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presents

the Annotated Popular Edition of

Ralph Roister Doister

by Nicholas Udall

c. 1552-3

Featuring complete and easy-to-read annotations.

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RALPH ROISTER DOISTER
by Nicholas Udall
c. 1552-3

DRAMATIS PERSONS.

Ralph Roister Doister.
   Dobinet Doughtie, servant to Roister Doister.
   Harpax and other Musicians in the service of Roister
   Doister.
Mathew Merygreeke, friend to Roister Doister.

Dame Christian Custance, a wealthy widow.
   Tom Trupenie, servant to Dame Custance.
   Margerie Mumblecrust, an old nurse to Dame Custance.
   Tibet Talkapace, maid to Dame Custance.
   Annot Alyface, maid to Dame Custance.

Gawyn Goodluck, a London Merchant, affianced to Dame
   Custance.
   Sym Suresby, servant to Gawyn Goodluck.
   Tristram Trustie, a friend to Gawyn Goodluck.

Scrivener.

Scene: London

INTRODUCTION to the PLAY

Ralph Roister Doister is considered the earliest proper stage comedy in the English language. Yet, despite its somewhat clunky language - owing to the rhyming verse - the play's clever parodies, clearly delineated characters and physical slapstick give it a surprisingly modern sensibility.

Roister's two protagonists are based on classical character-types: first, the parasite, Mathew Merygreeke, a penniless man who must flatter potential patrons in order to get food and money; and second, the swaggering and boasting, yet ultimately cowardly, soldier, Ralph Roister Doister (think Ralph Kramden of The Honeymooners), a man of such weak character, he will do anything Merygreeke suggests he should do; as you read Roister, you may note how every line spoken by Merygreeke to Roister Doister is ironic and manipulative.

NOTE on the PLAY'S SOURCE

The text of the play is taken from Clarence Griffin Child's 1912 edition of the play, cited below at #4, with some original spelling from the earliest known edition of 1566 reinstated.

NOTES on the ANNOTATIONS

Mention of Flügel, Child, Farmer, Williams, Hazlitt, Cooper, Gassner, Morley and Whitworth in the annotations refers to the notes provided by each of these editors in their respective editions of this play, each cited fully below.

The most commonly cited sources are listed in the footnotes immediately below. The complete list of footnotes appears at the end of this play.

1. Oxford English Dictionary (OED) online.
A. The Setting of Roister.

Unless otherwise noted, the entire play (with perhaps the partial exception of Act I, Scenes iii and v) takes place on the street either directly in front of or within sight of the entrance to Dame Christian Custance's house. A door at the back of the stage would represent the entrance to the house, and characters would enter and exit the house through this door.

Roister editor Charles Whitworth suggests that a second house, that of Roister Doister himself, may have also been represented on the stage; Whitworth further theorizes that between the homes of Custance and Roister there may have appeared something like a painting of a street (on a backdrop) disappearing into the distance, indicating to the audience that the two houses were actually located in different parts of town.12

Many of the scenes do not end clearly with all of the actors and actresses exiting the stage; Udall often begins a new scene whenever a character or two enters the stage to join those already present.

In these cases, you will note that the players on stage will suddenly observe another character or two coming towards them from off-stage; as the new characters enter, the separate parties will proceed to talk to themselves or to the audience as they pause in their movements or slowly approach each other.

In general, because it is very clear when the characters finally meet and converse, we have decided it was not necessary to insert relevant stage directions.

B. Oaths and Swears.

Ralph Roister Doister contains a notably wide range of oaths and swears, and almost all of them are of a religious nature, including some odd examples which invoke the Lord's passion, the mass, and even God's potstick!

As you read the play, you may observe that the characters (with the exception of the squeamish Roister Doister) have no aversion to explicitly mentioning God and Jesus in these oaths, although God is often replaced euphemistically with Gog and Cock, and even one Goss. It was only later, in the first decade of the 17th century, that the explicit use of God's name on stage was banned by a statute of Parliament, so that plays printed after 1605 generally contained no such explicit expressions.

A particular oddity of the era was the use of the names of body parts and other attributes as part of the oath formulae; thus we find "Gog's arms". Later plays will invoke God's eyelids, his wounds, and his blood.

C. Some Frequently Appearing Vocabulary.

Speakers of English frequently take recourse to a number of pause-phrases which parenthetically indicate an individual's frame of mind - I believe, you think, don't you know: "The governor, I think, is not so tall" (such expressions are part of a larger category of sentence organizers called discourse markers).

16th century English used some older words in these types of phrases, and these words appear repeatedly in this play:

1. trow = to believe; examples: I trow, trow ye.
2. ween = to expect, think; example: I ween.
3. wot = to know; examples: I wot, I wot not.

Some other unusual words that Udall depends heavily on include the following:

4. warrant = guarantee, assure; used especially in phrases such as I warrant you, ie. "I guarantee it", or "I assure you".
5. wist = to know.
6. pastance = pastime, recreation.
7. use = to treat.
8. fet = to fetch.

Finally, we point out that the word and could be used to mean either "and" or "if". Udall uses and in both senses regularly.
D. Roister's Rhyme Scheme.

Except for the Prologue, the entire play is written in rhyming couplets. Fortunately, the meter is completely irregular, or non-existent, and the number of syllables per line varies: this is a blessing, because otherwise the play would quickly begin to sound like a Dr. Seuss book, and the regular rhythm and rhyme would grow rapidly tiresome, indeed exhausting.

As it is, the lines generally have 10, 11 or 12 syllables; and as mentioned, thanks to there being no meter to speak of, - that is, no regular rhythm - the dialogue comes across as a little more natural, and you probably won't even be conscious of the rhyming.

Another interesting circumstance was that our author, Nicholas Udall, did not seem to obsess about having the rhymes be perfect every time; in fact, many of them seem quite strained, even taking into account the different sound of many - or most - vowels of the time compared to how we sound them today.

So, just looking at the first Scene, we have some rhymes that would work well even today, such as say-day, piping-griping, and advise-wise; we have rhymes that would have worked more obviously in the 16th century, such as feast-guest, and coming-gloming; and we also find some rhymes that require a bit of a stretch of the imagination to appreciate, or that perhaps even seem amateurish: sop-Blinkensoppe, gone-compassion, express-worthiness, is-amiss.

Another interesting feature of Udall's versifying is that he sometimes chose to use an obscure or rarely used alternative spelling or form of a word in order to make a rhyme work; for example, he uses together instead of together in order to rhyme with hither; and wast instead of waste in order to rhyme with last.

Having said all that, we recommend you not get hung up on the rhyming as you read our play; Udall used rhyming couplets as a frame, or skeleton, on which to build Roister, but since he did not obsess over perfect rhymes, neither should you: in fact, you will enjoy the play a great deal more if you do not think about the rhyming at all.

E. Written in the 1550's, But...

It is generally accepted that Nicholas Udall wrote Ralph Roister Doister in the period around 1552-1553; however, the earliest extant edition of the play was published in 1566. Interestingly, the play had actually been believed lost, until it was stumbled upon by the Reverend T. Briggs in 1818 in a quarto collection of plays.
THE PROLOGUE.

What creature is in health, either young or old,
But some mirth with modesty will be glad to use? —
As we in this interlude shall now unfold,
Wherein all scurrility we utterly refuse,
Knowing nothing more commendable for a man's recreation
Than mirth which is used in an honest fashion.

For mirth prolongeth life, and causeth health,
Mirth recreates our spirits and voideth pensiveness,
Mirth increaseth amity, not hindering our wealth,
Mirth is to be used both of more and less,
Being mixed with virtue in decent comeliness,
As we trust no good nature can gainsay the same:
Which mirth we intend to use, avoiding all blame.

The wise poets long time heretofore
Under merry comedies secrets did declare,
Wherein was contained very virtuous lore,
With mysteries and forewarnings very rare,
Such to write neither Plautus nor Terence did spare,
Which among the learned at this day bears the bell;
These, with such other, therein did excel.

The Prologue: the Prologue, sometimes called a Chorus, is a device used to introduce the play to an audience, and is recited by a single actor. The Prologue of our play is divided into 7-line stanzas, and employs a rhyme scheme known as rhyme royal, or rhythm royal: ababbcc. Rhyme royal was first used in English poetry in the 14th century by Geoffrey Chaucer, who may have borrowed it from Guillaume de Machaut, the famous 14th century French composer and poet. 14

1-2: people of all ages appreciate a bit of good clean (modest) but merry entertainment.
2: mirth = entertainment which brings pleasure. 1
3: interlude = originally used to describe a brief comic entertainment performed between acts of long mystery plays, but by the early 16th century interlude was employed to mean any stage play, especially one of a brief and light nature.
unfold = reveal, disclose. 1
4-5: the play will not employ lewd or coarse material.
Udall was a cleric - he was serving as a vicar when he wrote Roister - so that his rejection of bawdy humour is not surprising.
6: recreation = amusement, pleasure. 1
7: honest = decent, not deserving of reproach. 1
8: Child notes this was a common sentiment expressed in old works on medicine.
causeth health = leads to good health.
9: recreates = refreshes. 1
voideth pensiveness = drives away sadness. 1
10: not hindering our wealth = not causing harm to our welfare. 1, 3
11. of more and less = by the high and the low, ie. people of all ranks. 1, 5
12: comeliness = propriety, decency. 1
13: good nature = (person of) virtuous character. 1
gainsay the same = deny this.
15-19: to paraphrase generally, dramatists of ancient times - especially Plautus and Terence - were able to subtly or surreptitiously teach lessons to and morally instruct their audience, even as the viewers of the plays were conscious only of being entertained.
18: mysteries = truths (especially of a religious nature) or hidden meanings. 1, 4
forewarnings = preventive admonishments. rare = excellent, valuable.
Our comedy, or interlude, which we intend to play
Is named Roister Doister indeed,
Which against the vainglorious doth inveigh,
Whose humour the roisting sort continually doth feed.

Thus by your patience we intend to proceed
In this our interlude by God's leave and grace;
And here I take my leave for a certain space.

FINIS.
ACT I.

SCENE I.
The Street in Front of, or a Short Distance from, Christian Custance's House.

Enter Mathew Merygreeke, singing.

1 Mery. As long liveth the merry man, they say,
2 As doth the sorry man, and longer, by a day.

Yet the grasshopper, for all his summer piping,
4 Starveth in winter with hungry griping.

Therefore another said saw doth men advise,
6 That they be together both merry and wise.
This lesson must I practise, or else ere long,
8 With me, Mathew Merygreeke, it will be wrong.

Indeed men so call me, for by Him that us bought,
10 Whatever chance betide, I can take no thought,

Yet wisdom would that I did myself bethink
12 Where to be provided this day of meat and drink –
For know ye that, for all this merry note of mine,
14 He might appose me now that should ask where I dine.

My living lieth here and there, of God's grace,
16 Sometime with this good man, sometime in that place;
Sometime Lewis Loytre biddeth me come near;

Scene setting: the entire play (with the possible exceptions of Act I, Scenes iii and v) takes place on the street in front of or within sight of Christian Custance's house; hence, with the exception of the above-mentioned scenes, the setting of each scene will no longer be identified.

Entering Character: Mathew Merygreeke plays the role of the parasite, a character-type famous since the days of ancient Roman comedy. The parasite depends on the good will of other, more wealthy members of society for sustenance and patronage, usually engaging in entertaining, flattering and obsequiously serving a rich patron in return for a meal.

The phrase merry Greek (and its equivalents, gay Greek and mad Greek) was used to describe one who was a good companion or fellow1 or a merry rascal.5

1-2: Merygreeke begins the play by reciting a proverbial sentiment.
   sorry = sad, dismal.5

3-4: Allusion to Aesop's famous fable of the grasshopper and the ant: while the grasshopper spent the summer singing (piping), the ants worked hard to collect food for the winter; when winter arrived, the grasshopper, hungry, begged the ants for food, but the ants laughed at him and sent him on his way.
   hungry griping = a painfully clutching or voracious hunger.1,2

= common phrase for "frequently recalled adage",1 ie. proverbial for "proverb".

6-8: A commonplace conceit, "it is good to be merry and wise;" for Merygreeke, this means that he should continue to enjoy life but, unlike the grasshopper, not wait till the last moment to figure out where he will next eat, ie. from which of his acquaintances he can wrangle his next meal.

9-10: "I am called Merygreeke, because no matter what happens to me, I generally don't worry about it."1
   by Him that bought us = an oath: "by Christ, who redeemed our sins".

= "I would be wise to".

14: "if someone were to ask me where I would eat today, I would be stumped to come up with answer." appose = puzzle, perplex;5 Gassner prefers "embarrass".
   = means of support.2 = with or by.

= ie. Lewis Loiterer; Child notes that alliterative names have appeared in English literature since the 14th
Somewhiles Watkin Waster maketh us good cheer.

Sometime Davy Diceplayer, when he hath well cast,

Keepeth revel-rout as long as it will last;

Sometime Tom Titivile maketh us a feast;

Sometime with Sir Hugh Pye I am a bidden guest;

Sometime at Nicol Neverthrive's I get a sop;

Sometime I am feasted with Bryan Blenkinsoppe;

Sometime I hang on Hankyn Hoddydodie's sleeve;

But this day on Ralph Roister Doister's, by his leave.

For, truly, of all men he is my chief banker

Both for meat and money, and my chief shoot-anchor.

For, sooth Roister Doister in that he doth say,

And, require what ye will, ye shall have no nay.

But now of Roister Doister somewhat to express,

century; such an appellation generally suggests the owner's occupation or a particular characteristic: Flügel notes the examples of Piers Plowman, Robert the Ryfelar (Rifler) and Peter Piemaker.

Loytrer = loiterer, ie. time-waster; see Act IV.iii.187 for a note on anti-loitering laws of the 16th century.

18: as a "waster" - one who spends money extravagantly - Watkin sometimes provides Merygreeke with a good meal.

maketh us good cheer = to make one good cheer means "to gladly entertain one".

= ie. been successful at dice; cast refers to "thrown dice".

20: Keepeth revel-rout = carouses, makes merry, with the implication that Davy treats his friends to food and drink with his winnings.

it = the money Davy has won gambling.

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For, truly, of all men he is my chief banker

Both for meat and money, and my chief shoot-anchor.

For, sooth Roister Doister in that he doth say,

And, require what ye will, ye shall have no nay.

But now of Roister Doister somewhat to express,
That ye may esteem him after his worthiness,

In these twenty towns, and seek them throughout,

Is not the like stock whereon to graff a lout.

All the day long is he facing and craking

Of his great acts in fighting and fray-making.

But when Roister Doister is put to his proof,

To keep the Queen's peace is more for his behoof.

If any woman smile, or cast on him an eye,

Up is he to the hard ears in love by and by;

And in all the hot haste must she be his wife,

Else farewell his good days, and farewell his life;

Master Ralph Roister Doister is but dead and gone

Except she on him take some compassion.

Then chief of counsel must be Mathew Merygreeke,

"What if I for marriage to such an one seek?"

Then must I sooth it, whatever it is --

For what he sayeth or doeth cannot be amiss;

Hold up his yea and nay, be his nown white son.

32: "so that you may form an accurate opinion of or correctly appraise his worthiness" - a deliberately ambiguous line!

33: "you could search in twenty towns".

34: a horticultural metaphor: "and you will not find a similar stem or shoot (representing Roister, described as a lout - a country bumpkin or clown) that you can graft (graff) onto any other stem or stalk (stock)", where stock also was used to refer to a line of descent or family.¹

= bullying and boasting.² The OED suggests craking is just an alternate spelling for cracking.
= about. = brawling.
= the test.

