in sad communication.

350

But there was pointing and nodding with the head,  
 And many words said in secret wise;  
 They wand' red ay, and stood still in no stead.  
 Methought alway Dissimuler did devise  
 Me passing sore; mine heart than gan agrise.  
 I dempt and dread their talking was not good.  
 Anon Dissimuler came where I stood.

Than in his hood I saw there faces twain:  
 That one was lean and like a pined ghost,  
 That other looked as he would me have slain;  
 And to meward as he gan for to coast,  
 Whan that he was even at me almost,  
 I saw a knife hid in his one sleeve,  
 Whereon was written this word, "Mischief."

360

And in his other sleeve methought I saw  
 A spoon of gold, full of honey sweet  
 To feed a fool and for to prey a daw;  
 And on that sleeve these words were wrete,  
 "A false abstract cometh from a false concrete.  
 His hood was side, his cope was roset gray.  
 These were the words that he to me did say.

370

## DISSIMULATION

"How do ye, maister, ye look so soberly?  
 As I be saved at the dreadful day,  
 It is a perilous vice, this envy.  
 Alas, a cunning man ne dwell may  
 In no place well, but fools with <him> fray.  
 But as for that, cunning hath no foe  
 Save him that nought can—Scripture saith so.

"I know your virtue and your literature  
 By that little cunning that I have.  
 Ye be maligned sore, I you ensure,  
 But ye have craft yourself alway to save.  
 It is great scorn to see a misproud knave  
 With a clerk that cunning is to prate.  
 Let them go louse them, in the Devil's date!

380

"For albeit that this long not to me,  
 Yet on my back I bear such lewd dealing.  
 Right now I spake with one, I trow, I see—  
 But what?—a straw! I may not tell all thing  
 By God, I say there is great heart-brenning  
 Between the person ye wot of <and> you.  
 Alas, I could not deal so with an Yew.

390

"I would each man were as plain as I.  
 It is a world, I say, to hear of some.  
 I hate this feigning, fie upon it, fie!  
 A man cannot wote where to be come.  
 Iwis I could tell—but humlery, home!  
 I dare not speak, we be so laid await,  
 for all our court is full of desceit. . . ."

## DREDE

Sodainly, as he departed me fro,  
 Came pressing in one in a wonder array.  
 Ere I was ware, behind me he said, "Bo!"  
 Than I, astonied of that sodain fray,  
 Stert all at ones, I liked nothing his play;  
 For if I had not quickly fled the touch,  
 He had pluck'd out the nobles of my pouch.

400

He was trussed in a garment strait;  
 I have not seen such another's page,  
 For he could well upon a casket wait,  
 His <hood> all pounced and garded like a cage.  
 Light lime-finger, he took none other wage.  
 "Harken," quod he, "lo, here mine hond in thine,  
 To us welcome thou art, by Saint Quintine."

410

## DISCRET

"But by that Lord that is one, two, and three,  
 I have an errand to round in your ear.  
 He told me so, by God, ye may trust me.  
 Parde, remember whan ye were there,  
 There I winked on you—wot ye not where?  
 In *A loco*, I mean *juxta B*—  
 Wo is him that is blind and may not see!

420

"But to hear the subtilty and the craft  
 As I shall tell you, if ye will hark again,  
 And, whan I saw the whoresons would you haft,  
 To hold mine hond, by God, I had great pain.

For forthwith there I had him slain  
 But that I dread morder would come out.  
 Who dealeth with shrews hath need to look about."

## DREDE

And as he rounded thus in mine ear  
 Of false collusion confett' red by assent,  
 Methought I see lewd fellows here and there 430  
 Came for to slee me of mortal entent;  
 And, as they came, the shipboard fast I hent

And thought to leap, and even with that woke,  
 Caught pen and ink, and wrote this little book.

I would therewith no man were discontent,  
 Beseeching you that shall it see or read,  
 'N every point to be indifferent,  
 Sith all in substance of slumb'ring doth proceed.  
 I will not say it is matter indeed,  
 But yet oftime such dreams be found true. 440  
 Now construe ye what is the residue.

## PHILIP SPARROW ✓

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

Whan I remember again  
 How my Philip was slain,  
 Never half the pain  
 Was between you twain,  
 Pyramus and Thisbe,  
 As than 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,  
 Worrowed her on that  
 Which I loved best.  
 It cannot be express'd  
 My sorrowful heaviness,  
 But all without redress;  
 For within that stound,  
 Half slumb'ring, in a sound  
 I fell down to the ground.

Unneth I kest mine eyes  
 Toward the cloudy skies.  
 But when I did behold  
 My sparrow dead and cold,  
 No creature but that wold

Have rued upon me,  
 To behold and see  
 What heaviness did me pang;  
 Wherewith my hands I wrang,  
 That my senows cracked,  
 As though I had been racked,  
 So pained and so strained,  
 That no life well-nigh remained.  
 I sighed and I sobbed, 50  
 For that I was robbed  
 Of my sparrow's life.  
 O maiden, widow, and wife,  
 Of what estate ye be,  
 Of high or low degree,  
 Great sorrow then ye might see,  
 And learn to weep at me!  
 Such paines did me frete,  
 That mine heart did beat,  
 My visage pale and dead, 60  
 Wan, and blue as lead;  
 The pangs of hateful death  
 Well-nigh stopped my breath.  
*Heu, heu, me,*  
 That I am wo for thee!  
*Ad Dominum cum tribularer clamavi.*  
 Of God nothing else crave I  
 But Philip's soul to keep  
 From the marees deep  
 Of Acheronte's well, 70  
 That is a flood of hell;  
 And from the great Pluto,  
 The prince of endless wo;  
 And from foul Alecto,  
 With visage black and blo;  
 And from Medusa, that mare,  
 That like a fiend doth stare;  
 And from Megera's edders,  
 For ruffling of Philip's feathers,  
 And from her fiery sparklings, 80  
 For burning of his wings;  
 And from the smokes sour  
 Of Proserpina's bower;

And from the dens dark,  
 Where Cerberus doth bark,  
 Whom Theseus did afray,  
 Whom Hercules did outray,  
 As famous poets say;  
 For that hell-hound,  
 That lieth in chains bound, 90  
 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:*  
 Would God I had Zenophontes,  
 Or Socrates the wise,  
 To shew me their devise 100  
 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 Andromaca, Hector's wife,  
 Was weary of her life,  
 When she had lost her joy, 110  
 Noble Hector of Troy;  
 In like manner also  
 Encreaseth my deadly wo,  
 For my sparrow is go.  
 It was so pretty a fool,  
 It would sit on a stool,  
 And learned after my schoel  
 For to keep his cut,  
 With "Philip, keep your cut!"  
 It had a velvet cap, 120  
 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