38: he much prefers to keep the peace, ie. avoid a fight, proving himself to be a coward.

behoof = benefit, ie. liking.¹¹

Editors have noted that if our play was written before 1553, then King's peace would have originally appeared in the place of Queen's peace: Edward VI was king from 1547 until his death in 1553, when he was succeeded by a string of female monarchs: Jane (queen for nine disputed days in July 1553), Mary I (1553-8), and Elizabeth I (1558-1603), so that the phrase would have been amended when the play was edited, rewritten or published after 1553.

40: "he immediately (by and by) falls up to his ears (ie. completely) in love."¹⁵

to the hard = common expression meaning "completely up to" or "right up to";¹ the phrase up to the hard ears (and its variations over the hard ears and over head and ears), meaning "to the fullest extent" or "fully immersed", was common.⁵

41-42: Roister always has an extreme reaction whenever any woman pays him even the slightest attention: he must marry her, or his life will be over.

43-44: these lines express basically the same idea as lines 41-42.

Except = unless.

45: Roister always seeks out Merygreeke to assist him in these situations.

46: "what if I seek marriage with such-and-such a woman?" Merygreeke quotes Roister asking him for advice.

47: sooth it = "support him" or "affirm it", ie. "humour him".⁷

whatever it is = "whatever he says", or "whoever he wants to marry."

48: ie. "for one cannot find fault with anything he says or does."

49: the sense is, "uphold him in whatever he says, and be his favourite person (white son)."
Praise and roose him well, and ye have his heart won,
For so well liketh he his own fond fashions
That he taketh pride of false commendations.
But such sport have I with him as I would not lese,
Though I should be bound to live with bread and cheese.

For exalt him, and have him as ye lust indeed —

Yea, to hold his finger in a hole for a need.

I can with a word make him fain or loth,
I can with as much make him pleased or wroth,
I can, when I will, make him merry and glad,
I can, when me lust, make him sorry and sad,
I can set him in hope and eke in despair,
I can make him speak rough, and make him speak fair.
But I marvel I see him not all this same day;
I will seek him out. — But, lo! he cometh this way.

I have yond espied him sadly coming,
And in love, for twenty pound, by his gloming!

yea and nay = common formula describing alternating positive and negative assertions or vacillation in general.¹
nown = own, a corruption of "mine own".³ ⁵
white = the use of white in phrases such as white son and white boy simply indicated a term of endearment.

= flatter, extol, a synonym for praise.¹
= foolish.
= in sham compliments,¹ ie. flattery.
= entertainment. = lose.¹⁸
= formula for "simple or poor fare"; Merygreeke so enjoys manipulating Roister when he seeks the parasite for advice in love that he would help Roister even if meant never getting a substantial or luxurious meal ever again.
55: "if you praise him, you can get him to do anything you want (lust)."

56: a proverbial expression describing one who follows instructions, especially foolish ones, without question.¹
Here, Merygreeke enjoys giving ridiculous advice to Roister, which he always follows.
The expression comes from John Heywood's 1546 book of Proverbs: "But me seemth your counsaile wayth in the whole, / To make me put my finger in a hole."
You may note that the characters of this play - especially Merygreeke and Tibet - frequently resort to proverbial expressions, with a particular partiality for those published in John Heywood's 1546 book of Proverbs.

= ie. either willing or unwilling to do something.¹
= angry or enraged.
= "want to".
= ie. "I desire to".
= also.
= harshly. = kindly.
= wonder.

= you will notice throughout the play that characters announce when they see another character approaching; the two parties will usually continue to speak either to themselves or to the audience, until they finally meet.
65: "I see him over there (yond), wearing a serious (sad) expression, coming this way".
66: ie. "and I would wager 20 pounds that, based on his scowling or looking glum (gloming), he is in love." The OED files gloming under glumming.

Scene i Postscript: Merygreeke's monologue - which comprises the entire scene - basically foreshadows the primary theme of the play: namely, to showcase the many different ways Merygreeke can manipulate Roister and lead him to repeatedly make a complete fool of himself.
ACT I, SCENE II.

[Still on Stage: Merygreeke.]

Enter Roister Doister.

Roist. Come death when thou wilt, I am weary of my life.

Mery. I told you, I, we should woo another wife.

Roist. Why did God make me such a goodly person?

Mery. He is in by the week, we shall have sport anon.

Roist. And where is my trusty friend, Mathew Merygreeke?

Mery. I will make as I saw him not, he doth me seek.

Roist. I have him espied me thinketh, yond is he. –

Ho! Mathew Merygreeke, my friend, a word with thee.

Mery. I will not hear him, but make as I had haste. –

Farewell all my good friends, the time away doth waste,

And the tide, they say, tarieth for no man.

Roist. Thou must with thy good counsel help me if thou can.
Mery. God keep thee, worshipful Master Roister Doister, And fare well thee, lusty Master Roister Doister.

Roist. I must needs speak with thee a word or twain.

Mery. Within a month or two I will be here again. Negligence in great affairs, ye know, may mar all.

Roist. Attend upon me now, and well reward thee I shall.

Mery. I have take my leave, and the tide is well spent.

Roist. I die except thou help, I pray thee be content. Do thy part well now, and ask what thou wilt. For without thy aid my matter is all spilt.

Mery. Then to serve your turn I will some pains take, And let all mine own affairs alone for your sake.

Roist. My whole hope and trust resteth only in thee.

Mery. Then can ye not do amiss, whatever it be.

Roist. Gramercies, Merygreeke, most bound to thee I am.

Mery. But up with that heart, and speak out like a ram! Ye speak like a capon that had the cough now. Be of good cheer, anon ye shall do well now.

Roist. Upon thy comfort, I will all things well handle.

Mery. So, lo, that is a breast to blow out a candle!

But what is this great matter, I would fain know? We shall find remedy therefore I trow. Do ye lack money? Ye know mine old offers; Ye have always a key to my purse and coffers.

Roist. I thank thee! had ever man such a friend!

Mery. Ye give unto me, I must needs to you lend.

Roist. Nay, I have money plenty all things to discharge.

Mery. [Aside] That knew I right well when I made offer so large.

Roist. But it is no such matter.

Mery. What is it than?

20: a salutation: Merygreeke "suddenly" notices Roister.

= merry.¹

= two.

= ie. return.

28: ie. if a man ignores pressing business, ruin necessarily follows; Merygreeke is suggesting he has to travel abroad on a business trip.

= wait upon, ie. help.

= taken. = ie. Merygreeke's tide of line 18 is almost out, meaning his window of opportunity for leaving in a timely fashion is closing quickly.

= unless.

= ie. "ask any payment or reward".

= ruined.

= purpose.

= "you cannot go wrong".

= "thank you"; from the French grand merci.

= male sheep, ie. a man.

= castrated cock. = ie. a cough.¹

= soon. = enough.

= ie. "with your support or encouragement".²

53: Whitworth suggests that Merygreeke here is likely responding admiringly to Roister puffing out his chest.

lo = a vague interjection, similar ot "oh!"¹

breast = breathe.³

= like to.

= expect, believe.

61: "since you are ever ready to give money to me, I must by necessity lend money to you when you need it."

= ie. "I already knew that".

= ie. "then", written as than to rhyme with man.⁹
Are ye in danger of debt to any man?

If ye be, take no thought nor be not afraid.

Let them hardly take thought how they shall be paid.

Roist. Tut, I owe nought.

Mery. What then? fear ye imprisonment?

Roist. No.

Mery. No, I wist ye offend not, so to be shent.

But if ye had, the Tower could not you so hold.

But to break out at all times ye would be bold.

What is it – hath any man threatened you to beat?

Roist. What is he that durst have put me in that heat? He that beateth me, by His arms, shall well find,

That I will not be far from him nor run behind.

Mery. That thing know all men ever since ye overthrew The fellow of the lion which Hercules slew.

But what is it then?

Roist. Of love I make my moan.

Mery. "Ah, this foolish-a love, wil't ne'er let us alone?"

But because ye were refused the last day,

Ye said ye would ne'er more be entangled that way – "I would meddle no more, since I find all so unkind."

Roist. Yea, but I cannot so put love out of my mind.

Mery. But is your love, tell me first in any wise.

In the way of marriage, or of merchandise?

If it may otherwise than lawful be found,

Ye get none of my help for a hundred pound.

Roist. No, by my troth, I would have her to my wife.

Mery. Then are ye a good man, and God save your life! And what or who is she, with whom ye are in love?

Roist. A woman whom I know not by what means to move.

Mery. Who is it?
Roist. A woman **yond**.

Mery. What is her name?

Roist. Her yonder.

Mery. Whom?

Roist. Mistress — ah —

Mery. Fie, fie, for shame!

Love ye, and know not whom — but "her yond," "a woman?" We shall then get you a wife, I cannot tell when. 

Roist. The fair woman, **that supped with us** yesternight, And I heard her name twice or thrice, and had it right.

Mery. Yea, ye may see ye ne'er take me to good **cheer** with you, — If ye had, I could have told you her name now.

Roist. I was to blame indeed, but the next time **perchance** — And she dwelleth in this house.

Mery. What, Christian Custance?

Roist. Except I have her to my wife, I shall run mad.

Mery. Nay, "unwise" perhaps, but I **warrant you for "mad."**

Roist. I am utterly dead unless I have my desire.

Mery. Where be the bellows that blew this sudden fire?

Roist. I hear she is worth a thousand pound and more.

Mery. Yea, but learn this one lesson of me afore — An hundred pound of marriage-money, doubtless, Is ever thirty pound sterling, or somewhat less;

So that her thousand pound, if she be thrifty, Is much near about two hundred and fifty. **Howbeit**, wooers and widows are never poor.
Roist. Is she a widow? I love her better therefore.

Mery. But I hear she hath made promise to another.

Roist. He shall go without her, and he were my brother!

Mery. I have heard say, I am right well advised, That she hath to Gawyn Goodluck promised.

Roist. What is that Gawyn Goodluck?


Roist. Shall he speed afore me? Nay, sir, by sweet Saint Anne!

Ah, sir, "'Backare,' quod Mortimer to his sow,"

I will have her mine own self, I make God a vow. For I tell thee, she is worth a thousand pound.

Mery. Yet a fitter wife for your maship might be found. Such a goodly man as you might get one with land, Besides pounds of gold a thousand and a thousand, And a thousand, and a thousand, and a thousand, And so to the sum of twenty hundred thousand. Your most goodly personage is worthy of no less.

Roist. I am sorry God made me so comely, doubtless, For that maketh me eachwhere so highly favoured. And all women on me so enamoured.


Roist. Yes, eachwhere they gaze all upon me and stare.

Mery. Yea, Malkyn, I warrant you, as much as they dare. –

And ye will not believe what they say in the street, When your maship passeth by, all such as I meet, That sometimes I can scarce find what answer to make. "Who is this," saith one, "Sir Launcelot du Lake?"

"Who is this – great Guy of Warwick?" saith another.

= is engaged.
= even if.

= Gawyn is a Scottish name, meaning "white hawk".17
= who.

= "succeed before". = Anne was the mother of Mary, and grandmother of Jesus.

173: in brief, "back off, Gawyn!"
Ralph borrows a line from Heywood's Proverbs, "Nay, backare (quoth Mortimer to his sow)"; Heywood editor Julian Sharman10 observes that the allusion of the expression has long been lost, but notes that the interjection backare was used to indicate condemnation of another's forward or presumptuous conduct: "stand back!" (OED) or "hands off!" (Farmer).

= more appropriate. = "your mastership", a title of respect, used only in the 16th century.1

= ie. two million pounds, an obviously ridiculously large amount of money;
= handsome.
= everywhere. = advantaged or blessed.1

= say.
= an oath, derived from the Virgin Mary.
= quoth, ie. "you say".18

= everywhere.

195: Malkyn = a name for an effeminate or weak man.1 Merygreeke is twitting Roister in this aside. warrant = assure.

= Lancelot du Lac. aka Sir Lancelot of the Round Table; one of King Arthur's fabled knights, Lancelot was famous for his chivalry and courage.19

= English hero of romance, whose legendary exploits were first written down in the 12th century. He was known for slaying giants (including Colbrand, mentioned below in line 204), boars and dragons, and
he also fought in the Crusades in the Holy Land, where he killed the Sultan.  

"No," say I, "it is the thirteenth Hercules' brother."  

"Who is this − noble Hector of Troy," saith the third.  

"No, but of the same nest," say I, "it is a bird."  

"Who is this − great Goliath, Sampson, or Colbrand?"  

"No," say I, " but it is a brute of the Alie Land."  

"Who is this − great Alexander, or Charle le Maigne?"  

"No, it is the tenth Worthy," say I to them again. −

I know not if I said well.  

Roist. Yes, for so I am.  

Mery. Yea, for there were but nine Worthies before ye came. To some others, the third Cato I do you call.  

brute = a reference to Brute, the legendary descendent of the Trojan hero Aeneas, and the man credited with founding England; brute hence is used to mean "hero" or "person of distinction".  

Alie Land = uncertain reference, but "Holy Land" has been suggested, in response to the mention of the Biblical heroes Goliath and Sampson, Farmer, however, tentatively suggests that Alie, or alye, means "kindred" or "neighbouring", and Hazlitt, similarly, suggests "similar", so that they propose the intended meaning of the clause to be "a hero from a similar land."

Merygreeke alludes to the proverbial Nine Worthies, a collection of nine heroes from the past whose lives were worthy of admiration; they included:  

(a) 3 pagans: Hector of Troy, Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar;  

(b) 3 Jews: Joshua, David and Judas Maccabeus; and  

(c) 3 Christians: King Arthur, Charlemagne, and Godfrey of Boullion, a leader of the First Crusade, and first sovereign of the Kingdom of Jerusalem.

Roister by Merygreeke as "mock heroic descriptions".

= Alexander the Great. = Charlemagne.

= the first two Cato's were:

1) Marcus Porcius Cato (234-149 B.C.), known as "Cato the Elder", and one of early Rome's most famous statesmen, soldiers and writers. He became notorious for his severe views on ethics, and it was his special mission to eject men from the lists of senators and knights if they failed to live up to the moral Roman code he demanded of all, earning him his most enduring epithet, "the Censor"; and

2) Marcus Porcius Cato (95-46 B.C.), called "the Younger" to distinguish him from his more famous great-grandfather. Seeing himself as a defender of the
And so, as well as I can, I answer them all. "Sir, I pray you, what lord or great gentleman is this?"
"Master Ralph Roister Doister, dame," say I, "iwis." "O Lord," saith she then, "what a goodly man it is. Would Christ I had such a husband as he is!"

"O Lord," say some, "that the sight of his face we lack!"
"It is enough for you," say I, "to see his back. His face is for ladies of high and noble parages. With whom he hardly 'scapeth' great marriages" – with much more than this, and much otherwise.

Roist. I can thee thank that thou canst such answers devise;
But I perceive thou dost me thoroughly know.
Mery. I mark your manners for mine own learning, I trow, But such is your beauty, and such are your acts, Such is your personage, and such are your facts, That all women, fair and foul, more and less, They eye you, they lub you, they talk of you doubtless. Your pleasant look maketh them all merry;
Ye pass not by, but they laugh till they be weary;
Yea and money could I have, the truth to tell, Of many, to bring you that way where they dwell.

Roist. Merygreeke, for this thy reporting well of me –
Mery. What should I else, sir? It is my duty, pardee.
Roist. I promise thou shalt not lack, while I have a groat.

Mery. Faith, sir, and I ne'er had more need of a new coat.
Roist. Thou shalt have one to-morrow, and gold for to spend.
Mery. Then I trust to bring the day to a good end; For, as for mine own part, having money enow, I could live only with the remembrance of you. But now to your widow whom you love so hot.

Roist. By Cock, thou sayest truth! I had almost forgot.
Mery. What if Christian Custance will not have you, what?
Roist. Have me? Yes, I warrant you, never doubt of that;
I know she loveth me, but she dare not speak.

Mery. Indeed, meet it were somebody should it break.

Roist. She looked on me twenty times yesternight,
And laughed so −

Mery. That she could not sit upright.

Roist. No, faith, could she not.

Mery. No, even such a thing I cast.

Roist. But for wooing, thou knowest, women are shamefast.
But, and she knew my mind, I know she would be glad,
And think it the best chance that ever she had.

Mery. To her then like a man, and be bold forth to start!
Wooers never speed well that have a false heart.

Roist. What may I best do?

Mery. Sir, remain ye awhile [here].
Ere long one or other of her house will appear.
Ye know my mind.

Roist. Yea, now, hardly, let me alone!

Mery. In the meantime, sir, if you please, I will home, −
And call your musicians, for, in this your case,

It would set you forth, and all your wooing grace;
Ye may not lack your instruments to play and sing.

Roist. Thou knowest I can do that.

Mery. As well as anything.
Shall I go call your folks, that ye may show a cast?

Roist. Yea, run, I beseech thee, in all possible haste.

Mery. I go.

300 [Exit.]
Ralph. Yea, for I love singing out of measure.

It comforteth my spirits and doth me great pleasure.

But who cometh forth yond from my sweetheart Custance? My matter frameth well, this is a lucky chance.

ACT I, SCENE III.
The Yard before Custance's House.

[Still on Stage: Roister Doister.]

Enter Madge Mumblecrust, spinning on the distaff, and Tibet Talkapace, sewing.

Madge. If this distaff were spun, Margerie Mumblecrust –

Tibet. Where good stale ale is, will drink no water, I trust.
**Midge.** Dame Custance hath promised us **good ale and white bread.**

**Tibet.** If she keep not **promise**, I will **beshrew** her head:

But it will be **stark** night before I shall **have done**.

**Roist.** I will stand here awhile, and talk with them **anon**, I hear them speak of Custance, which doth my heart good; To hear her name spoken doth even comfort my blood.

**Midge.** Sit down to your work, Tibet, like a good girl,

**Tibet.** Nurse, **meddle you with** your spindle and your **whirl**!

No haste but good, Madge Mumblecrust, for "whip and **whur**."
The old proverb doth say, "never made good **fur**."

**Midge.** Well, ye will sit down to your work **anon**, I trust.

**Tibet.** "Soft fire maketh sweet malt," good Madge Mumblecrust.

**Midge.** And sweet malt maketh **jolly** good ale **for the nones,**
sarcastic, "and if one has good ale to drink, then one wouldn't have to drink water."

5: Midge absent-mindedly picks up on Tibet's mentioning **ale.**

**good ale and white bread** = ie. better fare than usual (Flügel); **white bread** is bread made of a combination of rye and wheat grain, wheat being more expensive and of slightly better nutritional value than rye. Poorer folk generally only ate rye bread.

= ie. her promise. = curse.

= absolute, fully.1,5 = ie. "be done (with my sewing);" assuming the ladies have just walked onto the stage, Tibet has remained standing, not yet ready to begin working, even as Midge has sat down and started spinning. Tibet's lazy nature will soon become more evident.

= in a moment.

16: **meddle you with** = "busy yourself with", or "keep your nose in", the sense of the line being "mind your own business."1

**whirl** = a weighty disk attached to a spindle to cause it to spin with greater force.4

17-18: Tibet recites a pair of proverbial sentiments, both of which admonish against rushing a job, ie. "haste makes waste". The lazy Tibet uses these proverbs to justify her slow work.23

**No haste but good** = proverbial, from Heywood; a variation on an earlier formula, "an ill haste is not good", which appeared in a 1515 publication, *John of Bordeaux*, by Sir John Bourchier, Lord Berners.

**whip and whur never made good fur** = William Hazlitt, in his collection of English proverbs, infers that this is an old agricultural saying.21 **Whip** could refer to the instrument of whipping, or (as the OED suggests) could mean "brisk or hasty movement"; **whur** could mean either "hurry" or "scolding",8 and **fur** is short for "furrow".5 Putting it all together, the meaning of the phrase may be something like, "if you push your draft animal too hard, the result will be a poorly-created furrow for planting."

= soon.

22: ie. "a gentle fire makes the best malt"; Tibet quotes another proverb of Heywood's, warning yet again against rushing anything.

= very.5 = for the nonce, ie. for the purpose or occasion.2
Tibet. Which will slide down the lane without any bones.

[Canter.]

"Old brown bread crusts must have much good mumbling. But good ale down your throat hath good easy tumbling."

Roist. The jolliest wenche that ere I heard, little mouse! 

May I not rejoice that she shall dwell in my house!

Tibet. So, sirrah, now this gear beginneth for to frame.

Madge. Thanks to God, though your work stand still, your tongue is not lame.

Tibet. And though your teeth be gone, both so sharp and so fine, yet your tongue can renne on pattens as well as mine.

Madge. Ye were not for nought named Tib Talkapace.

Tibet. Doth my talk grieve you? Alack, God save your grace!

Madge. I hold a groat ye will drink anon for this gear.

Enter Annot Alyface, [with her knitting].

Tibet. And I will pray you the stripes for me to bear.

Madge. I hold a penny ye will drink without a cup.
Tibet. Whereinsoe'er ye drink, I wot ye drink all up.

Annot. By Cock, and well sewed, my good Tibet Talkapace!

Tibet. And e'en as well knit, my nown Annot Alyface.

Roist. See what a sort she keepeth that must be my wife! Shall not I, when I have her, lead a merry life?

Tibet. Welcome, my good wench, and sit here by me just.

Annot. And how doth our old beldame here, Madge Mumblecrust?

Tibet. Chide, and find faults, and threaten to complain.

Annot. To make us poor girls shent to her is small gain.

Madge. I did neither chide, nor complain, nor threaten.

Roist. It would grieve my heart to see one of them beaten.

Madge. I did nothing but bid her work and hold her peace.

Tibet. So would I, if you could your clattering cease – But the devil cannot make old trot hold her tongue.

Annot. Let all these matters pass, and we three sing a song, So shall we pleasantly both the time beguile now, And eke dispatch all our works ere we can tell how.

Tibet. I shrew them that say nay, and that shall not be I.

Madge. And I am well content.

Tibet. Sing on then, by and by.

Roist. And I will not away, but listen to their song, Yet Merygreeke and my folks tarry very long.

[ Tibet, Annot, and Madge do sing here.]

Pipe, merry Annot! etc.
Trilla, trilla, trillarie.
Work, Tibet! work, Annot! work, Margerie!
Sew, Tibet! knit, Annot! spin, Margerie!
Let us see who shall win the victory.

Tibet. This sleeve is not willing to be sewed, I trow.
A small thing might make me all in the ground to throw.

[Then they sing again.]

Pipe, merry Annot! etc.
Trilla, trilla, trillarie.
What, Tibet! what, Annot! what, Margerie!
Ye sleep, but we do not, that shall we try.
Your fingers be numbed, our work will not lie.

Tibet. If ye do so again, well I would advise you nay.

In good sooth one stop more, and I make holiday.

[They sing the third time.]

Pipe, merry Annot! etc.
Trilla, trilla, trillarie.
Now, Tibet! now, Annot! now, Margerie!
Now whippet apace for the maistry.
But it will not be, our mouth is so dry.

Tibet. Ah, each finger is a thumb to-day, methink;
I care not to let all alone, choose it swim or sink.

[They sing the fourth time.]

Pipe, merry Annot, etc.
Trilla, trilla, trillarie.

---

song, continues Child, might be performed as a round
(which interpretation may be supported by Tibet's use
of by and by above in line 89).
Williams thinks the etc. means the line refers to the
refrain of a popular song.
The first line of this song was referenced in an
earlier published poem, A Pore Helpe (c.1548): "And
martirs woulde them make / That brent were at a stake /And sing pipe meri annot, etc."

Trilla, trilla, trillarie.
98 Work, Tibet! work, Annot! work, Margerie!
Sew, Tibet! knit, Annot! spin, Margerie!
100 Let us see who shall win the victory.

Tibet. This sleeve is not willing to be sewed, I trow.
A small thing might make me all in the ground to throw.

[Then they sing again.]

Pipe, merry Annot! etc.
Trilla, trilla, trillarie.
What, Tibet! what, Annot! what, Margerie!
Ye sleep, but we do not, that shall we try.
Your fingers be numbed, our work will not lie.

Tibet. If ye do so again, well I would advise you nay.

In good sooth one stop more, and I make holiday.

[They sing the third time.]

Pipe, merry Annot! etc.
Trilla, trilla, trillarie.
Now, Tibet! now, Annot! now, Margerie!
Now whippet apace for the maistry.
But it will not be, our mouth is so dry.

Tibet. Ah, each finger is a thumb to-day, methink;
I care not to let all alone, choose it swim or sink.

[They sing the fourth time.]
When, Tibet? when, Annot? when, Margerie?
I will not, I cannot, no more can I.
Then give we all over, and there let it lie.

[Let her cast down her work.]

Tibet. There it lieth; the worst is but a curried coat —
Tut, I am used thereto, I care not a groat!

Annot. Have we done singing since? Then will I in again.
Here I found you, and here I leave both twain.

[Exit.]

Madge. And I will not be long after — Tib Talkapace!

Tibet. What is the matter?

Madge. Yond stood a man all this space
And hath heard all that ever we spake together.

Tibet. Marry, the more lout he for his coming hither,
And the less good he can to listen maidens talk.
I care not, and I go bid him hence for to walk;
It were well done to know what he maketh hereaway.

Roist. Now might I speak to them, if I wist what to say.

Madge. Nay, we will go both off, and see what he is.

Roist. One that hath heard all your talk and singing, i wis.

Tibet. The more to blame you! A good thrifty husband
Would elsewhere have had some better matters in hand.

Roist. I did it for no harm, but for good love I bear
To your dame mistress Custance, I did your talk hear.
And, mistress nurse, I will kiss you for acquaintance.

Madge. I come anon, sir.

Tibet. Faith, I would our dame Custance
Saw this gear.

Madge. I must first wipe all clean, yea, I must.

Tibet. Ill chieve it, doting fool, but it must be cust.
Madge. God yelde you, sir; chad not so much, ichotte not when –
Ne'er since chwas bore, – chwine – of such a gay gentleman.

Roist. I will kiss you too, maiden, for the good will I bear you.

Tibet. No, forsooth, by your leave, ye shall not kiss me.

Roist. Yes, be not afeard, I do not disdain you a whit.

Tibet. Why should I fear you? I have not so little wit –
Ye are but a man I know very well.

Roist. Why, then?

Tibet. Forsooth for I will not! I use not to kiss men.

Roist. I would fain kiss you too, good maiden, if I might.

Tibet. What should that need?

Roist. But to honour you by this light.
I use to kiss all them that I love, to God I vow.

Tibet. Yea, sir? – I pray you, when did ye last kiss your cow?

Roist. Ye might be proud to kiss me, if ye were wise.

Tibet. What promotion were therein?

Roist. Nurse is not so nice.

It appears that Madge is so flustered by the kiss, that she has reverted into the rustic dialect she probably grew up speaking.

Carla Mazzio, however, argues that Madge, having been embarrassingly caught singing and chastising her fellow servants, is deliberately slipping into dialect to "reassert gender decorum and reestablish social distance" (p. 80). You may decide whether this interpretation is legitimate or is just post-modern bunk.

yelde you = "yield you", meaning "reward you".
chad = "I had".
ichotte = "I know".
whan = when.
chwas bore = "I was born".
chwine = "I ween", ie. "I think".
of = by.

The ch- opening of all these colloquial words stands in for the pronoun "I", and was common in south-west England in the 15th-17th centuries.
Tibet. Well, I have not been taught to kissing and licking. Tibet presumably does not use the word *licking* to suggest a sort of sloppy salaciousness, but rather to indicate a contemptuous comparison to the behaviour of an affectionate animal; I note the appearance of a similar phrase in William Caxton's 1484 collection of Aesop's fables: "[The asse] beganne to kysse and to lykke hym."

Roist. Yet I thank you, mistress nurse, ye made no sticking. = Ralph is addressing Madge: "you did not hesitate."

Madge. I will not stick for a koss with such a man as you. 214: *stick for* = hesitate at, be overly-scrupulous with respect to. 5

koss = old, perhaps already obsolete form, for kiss.

Tibet. They that lust —! I will again to my sewing now. 216: They that lust = Tibet begins, without finishing, a well-known proverb which observes the lack of choosiness amongst those inclined to amorousness, but what the full proverb is, no editor has commented, and I have traced no source for it. *again* = ie. turn again, return.

Annot. Tidings, ho! tidings! dame Custance greeteth you well. 220: the stage direction was added by later editors.

Roist. Whom? me? 222: "but if (and) she knew I were here…"


Roist. But and she knew me here. 

Annot. Tibet Talkapace, Your mistress Custance and mine, must speak with your grace.


Annot. Ye must come in to her, out of all doubts.

Tibet. And my work not half done? A mischief on all louts. 235: Tibet curses all rustic clods (*louts*), but of course she specifically means Roister, with whom she has wasted a great deal of time in idle chatter when she could have been finishing up her sewing; now she may face discipline for her job only half-done.

[Exeunt Annot and Tibet.]

Roist. Ah, good sweet nurse! = as Cooper notes, this probably should read "who?" to rhyme with line 245.

Madge. Ah, good sweet gentleman! = "what is it you wish for?"


Madge. Nay, I cannot tell, sir, but what thing would you? = ie. obsolete form of "commends". 1,5 Whitworth observes that Madge has misspoken - she should have said that Custance "commends herself" to you.

Roist. How doth sweet Custance, my heart of gold, tell me how? 248: = ie. obsolete form of "commends". 1,5 Whitworth observes that Madge has misspoken - she should have said that Custance "commends herself" to you.

Madge. She doth very well, sir, and command me to you.

Roist. To me?
Madge. Yea, to you, sir.

Roist. To me? Nurse, tell me plain, To me?

Madge. Ye.

Roist. That word maketh me alive again.

Madge. She command me to one, last day, whoe'er it was.

Roist. That was e'en to me and none other, by the Mass.

Madge. I cannot tell you surely, but one it was.

Roist. It was I and none other; this cometh to good pass.

I promise thee, nurse, I favour her.

Madge. E'en so, sir.

Roist. Bid her sue to me for marriage.

Madge. E'en so, sir.

Roist. And surely for thy sake she shall speed.

Madge. E'en so, sir.

Roist. I shall be contented to take her.

Madge. E'en so, sir.

Roist. But at thy request and for thy sake.

Madge. E'en so, sir.

Roist. And come – hark in thine ear what to say.

Madge. E'en so, sir.

[Here let him tell her a great long tale in her ear.]

ACT I, SCENE IV.
[Still on Stage: Roister Doister and Madge, Roister whispering to her.]

Enter Merygreeke, Dobinet Doughtie, Harpax,
[ and at least one other Musician.]

Entering Characters: the stage activity continues seamlessly from the previous scene: along with Merygreeke, we see the arrival of Roister's servant, Dobinet Doughtie, and his musicians (probably a total of two), which include Harpax.

Doughtie = doughty, meaning "valiant".

Harpax = the name of a slave in Plautus' comedy Pseudolus, or The Cheat; the ancient Roman Pliny the Elder, in his Natural History, tells us that the word harpax was used to describe both a solution of sulfur...
Mery. Come on, sirs, **pace**, and **quit** yourselves like men, Your **pains** shall be rewarded.

Dob. But I **wot** not when.

Mery. Do your **master worship** as ye have done in time past.

Dob. Speak to them; of mine office he shall have a **cast**.

Mery. Harpax, look that thou do well too, and thy **fellow**.

Harp. I **warrant**, if he will mine example follow.

Mery. Curtsy, **whoresons**, duck you, and crouch at every word.

Dob. Yes, whether our master speak **earnest** or bord.

Mery. For this **lieth upon** his **preferment** indeed.

Dob. **Oft** is he a wooer, but never doth he **speed**.

Mery. But with whom is he now so **sadly rounding yond**?

Dob. With "**Nobs, nicebecetur, miserere**" fond.

and turpentine (used to treat leprosy) and a form of amber found in Syria;

= "hurry". = **acquit**.

= efforts; Merygreeke assures the musicians they will be compensated for their work.

4: "but I don't know (wot) when." Dobinet's speeches, mostly asides, generally consist of humorous responses and interjections.

= "treat your master (Roister) with the respect or due reverence". 

8: in this aside, Dobinet encourages Merygreeke to continue instructing the musicians; in this way, the parasite will get a sampling (**cast**) of what Dobinet's job entails.

= companion, ie. the other musician.

= ie. "I guarantee he will do well too".

14: Merygreeke instructs the musicians to bow whenever Roister speaks to them; **curtsy, duck** and **crouch** are synonyms for "bow".

**whoreson** = a common term of abuse.

24: "with his words of infatuation, such as dear one, dainty one, have pity on me."

A puzzling and much discussed line. The most likely interpretation is that Dobinet is making light of Roister's talking to Madge, and the Latin words are a satirical version of the words he imputes to Roister.

**nobis** = a term of endearment. 

**nicebecetur** = fine, dainty woman or affected finicking woman.

**miserere** = expressing pity. 

**fond** = doting, infatuated, an adjective describing Roister's imagined words.

In addition, there is a parody here of the liturgical words **miserere nobis**, or "have pity on us". Farmer suggests a possible alternative interpretation of the line, which turns on **miserere** being understood to mean "wretch" if it is a noun instead of a verb; the Latin words then represent descriptions of Madge: "with his doting dear, dainty wretch of a woman". The Latin words, continues Farmer, describe Madge's "woebegone appearance."
Mery. God be at your wedding, be ye sped already?

I did not suppose that your love was so greedy.
I perceive now ye have chose of devotion, —
And joy have ye, lady, of your promotion.

Ralph. Tush, fool, thou art deceived, this is not she.

Mery. Well, mock much of her, and keep her well, I 'vise ye.
I will take no charge of such a fair piece' keeping.

Mumb. What aileth this fellow? he driveth me to weeping.

Mery. What, weep on the wedding day? Be merry, woman,
Though I say it, ye have chose a good gentleman.

Roist. Cocks nouns, what meanest thou, man? tut-a-whistle!

Mery. Ah, sir, be good to her; she is but a gristle.
Ah, sweet lamb and coney!

Roist. Tut, thou art deceived.
Mery. Weep no more, lady, ye shall be well received. —
Up with some merry noise, sirs, to bring home the bride.


Mery. Then ye intend by night to have her home brought.

Roist. I tell thee no.

Mery. How then?

Roist. 'Tis neither meant ne thought.

Mery. What shall we then do with her?

Roist. Ah, foolish harebrain.
This is not she.

Mery. No is? Why then, unsaid again!
And what young girl is this with your maship so bold?

Roist. A girl?

Mery. Yea — I dare say, scarce yet three score year old.

Roist. This same is the fair widow's nurse, of whom ye wot.

26: Merygreeke pretends to mistake Madge as Roister's intended bride; he knows full well she is not the woman whom Roister wants to marry.

sped = successful (in his courting).
= eager (to get married).
= ie. "chosen a wife out of pure love".
= ie. marriage.

41: Cock's nouns = an oath, a variation on "God's wounds".

tut-a-whistle = "what nonsense", or a warning to speak no more.

= a delicate individual (OED), grey with age (Flügel),
or a term of endearment for young girls (Farmer).
= a term of endearment.

= regarded.

Up with some merry noise, sirs, to bring home the bride.

= wide of the mark, ie. mistaken (a term from archery).

53: ie. "then you intend to be married by tonight."

= nor.

= Udall, in a 1542 work, had been the first to use this early version of this still-common adjective harebrained.

= "is it not she?" = "let it (ie. what I said) be unsaid again!"
Mery. Is she but a nurse of a house? Hence home, old trot. Hence at once!

Roist. No, no.

Mery. What, an please your maship, a nurse talk so homely with one of your worship?

Roist. I will have it so: it is my pleasure and will.

Mery. Then I am content. Nurse, come again, tarry still.

Roist. What, she will help forward this my suit for her part.

Mery. Then is't mine own pigsney, and blessing on my heart.

Roist. This is our best friend, man.

Mery. Then teach her what to say.

Madge. I am taught already.

Mery. Then go, make no delay.

Roist. Yet hark, one word in thine ear.

Mery. Back, sirs, from his tail.

Roist. Back, villains, will ye be privy of my counsail?

Mery. Back, sirs, so: I told you afore ye would be shent.

Roist. She shall have the first day a whole peck of argent.

Madge. A peck! Nomine Patris, have ye so much spare?

Roist. Yea, and a cart-load thereto, or else were it bare. Besides other moveables, household stuff, and land.

Madge. Have ye lands too?

Roist. An hundred marks.

Mery. Yea, a thousand.

= "get yourself home". = decrepit old woman.13

75-76: Merygreek is "shocked" that Madge and Roister are so intimate with each other.

= if it.

= in such a friendly or familiar manner.13

= satisfied. = "please continue to hang around here."

87: Roister has been giving instructions to Madge for her help in his pursuit of Custance.

= ie. "she is". = sweetheart, a term of endearment.

Merygreeke addresses the musicians, who have begun to crowd Roister during this conversation; a very early editor suggests Merygreeke is herding the musicians against Roister even as he claims to be trying to hold them back.

= listen; Roister wants to give Madge one more instruction.

101: Merygreeke addresses the musicians, who have begun to crowd Roister during this conversation; a very early editor suggests Merygreeke is herding the musicians against Roister even as he claims to be trying to hold them back.

tail = backside.1

= counsel, advice.

= before. = chided.

107: Roister instructs Madge to impress Custance with his wealth.

peck = 2 gallons, about 554 cubic inches.

argent = silver.

109: Nomine Patris = "the name of the Father"; Madge crosses herself here.4

spare = ie. to spare,3 or perhaps elliptical for "spare cash".9

= in addition.1 = "it would be poorly provided indeed".4

= a mark was a unit of money worth 2/3 of a pound sterling; Roister means he has an annual income of about 67 pounds from renting his land.
Madge. And have ye cattle too? and sheep too?
Roist. Yea, a few.

Mery. He is ashamed the number of them to shew. 
E'en round about him, as many thousand sheep goes,  
As he and thou, and I too, have fingers and toes.

Madge. And how many years old be you?
Roist. Forty at least.

Mery. Yea, and thrice forty to them.

Roist. Nay, now thou dost jest.  
I am not so old; thou misreckonest my years.

Mery. I know that; but my mind was on bullocks and steers.

Madge. And what shall I show her your mastership's name is?
Roist. Nay, she shall make suit ere she know that, i-wis.

Madge. Yet let me somewhat know.

Mery. This is he, understand,

That killed the Blue Spider in Blanchepowder land.

Madge. Yea, Jesus, William zee law, did he zo, law!

Mery. Yea, and the last elephant that ever he saw,  
As the beast passed by, he start out of a busk.

And e'en with pure strength of arms plucked out his great tusk.

Madge. Jesus, nomine Patris, what a thing was that!

= common alternative for "show".
125-6: as the three of them have 30 fingers and toes,  
Roister has 30,000 cattle and sheep.

= in addition to; Merygreeke, as if he were on a roll  
of sorts, absurdly adds years to Roister's age with the  
same abandon with which he added money and  
livestock to his property.

= young or castrated bulls. = bullocks or young oxen.  
= tell. = "press me for marriage". = before. = assuredly.

145-182: this passage is modeled on a similar episode  
in Plautus' ancient Roman comedy Miles Gloriosus, in  
which the parasite absurdly extols the heroic qualities  
of the vain-glorious soldier he is flattering.

146: Udall has likely invented this allusion;  
Merygreeke wants this assertion that Roister killed a  
spider in the kitchen to have the same awe-inspiring  
effect as if he were describing David as having "slain  
the giant Goliath on the plains of Judah!"

Blanchepowder = a powder made from ginger,  
cinnamon and nutmeg, used on deserts.

148: Madge, excited, slips back into her rural dialect.  
zee = see; an "s" at the start of a word frequently  
becomes a "z" to suggest a western dialect. 

c = an exclamation meaning "indeed".  
zo = so.

= jumped or emerged suddenly. = northern dialect for  
"bush".

150-2: Udall borrowed (and modified) the idea of the  
boastful captain wounding an elephant with his bare  
hands from the opening scene of Plautus' play Miles  
Gloriosus, in which the parasite brags that the captain  
had broken the thigh of an elephant with a single  
punch, and further suggests that if the soldier had put  
any effort into the blow, his "arm would have passed  
right through the hide, the entrails, and the frontispiece  
of the elephant."
Roist. Yea, but, Merygreeke, one thing thou hast forgot.

Mery. What?

Roist. Of th' other elephant.

Mery. Oh, him that fled away.

Roist. Yea.

Mery. Yea, he knew that his match was in place that day.

Tut, he bet the King of Crickets on Christmas day,
That he crept in a hole, and not a word to say.

Madge. A sore man, by zembletee.

Mery. Why, he wrong a club
Once in a fray out of the hand of Belzebub.

Roist. And how when Mumfision −?

Mery. Oh, your custreling
Bore the lantern a-field so before the gosling −

Nay, that is too long a matter now to be told.
Never ask his name, nurse, I warrant thee, be bold.
He conquered in one day from Rome to Naples,
And won towns, nurse, as fast as thou canst make apples.

Madge. O Lord, my heart quaketh for fear: he is too sore.

Roist. Thou makest her too much afeard, Merygreeke, no more.
This tale would fear my sweetheart Custance right evil.

Mery. Nay, let her take him, nurse, and fear not the devil.
But thus is our song dashed. − Sirs, ye may home again.

Roist. No, shall they not. I charge you all here to remain −
The villain slaves, a whole day ere they can be found.

Mery. Couch on your marybones, whoresons, down to the ground.

Was it meet he should tarry so long in one place

156: the second elephant fled, knowing he had met his match at that place on this day.

157: bet = 16th century variation of, and perhaps regional alternative for, "beat".¹

King of Crickets = an invention of Udall's.

170: sore = severe or violent.¹

by zembletee = malapropism for "by semblance", meaning "by his looks". Flügel and Farmer, however, suggest "by the holy blood".

= 16th century variation for "wrung".¹

= a leading devil of Hell, sometimes conflated with Lucifer, the head demon.

= a soldier or other imaginary character Roister is raising, around whom he hopes Merygreeke will invent another tall tale.

177-8: Merygreeke plays along with Roister, but his fictional account immediately turns ridiculous.

custreling = diminutive form of custrel, both words referring to a servant or armour-bearer to a knight or soldier.¹

Bore = ie. "who bore", ie. carried.

= "you can be sure."

= ie. cook.⁴

= ie. of too violent character.¹

= frighten.

= proverbial.

190: "but it appears our music is spoiled." Merygreeke then dismisses the musicians.

= order.

193: if the musicians go home, it will take another whole day to round them up again.

195: Merygreeke orders the musicians to kneel before Roister.

couch = crouch or submit.¹

marybones = marrowbones, ie. knees.⁵

196: "was it right (meet) Roister should remain waiting here for so long (for you to arrive)"; Merygreeke is dressing down the musicians.
Without harmony of music, or some solace?
Whoso hath such bees as your master in his head
Had need to have his spirits with music to be fed. —
By your mastership's licence —

Roist. What is that? a mote?
Mery. No, it was a fool's feather had light on your coat.

Roist. I was nigh no feathers since I came from my bed.
Mery. No, sir, it was a hair that was fall from your head.
Roist. My men come when it please them.

Mery. By your leave —
Roist. What is that?
Mery. Your gown was foul spotted with the foot of a gnat.
Roist. Their master to offend they are nothing afeard —
What now?
Mery. A lousy hair from your mastership's beard.

Omnès famuli. And sir, for nurse's sake, pardon this one offence.
We shall not after this show the like negligence.
Roist. I pardon you this once, and come, sing ne'er the worse.
Mery. How like you the goodness of this gentleman, nurse?
Madge. God save his mastership that so can his men forgive!
And I will hear them sing ere I go, by his leave.
Roist. Many, and thou shalt, wench. Come, we two will dance!

Madge. Nay, I will by mine own self foot the song, perchance.

Roist. Go to it, sirs, lustily.

Madge. Pipe up a merry note, Let me hear it played, I will foot it for a groat.

[Content.]

Whoso to marry a minion wife, Hath had good chance and hap, Must love her and cherish her all his life, And dandle her in his lap.

If she will fare well, if she will go gay, A good husband ever still, Whatever she lust to do, or to say, Must let her have her own will.

About what affairs soever he go, He must show her all his mind. None of his counsel she may be kept fro. Else is he a man unkind.

Roist. Now, nurse, take this same letter here to thy mistress, And as my trust is in thee, ply my business.

Madge. It shall be done.

Mery. Who made it?

Roist. I wrote it each whit.

Mery. Then needs it no mending.

Roist. No, no.

Mery. No, I know your wit.

Roist. I warrant it well.

Madge. It shall be delivered. But, if ye speed, shall I be considered?

Mery. Whough! dost thou doubt of that?

Mery. What shall I have?

Mery. An hundred times more than thou canst devise to crave.
Mady. Shall I have some new gear? – for my old is all spent.

Mery. The worst kitchen wench shall go in ladies' raiment.

Mady. Yea?

Mery. And the worst drudge in the house shall go better
Than your mistress doth now.

Mady. Then I trudge with your letter.

Roi. Now, may I repose me – Custance is mine own.
Let us sing and play homeward that it may be known.

Mery. But are you sure that your letter is well enough?

Roi. I wrote it myself.

Mery. Then sing we to dinner.

[Here they sing, and go out singing.]

ACT I, SCENE V.
A Room in Custance's House.

Enter Christian Custance and Mady.

Cust. Who took thee this letter, Margerie Mumblecrust?

Mady. A lusty gay bachelor took it me of trust,
And if ye seek to him he will 'low your doing.

Cust. Yea, but where learned he that manner of wooing?

Mady. If to sue to him, you will any pains take,
He will have you to his wife, he saith, for my sake.

Cust. Some wise gentleman, belike, I am bespoken;

And I thought verily this had been some token

= clothes.
= lowest. = the clothes of a lady or noble-woman.

=ie. servant who performs the most menial tasks.
= depart.2

= "I can rest confidently." Note the use of the
grammatical construction known as the ethical
dative, in which the superfluous me of I repose
me adds emphasis to the sentiment.

= a previous editor suggested changing this to "will
win her" in order to provide a rhyme for the scene's
last line.

Entering Characters: we finally meet Christian
Custance, the widow Roister wishes to marry. Mady
has delivered Roister's letter to Dame Custance.

Several editors suggest that the name Custance is a
variation of Constance, and is meant to evoke her
loyalty or faithfulness.

= gave.3

4: seek to = pursue.

'low your doing = "receive you with favour",
assuming 'low stands for "allow", which means "admit"
or "approve";3 but Child has love; the original editions
printed lowe, which could go either way.

8: an inverted pair of clauses: "if you will make an
effort (pains take) to entreat (sue to) him". Mady is
too busy repeating her message to Custance to notice
she has been asked a question.

11: Some wise gentleman = Custance is greatly given
to speaking with irony and sarcasm.

belike = probably.

bespoken = spoken for, promised to another.3

12: verily = truly.

this = ie. the letter Mady brought to Custance.

token = an expression of affection, ie. a love letter.1
From my dear spouse, Gawyn Goodluck, whom when he please, God luckily send home to both our hearts’ ease.

**Madge.** A joyly man it is, I wot well by report, And would have you to him for marriage resort. Best open the writing, and see what it doth speak.

**Cust.** At this time, nurse, I will neither read nor break.

**Madge.** He promised to give you a whole peck of gold.

**Cust.** Perchance, lack of a pint when it shall be all told.

**Madge.** I would take a gay rich husband, and I were you.

**Cust.** In good sooth, Madge, e’en so would I, if I were thou. But no more of this fond talk now − let us go in, And see thou no more move me folly to begin. Nor bring me no more letters for no man’s pleasure, But thou know from whom.

**Madge.** I warrant ye shall be sure.

[Exeunt.]
ACT II.

SCENE I. Enter Dobinet.

Entering Characters: Roister's servant Dobinet is searching for Custance's house to deliver some tokens of Roister's esteem to the widow; in the meantime, he complains about the ceaseless work in which he and his fellow servants are forced to engage by their master to help him get a wife.

Act II: a day has passed since the events of Act I.

1 Dob. Where is the house I go to, before or behind?
2 I know not where nor when nor how I shall it find.
3 If I had ten men's bodies and legs and strength,
4 This trotting that I have must needs lame me at length.
5 And now that my master is new set on wooing,
6 I trust there shall none of us find lack of doing.
7 Two pair of shoes a day will now be too little
8 To serve me, I must trot to and fro so mickle.
9 "Go bear me this token," "carry me this letter,"
10 Now this is the best way, now that way is better.
11 "Up before day, sirs, I charge you, an hour or twain,
12 Trudge, do me this message, and bring word quick again."
13 If one miss but a minute, then, "His arms and wounds,
14 I would not have slacked for ten thousand pounds!
15 Nay, see, I beseech you, if my most trusty page
16 Go not now about to hinder my marriage!"
17 So fervent hot wooing, and so far from wiving,
18 I trow, never was any creature living.
19 With every woman is he in some love's pang,
20 Then up to our lute at midnight, twangledom twang,

Then twang with our sonnets, and twang with our dumps,
And heigho from our heart, as heavy as lead lumps;

Then to our recorder with toodeloodle poop,

As the howlet out of an ivy bush should whoop.

Anon to our gittern, thrumpedum, thrumpedum thrum,
Thrumpedum, thrumpedum, thrumpedum, thrumpedum, thrum.

Of songs and ballads also he is a maker,
And that can he as finely do as Jack Raker;
Yea, and extempore will he ditties compose,
Foolish Marsyas ne'er made the like, I suppose,

Yet must we sing them, as good stuff I undertake,

As for such a pen-man is well fitting to make.

"Ah, for these long nights! heigho! when will it be day?

I fear ere I come she will be wooed away."

Then when answer is made that it may not be,

"O death, why comest thou not by and by?" saith he.

But then, from his heart to put away sorrow,

He is as far in with some new love next morrow.

But in the mean season we trudge and we trot.

From dayspring to midnight I sit not, nor rest not.

And now am I sent to dame Christian Custance,

But I fear it will end with a mock for pastance.

I bring her a ring, with a token in a clout,

And by all guess this same is her house out of doubt.

And I pray God I die, if I meant any harm,

But for my life-time this shall be to me a charm.

Enter Madge.

Madge. I was ne'er so shoke up afore, since I was born.

That our mistress could not have chid, I would have sworn –

And I pray God I die, if I meant any harm,

But for my life-time this shall be to me a charm.

Dob. God you save and see, nurse, and how is it with you?

Madge. Marry, a great deal the worse it is for such as thou.

Dob. For me? Why so?

Madge. Why, were not thou one of them, say,
That sang and played here with the gentleman last day?

Dob. Yes, and he would know if you have for him spoken,  
And prays you to deliver this ring and token.

Madge. Now by the token that God tokened, brother,  
I will deliver no token, one nor other.

I have once been so shent for your master's pleasure,  
As I will not be again for all his treasure.

Dob. He will thank you, woman.

Madge. I will none of his thank.  

[Exit Madge.]

Dob. I ween I am a prophet, this gear will prove blank:  
But what, should I home again without answer go?  
It were better go to Rome on my head than so.

I will tarry here this month, but some of the house  
Shall take it of me, and then I care not a louse.

But yonder cometh forth a wench or a lad,  
If he have not one Lombard's touch, my luck is bad.

= ie. Roister. = yesterday.

= ie. "would like to know".

= ie. requests.

18: only Whitworth has dared interpret this line: "now by the gift that God gave", ie. Jesus (p. 132).

= rebuked.

= ie. "any reward", "all of his wealth."

3: believe. = business. = ie. unsuccessful.³

29: there are two possible interpretations here:  
(1) according to the OED, the line, in suggesting an  
impossible mode of travel, is describing the difficulty  
or pointlessness of Dobinet's going home without  
having accomplished his mission; or  
(2) "I would be better off going to Rome alone than  
to return home without having carried out this  
assignment." Dobinet alludes to the common practice  
of making a pilgrimage to Rome.⁵  

on my head = the phrase on one's head was used  
to describe one travelling on one's own account, or, as  
Williams says, "on his thumb", ie. hitchhiking.

30-31: "I will hang around here for a month if I have to,  
but someone from this household will receive this  
ring and token from me, and after that I won't give  
a darn."  

of = from.

33: indirectly, if the stranger coming towards him  
cannot complete Dobinet's errand, then he truly has no  
luck.

one Lombard's touch = a single trait of a Lombard.  

Lombards = common term for bankers or money-  
men, named after the Italian bankers who came to  
London to set up shop; Nares¹³ notes that these  
merchants were primarily Jews, while Child says they  
only acted like stereotypical Jews, with respect to the  
way they transacted business and kept to themselves.  
Lombard Street was named after them.  

touch = trait or characteristic - but the editors are  
not in agreement over exactly what touch of the  
Lombards is referred to here.

Williams interpretation seems most likely: the  
Lombard's touch refers to the Lombards' penchant for  
taking and keeping gold, and Dobinet wants someone  
to take from him the ring and token he is carrying.  

Child, however, says the Lombard's touch refers to  
the Lombards' supposed ability to getting things done  
or achieving any result they desired, by right means or
ACT II, SCENE III.
[Still on Stage: Dobinet.]

Enter Tom Trupenie.

Tom. I am clean lost for lack of merry company, We ’gree not half well within, our wenches and I:

They will command like mistresses, they will forbid, If they be not served, Trupenie must be chid. Let them be as merry now as ye can desire, With turning of a hand, our mirth lieth in the mire.

I cannot skill of such changeable mettle.

There is nothing with them but "in dock out nettle."

Dob. Whether is it better that I speak to him first, Or he first to me? – It is good to cast the worst. If I begin first, he will smell all my purpose, Otherwise I shall not need anything to disclose.

Tom. What boy have we yonder? I will see what he is.

Dob. He cometh to me. It is hereabout, i-wis.

Tom. Wouldest thou ought, friend, that thou lookest so about?

Dob. Yea, but whether ye can help me or no, I doubt. I seek to one mistress Custance house here dwelling.

Tom. It is my mistress ye seek to, by your telling.

Dob. Is there any of that name here but she?

Tom. Not one in all the whole town that I know, pardee.

Dob. A widow she is, I trow.
Tom. And what and she be?

Dob. But ensured to an husband.

Tom. Yea, so think we.

Dob. And I dwell with her husband that trusteth to be.

Tom. In faith, then must thou needs be welcome to me –

Let us for acquaintance shake hands together.

And whate'er thou be, heartily welcome hither.

Enter Tibet and Annot.

Tibet. Well, Trupenie, never but flinging?

Annot. And frisking?

Tom. Well, Tibet and Annot, still swinging and whisking?

Tibet. But ye roil abroad –

Annot. In the street everywhere.

Tom. Where are ye twain – in chambers – when ye meet me there?

But come hither, fools, I have one now by the hand,

Servant to him that must be our mistress' husband,

Bid him welcome.

Annot. To me truly is he welcome.

Tibet. Forsooth, and as I may say, heartily welcome.

Dob. I thank you, mistress maids.

Annot. I hope we shall better know.

Tibet. And when will our new master come?

Dob. Shortly, I trow.

Tibet. I would it were to-morrow: for till he resort,

Our mistress, being a widow, hath small comfort;

And I heard our nurse speak of an husband to-day

Ready for our mistress, a rich man and a gay.

And we shall go in our French hoods every day,

32: "and what if she is?"

and = if.

34: ie. "but she is engaged (ensured)."

38: "and I live with the man that expects (trusteth) to be her husband."

= common alternative of together, used here to rhyme with hither.

= whoever.

39: Tom mistakes Dobinet for a servant of Custance's real fiancé, Gawyn.

40: "in that case, I am glad to meet you;" but Tom

mistakes Dobinet for a servant of Custance's real fiancé, Gawyn.

= common alternative of together, used here to rhyme with hither.

= whoever.

56: Tom responds with sarcasm: "and where are the two of you when I meet up with you here in the street (there) - in your rooms?"

57: Tom plays with the proverbial phrase, "take a fool by the hand", though of course here he calls the ladies fools, but has Dobinet by the hand.

57-59: Tom introduces the ladies to Dobinet, whom he believes to be one of Gawyn's servants.

= become acquainted.

= believe.

= wish. = arrives or visits, with the sense of "returns safely from his trip".

75-76: Tibet overheard Madge describe Roister, but thinks she was describing Gwyn.

77-83: Tibet dreams of wearing the finest of clothing once Custance is married to Gawyn.

French hoods = a style of hood popular in the 16th and 17th centuries, comprised of a hard band (sometimes shaped like half a bow) with a long loose cloth hanging from its back which covered the ears,
In our silk cassocks (I warrant you) fresh and gay,
In our trick ferdegews and biliments of gold;

Then shall ye see Tibet, sirs, tread the moss so trim –
Nay, why said I "tread"? – ye shall see her glide and swim,
Not lumperdee, clumperdee, like our spaniel Rig.

Brave in our suits of change, seven double fold.

Who shall then know our Tib Talkapace, trow ye?

Annot. And why not Annot Alyface as fine as she?

Tom. And what had Tom Trupenie, a father or none?

Tom. Marry, then, prick-me-dainty, come toast me a fig!

And what had Tom Trupenie, a father or none?

Who shall then know our Tib Talkapace, trow ye?

Annot. And why not Annot Alyface as fine as she?

Tom. And what had Tom Trupenie, a father or none?
Annot. Then our pretty new-come man will look to be one.

Tom. We four, I trust, shall be a jolly merry knot.

Shall we sing a fit to welcome our friend, Annot?

Annot. Perchance he cannot sing.

Dob. I am at all assays.

Tibet. By Cock, and the better welcome to us always.

[Here they sing.]

A thing very fit

For them that have wit,
And are fellows knit

Servants in one house to be,
Is fast for to sit,
And not oft to flit,
Nor vary a whit,

But lovingly to agree.

But further in honesty,

No man complaining,
No other disdaining,
For loss or for gaining,
But fellows or friends to be.

No grudge remaining,
No work refraining,
Nor help restraining,
But lovingly to agree.

No man for despite.

By word or by write
His fellow to twite.

But further in honesty,

No good turns entwite.

Nor old sores recite,

But let all go quite,
And lovingly to agree.

After drudgery,
When they be weary,
Then to be merry,
To laugh and sing, they be free –

With chip and cherry,

Heigh derry derry,
Trill on the berry –
And lovingly to agree.

92: a sly line: once Gawyn is married to Custance, he will seek to become a new father.

92: jolly, merry. = company.

Tom looks forward to the merging of the serving staffs of the two households.

= stanza or part of a song, but perhaps here referring to a full song.

= common phrase for "ready for anything".

1: united.

= change households, ie. move.

= get along with each other.

1: for spite, out of contempt.

= writing.

= alternate form of twit, meaning "to censure" or "to criticize".

127: "no good deeds (turns) to make a subject of reproach (entwite)."

128: ie. no old points of contention or wrongs should be brought up or remembered.

= ie. "go quit", meaning "go unpunished", ie. "be forgiven". Udall uses the alternate spelling of quite for quit to rhyme with the rest of the stanza.

= (a long day of) dreary work.


136: with cheeps and chirps.

137: often written hey derry derry.

138: play music on a barrow or small hill (berry); the OED, however, very hesitantly suggests "pass around the wine," with trill, or tril, defined (also
Finis.

Tibet. Will you now in with us unto our mistress go?

Dob. I have first for my master an errand or two.
But I have here from him a token and a ring,
They shall have most thank of her that first doth it bring.

Tibet. Marry, that will I!

Tom. See and Tibet snatch not now.

Tibet. And why may not I, sir, get thanks as well as you?

[Tibet grabs the gifts from Dobinet, then exits.]

Annot. Yet get ye not all, we will go with you both,
And have part of your thanks, be ye never so loth.

[Exeunt omnes.]

Dob. So my hands are rid of it, I care for no more.
I may now return home, so durst I not afore.

[Exit.]

ACT II, SCENE IV.

Enter Custance, Tom, Tibet and Annot.

Cust. Nay, come forth all three; and come hither, pretty maid.
Will not so many forewarnings make you afraid?

Tibet. Yes, forsooth.

Cust. But still be a runner up and down,
Still be a bringer of tidings and tokens to town.

Tibet. No, forsooth, mistress.

Cust. Is all your delight and joy
In whisking and ramping abroad like a tom-boy?

with admitted uncertainty) as a twirling or circulating of liquid, even as in a separate entry the OED defines berry as a small hill.

151: "see if (and) Tibet doesn't try to grab the trinkets herself to bring in."

= ie. from Custance; one may note how Custance's servants fear verbal and physical punishment from their mistress, yet simultaneously, like children, eagerly seek her praise.

155: except for exits, stage direction added by Whitworth.

= "so that you will not get all the thanks".

160: Annot and Tom exit, leaving Dobinet alone on the stage.

= ie. "so long as".

= "as I did not dare do before."

= this last gentle command is directed at Tibet, who may be more hesitant to approach Custance, as she fears she may be due a dressing down for having brought the gifts from Dobinet to her mistress.

2: Custance is addressing Tibet specifically here; Custance had warned her staff not to bring her anything from anyone other than Gawyn.

7: note the alliteration in this line.

12: whisking = running about.
   ramping = engaging in horseplay, or behaving wantonly or immodestly.

   tom-boy = this is the earliest appearance in English
Tibet. Forsooth, these were there too, Annot and Trupenie.

Trup. Yea, but ye alone took it, ye cannot deny.

Annot. Yea, that ye did.

Tibet. But if I had not, ye twain would.

Cust. You great calf, ye should have more wit, so ye should; —
But why should any of you take such things in hand?

Tibet. Because it came from him that must be your husband.

Cust. How do ye know that?

Tibet. Forsooth, the boy did say so.

Cust. What was his name?

Annot. We asked not.

Cust. No?

Annot. He is not far gone, of likelihood.

Tom. I will see.

Cust. If thou canst find him in the street, bring him to me.

Tom. Yes.

[Exit.]

Cust. Well, ye naughty girls, if ever I perceive
That henceforth you do letters or tokens receive,
To bring unto me from any person or place,
Except ye first show me the party face to face,
Either thou or thou, full truly abye thou shalt.

Tibet. Pardon this, and the next time powder me in salt.

Cust. I shall make all girls by you twain to beware.

Tibet. If ever I offend again, do not me spare!
But if ever I see that false boy any more
By your mistresship's licence, I tell you afore,
I will rather have my coat twenty times swung, = hide. = beaten, thrashed;\(^5\) the root word here is *swinge*, not *swing.*

Than on the naughty wag not to be avenged.

= mischievous boy.

*Cust.* Good wenches would not so ramp abroad idly,

= romp.\(^5\)

But keep within doors, and ply their work earnestly.

= ie. in the manner of official messengers.\(^1\)

If one would speak with me that is a man likely,

Ye shall have right good thank to bring me word quickly.

But otherwise with messages to come in post

From henceforth, I promise you, shall be to your cost.

Get you in to your work.

[Cust.]

Tibet. Yes, forsooth.

[Cust.]

Tibet. Hence, both twain.

And let me see you play me such a part again.

[Exit Tibet and Annot.]

Re-enter Tom.

Tom. Mistress, I have run past the far end of the street,

73: "get out of here, you two."

Yet can I not yonder crafty boy see nor meet.

Cust. No?

Tom. Yet I looked as far beyond the people,

= the steeple of St. Paul's church.

As one may see out of the top of Paul's steeple.

= "get back inside".

Cust. Hence, in at doors, and let me no more be vexed.

= "you can thrash me".

Tom. Forgive me this one fault, and lay on for the next.

[Exit.]

Cust. Now will I in too, for I think, so God me mend,

This will prove some foolish matter in the end.

[Exit.]

END OF ACT II.
ACT III.

SCENE I.

Enter Merygreeke.

1 Mery. Now say this again–he hath somewhat to doing Which followeth the trace of one that is wooing,

Specially that hath no more wit in his head, Than my cousin Roister Doister withal is led.

I am sent in all haste to espy and to mark How our letters and tokens are likely to wark.

Master Roister Doister must have answer in haste, For he loveth not to spend much labour in waste. Now as for Christian Custance, by this light, Though she had not her troth to Gawyn Goodluck plight,

Yet rather than with such a loutish dolt to marry, I daresay would live a poor life solitary.

But fain would I speak with Custance, if I wist how, To laugh at the matter–yond cometh one forth now.

ACT III, SCENE II.

[Still on Stage: Merygreeke.]

Enter Tibet.

1 Tibet. Ah, that I might but once in my life have a sight Of him that made us all so ill shent–by this light, He should never escape if I had him by the ear, But even from his head I would it bite or tear! Yea, and if one of them were not enow, I would bite them both off, I make God avow!

2 Mery. What is he, whom this little mouse doth so threaten?

3 Tibet. I would teach him, I trow, to make girls shent or beaten!

4 Mery. I will call her.–Maid, with whom are ye so hasty?

5 Tibet. Not with you, sir, but with a little wag-pasty, A deceiver of folks by subtle craft and guile.

6 Mery. I know where she is–Dobinet hath wrought some wile.

1-2: "I'll say this again: one has a lot of work to do, if one is trying to help out a man who is courting a lady"; though Child suggests say is short for assay, meaning "try".

trace = path, track.

4: cousin = a term of familiarity, not literal.

withal is led = ie. "has"; withal means "with".

= discover, find out.1 = observe.

= rare alternate spelling for work, used here to rhyme with mark.

= quickly.

= common oath.

10: "if she were not engaged to Gawyn"; to plught one's troth means "to become engaged".

11-12: she would be better off being poor and alone than being married to such a clown as Roister.

= "I would like to". = (only) knew.

= ie. to continue with the fun.

17: an aside: ie. "I know what (ie. who) she means–Dobinet has engaged in some trick or deception."

wrought = the past tense of "to work", wrought was used in a broad sense to mean "arranged" or "manipulated", or "worked" in its many nuanced senses.

some wile = most of the editors combine these two words to create the compound word somewile, or somewhat, which means "once" or "at one time"; if
Tibet. He brought a ring and token which he said was sent
From our dame's husband, but I wot well I was shent −
For it liked her as well, to tell you no lies,
As water in her ship, or salt cast in her eyes;
And yet whence it came neither we nor she can tell.

Mery. We shall have sport anon – I like this very well! –
And dwell ye here with mistress Custance, fair maid?

Tibet. Yea, marry do I, sir – what would ye have said?

Mery. A little message unto her by word of mouth.

Tibet. No messages, by your leave, nor tokens forsooth.

Mery. Then help me to speak with her.

Tibet. With a good will that.
Here she cometh forth. Now speak ye know best what.

Enter Custance.

Cust. None other life with you, maid, but abroad to skip?

Tibet. Forsooth, here is one would speak with your mistress-

Cust. Ah, have ye been learning of mo messages now?

Tibet. I would not hear his mind, but bade him show it to you.

Cust. In at doors.

Tibet. I am gone.

[Exit.]

Mery. Dame Custance, God ye save.

Cust. Welcome, friend Merygreeke – and what thing would ye have?

Mery. I am come to you a little matter to break.

Cust. But see it be honest, else better not to speak.

Mery. How feel ye yourself affected here of late?

Cust. I feel no manner change but after the old rate.

But whereby do ye mean?

Mery. Concerning marriage.

Doth not love lad ye?
Cust. I feel no such carriage.

Mery. Do ye feel no pangs of dotage? answer me right.

Cust. I dote so, that I make but one sleep all the night. But what need all these words?

Mery. Oh, Jesus, will ye see What dissembling creatures these same women be? – The gentleman ye wot of, whom ye do so love That ye would fain marry him, if ye durst it move, Among other rich widows, which are of him glad,

Lest ye, for lesing of him, perchance might run mad,

Is now contented that, upon your suit-making,

Ye be as one in election of taking,

Cust. What a tale is this? "that I wote of?" "whom I love?"

Mery. Yea, and he is as loving a worm, again, as a dove.

E'en of very pity he is willing you to take,

Because ye shall not destroy yourself for his sake.

Cust. Marry, God yield his maship whatever he be.

It is gentlemanly spoken.

Mery. Is it not, trow ye?
If ye have the grace now to offer yourself, ye speed.

Cust. As much as though I did – this time it shall not need.

But what gentman is it, I pray you tell me plain,

That wooeth so finely?

Mery. Lo, where ye be again.
As though ye knew him not.

Cust. Tush, ye speak in jest.

Mery. Nay sure, the party is in good knacking earnest,

And have you he will, he saith, and have you he must.

Cust. I am promised during my life; that is just.

Mery. Marry so thinketh he, unto him alone.

Cust. No creature hath my faith and troth but one,

That is Gawyn Goodluck, and, if it be not he,
He hath no title this way whatever he be,
Nor I know none to whom I have such word spoken.

Mery. Ye know him not, you, by his letter and token?

Cust. Indeed true it is, that a letter I have,
But I never read it yet, as God me save.

Mery. Ye a woman, and your letter so long unread?

Cust. Ye may thereby know what haste I have to wed.

But now who it is, for my hand I know by guess.

Mery. Ah, well I say!

Cust. It is Roister Doister, doubtless.

Mery. Will ye never leave this dissimulation?
Ye know him not?

Cust. But by imagination,
For no man there is but a very dolt and lout
That to woo a widow would so go about.

Mery. Then will he have you if he may, so mote I thrive.
And he biddeth you send him word by me,
That ye humbly beseech him, ye may his wife be,
But to be wedded on Sunday next if he lust,
And biddeth you to look for him.

Cust. Doth he bid so?

Mery. When he cometh, ask him whether he did or no.

Cust. Go say that I bid him keep him warm at home,
For if he come abroad, he shall cough me a mome;
My mind was vexed, I shrew his head, sottish dolt!

Mery. He hath in his head –

Cust. As much brain as a burbolt.

Mery. Well, dame Custance, if he hear you thus play choploge –

Cust. What will he?

Mery. Play the devil in the horologe.

= ie. "to me". = whoever.
= note the double negative.

125: Merygreeke mocks the stereotyped curiosity of women.

127: ie. "this is evidence for you of how eager I am to marry this man you speak of."
= an oath. = ie. can.

137: ie. "only by a mental conception or inference based on what I have heard about him".
= "go about it in this (idiotic) fashion."
= "so I hope to thrive;" mote = might.
= invites.
= hindrance, obstacle.
= wishes.

= himself.
= "leaves his house". = "show or demonstrate what a fool he is;" an expression whose origins are highly obscure.
= curse. = stupid, foolish.

= ie. birdbolt, a short arrow with a blunted head for shooting birds.
= engage in chop-logic, ie. quibble argumentatively, play the sophist.

163: "then what will he do?"

165: ie. "he will cause a ruckus;" this proverbial expression from Heywood was used to describe any confusion sown by a "mischievous agent" (OED); the image is of the devil loitering inside a timepiece and
messing with the delicate works, causing chaos. horologe = timepiece, hour-glass.

I defy him, lout.

Shall I tell him what ye say?

And I will avouch it, whatsoever it be.

Then let me alone —; we will laugh well, ye shall see.

It will not be long ere he will hither resort.

Let him come when him lust, I wish no better sport.

Fare ye well, I will in, and read my great letter.

I shall to my wooer make answer the better.

ACT III, SCENE III.
[Still on Stage: Merygreeke.]

Enter Roister Doister.

Now that the whole answer in my device doth rest.

I shall paint out our wooer in colours of the best,
And all that I say shall be on Cus tan ce's mouth;
She is author of all that I shall speak forsooth.
But yond cometh Roister Doister now in a trance.

Juno send me this day good luck and good chance!

I cannot but come see how Merygreeke doth speed.

I will not see him, but give him a jut indeed. —

I cry your mastership mercy.

And whither now?

As fast as I could run, sir, in post against you.

But why speak ye so faintly, or why are ye so sad?

Thou knowest the proverb — because I cannot be had.

Hast thou spoken with this woman?

Yea, that I have.

= ie. "back you up", "confirm I said it".
= is this an aside? or is Merygreeke letting Cus tan ce know the whole set-up is a joke on Roister? It does seem that Cus tan ce will not catch on for quite a while still.
= before. = "visit here."
= "he wishes". = entertainment.
= ie. go in.

1: generally, "now that the carrying out of this whole project is up to me".
in my device doth rest = "depends on my scheme".
2-5: Merygreeke plans to insult Roister extensively to his face - but he will be able to get away with it because everything he will say he can attribute to Cus tan ce.
paint out (line 2) = depict unfavourably, a metaphor with colours.
7: Juno is evoked in her guise as the goddess of marriage.
= ie. cannot help. = is succeeding, ie. is doing.
10: Merygreeke pretends not to see Roister approaching, then crashes hard into him.
jet = knock or jostle.
11: an apology.
= ie. "to where (are you going)".
= hurrying. = towards.
= serious.
18: Eric Partridge in A Dictionary of Catch-Phrases (Lanham, MD: Scarborough House, 1982) suggests that "because I cannot be had" is not really a proverb, nor part of any known proverb, but is basically just a rhyming response to Merygreeke's question.
Roist. And what will this gear be?

Mery. No, so God me save.

Roist. Hast thou a flat answer?

Mery. Nay, a sharp answer.

Roist. What?

Mery. Ye shall not, she saith, by her will marry her cat. Ye are such a calf, such an ass, such a block, Such a lilburn, such a hoball, such a lobcock.

And because ye should come to her at no season, She despised your maship out of all reason. "Bawawe what ye say," ko I, "of such a gentman."

"Nay, I fear him not," ko she, "do the best he can. He vaunteh himself for a man of prowess great, Whereas a good gander, I daresay, may him beat. And where he is louted and laughed to scorn, For the veriest dolt that ever was born, And veriest lover, sloven and beast, Living in this world from the west to the east: Yet of himself hath he such opinion, That in all the world is not the like minion.

He thinketh each woman to be brought in dotage With the only sight of his goodly personage. Yet none that will have him — we do him lout and flock, And make him among us our common sporting stock.

And so would I now," ko she, "save only because." "Better nay," ko I, "I lust not meddle with daws.

Ye are happy," ko I, "that ye are a woman. This would cost you your life in case ye were a man."

Roist. Yea, an hundred thousand pound should not save her life!

Mery. No, but that ye woo her to have her to your wife — But I could not stop her mouth.

Roist. Heigh ho, alas! 23: "how will this business (gear) turn out?" (Gassner, p. 301), ie. "so what was her answer?"

27: absolute, unqualified.

= severe; Merygreeke puns sharp with flat; the former word likely refers to a sharp edge, as on a sword, or a sharp or pointy angle, and the latter to a flat surface, including the broad side of a sword.

= ie. "even her".
= ie. blockhead.
= lout, stupid person. = clown, clod. = country bumpkin, boor. = at no time, ie. never.
= "your mastership", ie. "you".
38: Bawawe = an interjection of contempt, though Child feels it is likely a misprint for beware.
ko = quoth, said.

= brags of.
= ie. any fool.
= humiliated, mocked for being a lout. = greatest.
= would-be gallant (Child). = disreputable person, rogue. = country bumpkin, boor.
= "and I will do so now".
53: "it's better not to (said I), I will not have any dealings with such fools."

daws = jackdaws, a type of crow; many bird names were used in the era to mean "fools".

= happy.
= lucky.

= unless.
Mery. Be of good cheer, man, and let the world pass.

Roist. What shall I do or say now that it will not be?

Mery. Ye shall have choice of a thousand as good as she, And ye must pardon her; it is for lack of wit.

Roist. Yea, for were not I an husband for her fit?

Mery. Well, what should I now do?

Roist. I will go home and die.

Mery. Then shall I bid toll the bell?

Roist. No.

Mery. God have mercy on your soul, ah, good gentleman, That e'er ye should thus die for an unkind woman.

Will ye drink once ere ye go?

Roist. No, no, I will none.

Mery. How feel your soul to God?

Roist. I am nigh gone.

Mery. And shall we hence straight?

Roist. Yea.

= a recommendation to live his own life merrily and ignore everything else that goes on in the world: ie. "come what may."

This proverbial-sounding expression is a variation on the older "let the world wagge"; similarly, in the Induction of Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*, Sly says "let the world slide."

= ie. his marriage to Custance will not be taking place.

= ie. Custance won't marry Roister because she is not clever or intelligence enough to see the advantage of doing so.

= "a suitable husband for her?"

= call for the bell to be tolled, as for a dead person.

84: Merygreeke speaks to Roister as if he were a criminal about to be executed, offering him a customary last drink (Child).

88: "what is your feeling about the condition of your soul in its relation to God?"

= near gone, ie. nearly dead.

= "leave here right away?"

96ff: here begins a mock Requiem, or parody of the Roman Catholic *Office of the Dead*, which is a liturgy performed when someone dies, or on the anniversary of someone's death. The *Office of the Dead*, in its full expression, is comprised of the following elements, either in whole or in part:

1. **Vespers** (the evening monastic service), which includes the reading of Psalms 114, 119, 120, 129 and 137, followed by the **Magnificat** (the song of Mary, a canticle, or song, from Luke 46-55), and **preces** (a short prayer of intercession, said or sung responsorially, ie. lines spoken alternately by the cleric and the congregation);

2. **Mass**;

3. the **Lord's Prayer**;

4. **Matins** (the morning monastic service), also called the **Dirge**, comprised of three **nocturns** (groups of psalms), each nocturn followed by three prescribed **Lessons**;

5. **Lauds**, a morning service, which is made up of the three Psalms 50, 64, and combined 62 / 66; the song
of Hezekiah (Isaiah 38:10-14 and 17-20), and the three Psalms known collectively as the **Laudate Psalms** (148, 149 and 150); and lastly

(6) the song, or canticle, of Zachariah, also called the **Benedictus**, from Luke 1:68-79.

Sprinkled throughout the service are **antiphons** (the congregation's responses to certain verses) and **versicles and responses** (call and answer between the cleric and the congregation).

**The Psalmody**: some portion of the parody of the **Office of the Dead** was originally published at the end of the play as an appendix, and was entitled **Psalmody**, or "collection of psalms". We may note that many of the lines of the Psalmody were also included in the main text, and some not.

I have not reproduced the Psalmody as it appeared in the appendix of the 1566 edition in a parallel appendix here; instead I have incorporated those lines that appear in the Psalmody but not in the original text into the text, to give the reader the complete experience of the parody. If a reader absolutely needs to see what the Psalmody in the appendix looked like, he or she may consult any of the editions of the play cited in the footnotes.

I have used both Gassner and Whitworth to arrange the Psalmody's lines into the body of the text wherever they were lacking, in order to create as cohesive and comprehensive scene as is possible.

**Chanting and Speaking the Office of the Dead**: in observing the presence of random Latin words and phrases from the **Office of the Dead** sprinkled throughout the parody, Child suggests (1) the Latin words are plain chanted; (2) the English lines were "presumably intoned (ie. sung, but in a monotone) nasally in parody of the longer English portions of the burial service"; and he notes that (3) at one point when Roister interrupts him, Merygreeke responds in regular prose. "The humorous effect", writes Child, "of the intermingled chant and dialogue must have been very great."

96: Merygreeke begins by combining two words that appear separately in the **Office of the Dead**'s opening psalm, Psalm 114.

**Placebo** (which means "please"), the name given to Vespers, appears in several antiphons, and in Psalm 114: (Psalm 114:9: *placebo Domino in regione vivorum* = "I will please the Lord in the land of the living").

**dilexi** (which means "love") is from the opening verse of Psalm 114 (Psalm 114:1: *dilexi, quoniam audies Domine: vocem deprecationis meae* = "I have loved, because the Lord will hear the voice of my prayer").

The Latin translations in this note are of the Vulgate, or Latin Bible, and are quoted from the website Vulgate.org.

98: Master Roister Doister will straight go home and die,
Our Lord Jesus Christ his soul have mercy upon!
Thus you see to-day a man, to-morrow John.

Yet saving for a woman's extreme cruelty,
He might have lived yet a month or two or three.

Roist. Heigh-ho! Alas, the pangs of death my heart do break!

Mery. Hold your peace for shame, sir, a dead man may not speak!

Nequando. — What mourners and what torches shall we have?

Roist. None.

Mery. Dirige.

He will go darkling to his grave,

Neque lux, neque crux, neque mourners, neque clink,

He will steal to Heaven, unknowing to God, I think,

A porta inferi. Who shall your goods possess?
Roist. Thou shalt be my sectour, and have all more and less.

Mery. Requiem aeternum. – Now, God reward your mastership.

And I will cry halfpenny-dole for your worship.

Come forth, sirs, hear the doleful news I shall you tell.

[Evocat servos militis.]

Our good master here will no longer with us dwell.

But in spite of Custance, which hath him wearied.

Let us see his maship solemnly buried.

And while some piece of his soul is yet him within,

Some part of his funerals let us here begin.

Yet, sirs, as ye will the bliss of Heaven win,

When he cometh to the grave lay him softly in.

Audivi vocem.

All men take heede by this one gentleman,

How you set your love upon an unkind woman.

For these women be all such mad peevish elves,

They will not be won except it please themselves.

But in faith, Custance, if ever ye come in hell,

Master Roister Doister shall serve you as well!

And will ye needs go from us thus in very deed?

Roist. Yea, in good sadness.

Mery. Now, Jesus Christ be your speed.

Good-night, Roger, old knave! farewell, Roger, old knave!

Good-night, Roger, old knave! knave, knap!

= executor.³ = ie. “inherit everything I own, of great and low value.”

= "eternal rest"; recited after each psalm in the service, either alone, or as part of the full line, requiem aeternum dona eis Domine, et lux perpetua luceat eis = "Oh Lord, grant them eternal rest, and let the everlasting light shine upon them!"

= "alms to the poor"; such gifts were customary at funerals.⁵

123: "he (ie. Merygreeke) calls for the soldier's (ie. Roister's) servants"; four of Roister's servants - which will presumably include Dobinet and Harpax - will be needed to assist in the service.

= interestingly, though Udall wrote weried here, the OED files this word under worry (ie. worried), meaning "to treat roughly".

= ie. funeral services.¹

= "I heard a voice"; part of a versicle recited after Psalms 137: Audivi vocem de caelo dicentem mihi = "I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me" (from Revelations 14:13).

= "be forewarned by the example of".

= headstrong, stubborn² (or) silly, senseless.⁵

= "serve your purpose".

= there is great disagreement amongst the editors as to the meaning of knap.

(1) Farmer suggests knap is simply "nap", ie. sleep; the OED confirms knap was indeed a 16th century variation of nap.

(2) Child says knap represents the sound of a sharp blow, specifically the nailing shut of a coffin.

(3) The OED cites this line as an example of knap used for knape, meaning a knave or scoundrel.

(4) finally, Whitworth presumes that lines 146-7 are lyrics adapted from a popular song - which would at

Pray for the late master Roister Doister's soul, And come forth, parish clerk, let the passing bell toll.

Enter the Parish Clerk.

Pray for your master, sirs, and for him ring a peal.

He was your right good master while he was in heal.

[The Peal Of Bells Rung By The Parish Clerk And Roister Doister's Four Men.]

The first Bell a Triple.

When died he? When died he?

The second.

We have him, we have him.

The third.

Roister Doister, Roister Doister.

The fourth Bell.

He cometh, he cometh.

The great Bell.

Our own, our own.

Mery. Qui Lazarum.

Roist. Heigh-ho!

Mery. Dead men go not so fast

In Paradisum.

Roist. Heigh-ho!

Mery. Soft, hear what I have cast.

Roist. I will hear nothing, I am past.

Mery. Whough, wellaway!

Ye may tarry one hour, and hear what I shall say,

least explain where the name Roger came from; furthermore, he agrees with Child that knap means "a blow", and suggests that Merygreeke, having likely added knap gratuitously to the end of the borrowed lyric, takes the opportunity to rap Roister on the head.

146: Nequando = "lest"; see the note at line 107 above. Audivi vocem = "I heard a voice;" see line 132 above. Requiem aeternam = "eternal rest"; see line 119 above.

151: stage direction added by Whitworth.

153-4: Addressed to Roister's servants. = health.

156-172: this section was printed in the back of the original edition as an appendix.

160: this line is sung as a round, suggests Child, as would also be lines 163, 166, 169 and 172.

174: "who Lazarus"; the opening words of the response after the second lesson of the first nocturn: Qui Lazarum resuscitasti a monumento foetidum = "Thou who didst call up Lazarus from the grave after that he had begun to stink."

179: "into paradise;" from an antiphon sung when a corpse is carried to the grave; the antiphon begins, in paradisum deducant te angeli = "into paradise may the angels lead you."

= "quiet" = contrived, planned.

= a very ancient - Old English - cry of lament, similar to "alas!"
Ye were best, sir, for a while to revive again,

And quite them ere ye go.

Roist. Trowest thou so?

Mery. Yea, plain!

Roist. How may I revive, being now so far past?

Mery. I will rub your temples, and fet you again at last.

Roist. It will not be possible.

Mery. Yes, for twenty pound.

Roist. Arms, what dost thou?

Mery. Fet you again out of your sound.

By this cross ye were nigh gone indeed, I might feel

Your soul departing within an inch of your heel.

Now follow my counsel.

Roist. What is it?

Mery. If I were you,

Custance should eft seek to me, ere I would bow.

Roist. Well, as thou wilt have me, even so will I do.

Mery. Then shall ye revive again for an hour or two.

Roist. As thou wilt, I am content for a little space.

Mery. "Good hap is not hasty, yet in space cometh grace."

To speak with Custance yourself should be very well,

What good thereof may come, nor I nor you can tell.

But now the matter standeth upon your marriage,

Ye must now take unto you a lusty courage.

Ye may not speak with a faint heart to Custance,
But with a lusty breast and countenance,
That she may know she hath to answer to a man.

Roist. Yes, I can do that as well as any can.

Mery. Then because ye must Custance face to face woo,
Let us see how to behave yourself ye can do.
Ye must have a portly brag after your estate.

Roist. Tush, I can handle that after the best rate.

Mery. Well done! so lo, up man with your head and chin,
Up with that snout, man! So, lo, now ye begin! –

So, that is something like – but, pranky cote, nay whan!

That is a lusty brute – hands under your side, man!
So, lo, now is it even as it should be –
That is somewhat like, for a man of your degree.
Then must ye stately go, jetting up and down.
Tut, can ye no better shake the tail of your gown?
There, lo, such a lusty brag it is ye must make.

Roist. To come behind, and make curtsy, thou must some pains take.

Mery. Else were I much to blame, I thank your mastership.
The Lord one day all-to-begrime you with worship! –

Back, Sir Sauce, let gentlefolks have elbow room,

Void, sirs, see ye not master Roister Doister come?
Make place, my masters.

234: Merygreeke instructs Roister to practice a manly bearing with which to confront Custance.
235: portly = imposing, dignified.¹
  brag = pompous demeanor or swagger.¹⁵
  after your estate = "as is fitting for one of your condition or status," or "as you are able to do."
  to the best or greatest level.¹ Roister begins to put on the appearance of a most swaggering man.

238: watching Roister strut around, Merygreeke criticizes his mincing bearing.
  pranky cote = one who dresses ostentatiously, ie. a dandy;² pranky meant fine or gorgeous;² pruning
  cote was a Middle English spelling for coat.²⁸ Whitworth wonders if Merygreeke is showing Roister how he should properly hold himself as he speaks this line.
  nay whan = "nay when", meaning "not so", ie. "not like that!"²⁸
  = gallant.³ = ie. "on your hips", that is, akimbo.¹²
  244: "this is more like it, for a man of your (high) rank."
  = strutting.

249: "you will have to follow me, and demonstrate due respect and obeisance to me (make curtsy)."¹

252: all-to-begrime = literally "cover with grime", or "besmear", humorously used simply to mean "cover"; all is used as intensifier.
  worship = deferential attention (Child).

253: as Roister proudly moves about the stage, Merygreeke pretend to push back an adoring but imaginary crowd.
  Sir Sauce = ie. not uncommon epithet for "saucy, or impudent, fellow".³
  = "clear away!"
  = room: Merygreeke "accidentally" roughs up Roister as he performs the role of an usher.
Roist.  Thou jostlest now too nigh.
Mery.  Back, all rude louts!
Roist.  Tush!
Mery.  I cry your maship mercy.
Roist.  Ne'er an M. by your girdle?
Mery.  Mastership were her own Mistress-ship's
Ye were take up for hawks, ye were gone, ye were gone!
But now one other thing more yet I think upon.

Roist.  Show what it is.
Mery.  A wooer, be he never so poor,
Must play and sing before his best-beloved's door,
How much more, then, you?
Roist.  Thou speakest well, out of doubt.
Mery.  And perchance that would make her the sooner come out.
Roist.  Go call my musicians, bid them hie apace.
Mery.  I will be here with them ere ye can say "Treyace."

[Exit.]

Roist.  This was well said of Merygreeke.  I 'low his wit.

Before my sweetheart's door we will have a fit,
That if my love come forth, that I may with her talk,
I doubt not but this gear shall on my side walk.
But, lo, how well Merygreeke is returned sence.

257: "you are pushing too close to me!"
261: Roister responds testily to Merygreeke's continued jostling.
263: "I beg your pardon."
= a cry of wonder or surprise.¹
= "would be hers".  = "guarantee it."
267: ie. "do you not have a title such as Master in your possession to use?" Roister rebukes Merygreeke for omitting his title, thus not showing him due respect.³
There were in the old days a number of odd phrases, with different meanings, using the word girdle: to give up the girdle (to admit one was defeated), and to turn one's girdle (to find an outlet for one's wrath), are two examples.¹
269-271: Merygreeke more than makes up for his oversight!
= possibly short for "taken up for hawk's meat", meaning "you would be snapped up like hawk's meat for a husband" (Farmer), in which case Custance is the "rapacious, husband-hunting hawk (Whitworth, p. 155).
= "tell (me)".
276-8: "even the poorest suitor serenades his beloved with music; so what will you, who are so much greater than any such miserable wretch, do?"
= perhaps.
= "hurry quickly."
= "before you can say Treyace"; it is still common to use similar expressions to indicate the great speed with which something can be done (e.g. "before you can say Jack Robinson").
Treyace = abbreviation for "three and one", a French way of indicating this result of tossing two dice.³⁵
= by.  = "I grant he is a clever fellow."
'low = allow, ie. admit.⁵
= song.
= matter.  = ie. "go my way."
294: lo = "look!"; used to draw attention to the approach of another.
sence = already; alternate spelling of since, used here to rhyme with hence.
[Re-enter Merygreeke with the musicians.]

Mery. There hath grown no grass on my heel since I went hence,

Lo, here have I brought that shall make you pastance.

Roist. Come, sirs, let us sing to win my dear love Custance.

[Cantent.]

I mun be married a Sunday,
I mun be married a Sunday,
Whosoever shall come that way,
I mun be married a Sunday.

Roister Doister is my name,
Roister Doister is my name,
A lusty brute I am the same,
I mun be married a Sunday.

Christian Custance have I found,
Christian Custance have I found,
A widow worth a thousand pound,
I mun be married a Sunday.

Custance is as sweet as honey,
Custance is as sweet as honey,
I her lamb and she my coney,
I mun be married a Sunday.

When we shall make our wedding feast,
When we shall make our wedding feast,
There shall be cheer for man and beast,
I mun be married a Sunday.

I mun be married a Sunday, etc.

Mery. Lo, where she cometh, some countenance to her make,
And ye shall hear me be plain with her for your sake.

ACT III, SCENE IV.

[Still on Stage: Merygreeke and Roister Doister.]

Enter Custance.

Cust. What gauding and fooling is this afore my door?

Mery. May not folks be honest, pray you, though they be poor?
Cust. As that thing may be true, so rich folks may be fools.

Roist. Her talk is as fine as she had learned in schools.

Mery. Look partly toward her, and draw a little near.

Cust. Get ye home, idle folks!

Mery. Why, may not we be here?

Roist. Her talk is as fine as she had learned in schools.

Mery. Ye are too tender-hearted: shall she make us daws? − Nay, dame, I will be plain with you in my friend's cause.

Roist. Let all this pass, sweetheart, and accept my service.

Cust. I will not be served with a fool in no wise. When I choose an husband I hope to take a man.

Mery. And where will ye find one which can do that he can? Now this man toward you being so kind, You not to make him an answer somewhat to his mind!

Cust. I sent him a full answer by you, did I not?

Mery. And I reported it.

Cust. Nay, I must speak it again.

Roist. No, no, he told it all.

Mery. Was I not meetly plain?

Roist. Yes.

Mery. But I would not tell all: for faith, if I had, With you, dame Custance, ere this hour it had been bad, And not without cause − for this goodly personage Meant no less than to join with you in marriage.

Cust. Let him waste no more labour nor suit about me.

Mery. Ye know not where your preferment lieth, I see,
He sending you such a token, ring and letter.

Cust. Marry, here it is − ye never saw a better.

Mery. Let us see your letter.

Cust. Hold, read it if ye can,
And see what letter it is to win a woman.

Mery. "To mine own dear coney-bird, sweet-heart, and pigsney,
Good Mistress Custance, present these by and by."

Of this superscription do ye blame the style?

Cust. With the rest as good stuff as ye read a great while.

Mery. "Sweet mistress, where as I love you nothing at all −
Regarding your substance and richesse chief of all;

For your personage, beauty, demeanour and wit,
I commend me unto you never a whit.

Sorry to hear report of your good welfare,
For (as I hear say) such your conditions are,
That ye be worthy favour of no living man;
To be abhorred of every honest man;
To be taken for a woman inclined to vice,
Nothing at all to virtue giving her due price.
Wherefore, concerning marriage, ye are thought
Such a fine paragon, as ne'er honest man bought.
And now by these presents I do you advertise,

That I am minded to marry you in no wise.
For your goods and substance, I could be content
To take you as ye are. If ye mind to be my wife,
Ye shall be assured, for the time of my life,
I will keep you right well from good raiment and fare;
Ye shall not be kept but in sorrow and care.
Ye shall in no wise live at your own liberty;
Do and say what ye lust, ye shall never please me.
But when ye are merry, I will be all sad;
When ye are sorry, I will be very glad;
When ye seek your heart's ease, I will be unkind.
At no time in me shall ye much gentleness find,
But all things contrary to your will and mind
Shall be done − otherwise I will not be behind
To speak. And as for all them that would do you wrong,
I will so help and maintain, ye shall not live long;
Nor any foolish dolt shall cumber you but I.
I, whoe'er say nay, will stick by you till I die.
Thus, good mistress Custance, the Lord you save and keep
From me, Roister Doister, whether I wake or sleep,
Who favoureth you no less (ye may be bold)
Than this letter purporteth, which ye have unfold."

suggest an increase in status through marriage.

59: Custance hands her letter from Roister to Mery-
greeke, who begins to read it.

62: The letter begins with several terms of endearment.
= unclear meaning; though Gassner unhelpfully defines by and by to mean "at once".
64: "do you find any fault with the manner in which the letter addresses you?"

superscription = heading, addressment.
= ie. "it is as".

69: ie. "except that I especially love your wealth;" substance and richesse (riches) are synonyms for "wealth".
= appearance.
= not a bit.
= health.
= by.

80: "and now with this letter I do inform you".

these presents = common phrase for "this document".
= intend.
= "are inclined".
= clothing and food.
= anxiety.
= wish.
= be slow.
= encumber, ie. burden.
= "(despite) whoever denies it".
= ie. "save you and keep you".
Cust. How by this letter of love? is it not fine?

Roist. By the arms of Caleys, it is none of mine.

Mery. Fie, you are foul to blame, this is your own hand!

Cust. Might not a woman be proud of such an husband?

Mery. Ah, that ye would in a letter show such despite!

Roist. Oh, I would I had him here, the which did it endite!

Mery. Why, ye made it yourself, ye told me, by this light.

Roist. Yea, I meant I wrote it mine own self yesternight.

Cust. I-wis, sir, I would not have sent you such a mock.

Roist. Ye may so take it, but I meant it not so, by Cock.

Mery. Who can blame this woman to fume and fret and rage? Tut, tut! yourself now have marred your own marriage. — Well, yet mistress Custance, if ye can this remit, This gentleman otherwise may your love requit.

Cust. No, God be with you both, and seek no more to me.

[Exit.]

Roist. Wough! she is gone for ever, I shall her no more see.

Mery. What, weep? Fie, for shame! And blubber? For manhood's sake, Never let your foe so much pleasure of you take. Rather play the man's part, and do love refrain. If she despise you, e'en despise ye her again.

Roist. By Goss, and for thy sake I defy her indeed.

Mery. Yea, and perchance that way ye shall much sooner speed, For one mad property these women have in fey.

When ye will, they will not, will not ye, then will they. —

Ah, foolish woman! ah, most unlucky Custance!

Ah, unfortunate woman! ah, peevish Custance!

106: By the arms of Caleys = "by the arms of Calais"; as Farmer notes, this French port city had since 1450 "been mourned as the only English holding in France". This oath appeared earlier in two of the works of the English poet John Skelton (1460-1529). Calais was finally lost to France in 1558.

arms = coat of arms.¹
it is none of mine = "I didn't write that."

= a word of reproach. = ie. handwriting; as will become clear, the letter had been first written by a professional document-drafter (a scrivener), and then copied over by Roister to give to Custance.

= malice.
= wish. = "he who." = compose it; endite usually is written as indite.

118: Roister means that the letter they are looking at is indeed his own writing, but he did not compose it, he only copied it.

= assuredly.
= forgive.¹
= reciprocate.

133: Roister begins to cry.

= "forbear from feeling or expressing love."
= "then you should despise her right back."¹¹
= a euphemism for the euphemism Gog's.
= succeed.
= quality. = "in faith", ie. truly;⁵ but the OED suggests "in fee", meaning "holding in absolute possession", a legal term.

144: Merygreeke describes women as always doing the opposite of what one wants; his point is that if Roister shows disdain for Custance, she will perversely begin to desire him.

145-150: Merygreeke apostrophizes to Custance.
Art thou to thine harms so obstinately bent.

That thou canst not see where lieth thine high prefigurement?
Canst thou not lub dis man, which could lub dee so well?
Art thou so much thine own foe?

Roist. Thou dost the truth tell.
Mery. Well I lament.
Roist. So do I.
Mery. Wherefore?
Roist. For this thing.
Because she is gone.
Mery. I mourn for another thing.
Roist. What is it, Merygreeke, wherefore thou dost grief take?
Mery. That I am not a woman myself for your sake,
I would have you myself, and a straw for yond gill.

And mock much of you, though it were against my will.
I would not, I warrant you, fall in such a rage,
As so to refuse such a goodly personage.
Roist. In faith, I heartily thank thee, Merygreeke.
Mery. And I were a woman –
Roist. Thou wouldest to me seek.
Mery. For, though I say it, a goodly person ye be.
Roist. No, no.
Mery. Yes, a goodly man as e’er I did see.
Roist. No, I am a poor homely man, as God made me.
Mery. By the faith that I owe to God, sir, but ye be!
Would I might for your sake spend a thousand pound land.
Roist. I dare say thou wouldest have me to thy husband.
Mery. Yea, and I were the fairest lady in the shire.
And knew you as I know you, and see you now here –
Well, I say no more.

147: "are you so stubbornly inclined (bent) to only bring harm to yourself?" Notice how Merygreeke addresses Custance with the informal thee in her absence.
148: "can you not see where the great advantage to you lies here?"
= "love this man": a couple of our old editors suggest that Merygreeke is imitating the baby-talk of silly lovers.

158 = "why?"
= why.

168: a straw for = abbreviation for the common phrase, "I wouldn't give a straw for…", similar to the modern "I wouldn't give a red cent for…"
yond = yonder.
Gill = Jill, contemptuous term for a woman, here meaning Custance.1
= make.3
= assure.

1,5 = plain, rude or vulgar.1,5

188: "I wish I had land worth an annual income of 1000 pounds to give to you (as a dowry) in order to capture you."
= ie. even if. = most beautiful. = county.
Roist. Gramercies, with all my heart!

Mery. But since that cannot be, will ye play a wise part?

Roist. How should I?

Mery. Refrain from Custance a while now, And I warrant her soon right glad to seek to you.

Ye shall see her anon come on her knees creeping, And pray you to be good to her, salt tears weeping.

Roist. But what and she come not?

Mery. In faith, then, farewell she. Or else if ye be wroth, ye may avenged be.

Roist. By Cock’s precious potstick, and e’en so I shall.

I will utterly destroy her, and house and all. But I would be avenged in the mean space; On that vile scribbler, that did my wooing disgrace.

Mery. "Scribbler," quoth you, indeed he is worthy no less. I will call him to you, and ye bid me doubtless.

Roist. Yes, for although he had as many lives, As a thousand widows, and a thousand wives, As a thousand lions, and a thousand rats, A thousand wolves, and a thousand cats, A thousand bulls, and a thousand calves, And a thousand legions divided in halves, He shall never scape death on my sword’s point, Though I should be torn therefore joint by joint.

Mery. Nay, if ye will kill him, I will not fet him, I will not in so much extremity set him; He may yet amend, sir, and be an honest man, Therefore pardon him, good soul, as much as ye can.

Roist. Well, for thy sake, this once with his life he shall pass, But I will hew him all to pieces, by the Mass.

Mery. Nay, faith, ye shall promise that he shall no harm have, Else I will not fet him.

Roist. I shall, so God me save — But I may chide him a-good.

Mery. Yea, that do, hardly.

Roist. Go, then.
Mery. I return, and bring him to you by and by. [Exit.]

ACT III, SCENE V.
[Still on Stage: Roister Doister.]

Enter Merygreeke and Scrivener.

Roist. What is a gentleman but his word and his promise?
I must now save this villain's life in any wise,
And yet at him already my hands do tickle,
I shall uneth hold them, they will be so fickle.

But, lo, and Merygreeke have not brought him sens.

Mery. Nay, I would I had of my purse paid forty pence.

Scriv. So would I too; but it needed not, that stound.

Mery. But the gentman had rather spent five thousand pound,
For it disgraced him at least five times so much.

Scriv. He disgraced himself, his loutishness is such.

Roist. How long they stand prating! – Why comest thou not away?

Mery. Come now to himself, and hark what he will say.

Scriv. I am not afraid in his presence to appear.

Roist. Art thou come, fellow?

Scriv. How think you? Am I not here?

= right away.

249: it is unclear if Roister also exits the stage; we will assume he remains where he is.

Entering Characters: Merygreeke has returned with the Scrivener to face Roister's wrath. However, it may make sense to delay the pair's entrance until after Roister has spoken line 4.

1-2: Roister regrets having promised Merygreeke not to kill the Scrivener.
3: ie. "And yet my hands are itching to get at him".
4: uneth = uneth, ie. scarcely or hardly, or "with great difficulty". A strange and archaic-sounding word, derived from the ancient Saxon word eath, meaning "easy", and fickle = uncertain, unreliable.

5: lo = look. and = the sense is "see if". sens = obsolete form of since, meaning "already", used to rhyme with pence.

= "nay, I wish I had bet (paid) forty pence of my own money" (presumably wagering that Roister should have successfully won Custance over with the letter the Scrivener wrote for him). forty pence seems to have been a favourite or customary amount in a wager.

9: "I would have bet too; but it did not have to happen, this set-back (stound)".

Child, however, assumes that stound takes its alternate meaning of "time" or "moment", so that line might be interpreted, "I wish I had, too, but it was not necessary, at that time."

11: Roister would have gladly spent 5000 pounds to avoid the humiliation he incurred in the recent meeting with Custance.

= chattering.

= ie. "go over to him". = "listen to"; Merygreeke is still addressing the Scrivener.

24: the Scrivener is not at all intimidated by Roister.
Roist. What hindrance hast thou done me, and what villainy?

Scriv. It hath come of thyself, if thou hast had any.

Roist. All the stock thou comest of later or rather,

From thy first father's grandfather's father's father,
Nor all that shall come of thee to the world's end,
Though to threescore generations they descend,
Can be able to make me a just recompense,
For this trespass of thine and this one offence.

Scriv. Wherein?

Roist. Did not you make me a letter, brother?

Scriv. Pay the like hire, I will make you such another.

Roist. Nay, see and these whoreson Pharisees and Scribes
Do not get their living by polling and bribes.
If it were not for shame −

Scriv. Nay, hold thy hands still.

= meaning either (1) injury or wrong, or (2) obstruction, in the sense that the Scrivener's letter has brought Roister's courtship to a dead stop.

28: "any harm that has come to you is through your own fault, if indeed you have suffered any such." Note that the Scrivener addresses Roister with thou to indicate his disdain for this man who dares to rebuke him.

30: the sense is, "not any of your ancestors (stock) from whom you are descended".

later or rather = regionalism for "later or sooner".¹

32: "nor any of your descendents to come between now and the end of time".

= actionable wrong or injury.

37: "in what respect (have I injured you)?"

= a term of familiarity, not literal; just as Merygreeke referred to his cousin Roister Doister at Act III.i.4.⁵

= "if you pay me a similar fee".

43-44: and = if.

Pharisees and Scribes = two subgroups of the Jewish faith that are frequently paired in the New Testament.

The Pharisees distinguished themselves through their hyper-strict interpretation of the Law, and as such were considered hypocritical for what appeared to be their "holier than thou" attitude.¹⁹

Scribes was the word used in the New Testament to describe Jewish lawyers; they came into frequent conflict with Jesus, and after his crucifixion maintained hostile relations with the apostles.²⁶

In the Old Testament, however, Scribes described those Jews who were clerks and professional copyists, and who held offices such as that of Secretary of State; like Pharisees, they were considered to be "upholders of ancestral tradition" (OED, scribe, n.1, def. 1).

Roister thus pairs Pharisees and Scribes as the New Testament does, but at the same time links the Old Testament Scribes, by virtue of their profession, to the Scrivener; and as both groups have, because of their New Testament histories, come down through the ages with bad reputations, Roister ascribes to them, and thus to the Scrivener, the qualities listed in line 44.

polling = swindling.³
bribes = robbery or corruption.¹

47: the Scrivener notes that Roisters hands have turned into fists, or are engaged in some similar threatening gesture - though at least one editor suggests Roister actually strikes the Scrivener here,³⁰ even if that would be out of character for our cowardly hero.

Cooper plausibly assigns this line to Merygreeke;
Mery. Why, did ye not promise that ye would not him spill?  
Scriv. Let him not spare me.  

Roist. Why, wilt thou strike me again?  
Scriv. Ye shall have as good as ye bring of me, that is plain.  
Mery. I cannot blame him, sir, though your blows would him grieve.  
For he knoweth present death to ensue of all ye give.  

Roist. Well, this man for once hath purchased thy pardon.  
Scriv. And what say ye to me? or else I will be gone.  
Roist. I say the letter thou madest me was not good.  
Scriv. Then did ye wrong copy it, of likelihood.  
Roist. Yes, out of thy copy word for word I wrote.  
Scriv. Then was it as ye prayed to have it, I wot,  
But in reading and pointing there was made some fault.  

Roist. I wot not, but it made all my matter to halt.  
Scriv. How say you, is this mine original or no?  
Roist. The self same that I wrote out of, so mote I go!  
Scriv. Look you on your own fist, and I will look on this,  

And let this man be judge whether I read amiss.  
“To mine own dear coney-bird, sweetheart, and pigsney,  
Good Mistress Custance, present these by and by.”  
How now? doth not this superscription agree?  

Roist. Read that is within, and there ye shall the fault see.  
Scriv. “Sweet mistress, whereas I love you; nothing at all  
Regarding your richesse and substance — chief of all  
For your personage, beauty, demeanour, and wit  
I commend me unto you; never a whit  
Sorry to hear report of your good welfare,  

the Scrivener quickly shows he actually has no fear of Roister.  
= destroy or kill.  
51: it appears that at this point the Scrivener strikes Roister either preemptively or in return; Roister recoils, and the Scrivener threatens to dish him another blow.  
57-58: spoken to Roister, as an ironic compliment: "I can't blame the Scrivener for defending himself, because he knows that you are likely to kill someone if you were to strike them."  
= ie. Merygreeke.  = "this time": a face-saving line, especially if, as we surmise, the Scrivener has struck Roister above.  
= ie. "so what is it exactly you brought me here to tell me?"  
73: "I don't know about that, but it crippled my project."  
halt = limp, proceed lamely.  
75: Roister and the Scrivener examine the Scrivener’s original draft of the letter.  
= old expression of affirmation.  
79: the Scrivener will read aloud his draft of the letter; Roister is to follow along on his copy; Roister must have kept his own letter to Custance after Merygreeke read it out loud in the previous scene.  
fist = writing, or handwriting.  
83: ie. "how is this so far? Do the openings (superscriptions) of the two letters agree exactly with each other?"  
87-88: nothing…substance = ie. "but it is not for your wealth (that I love you)."
For (as I hear say) such your conditions are,
That ye be worthy favour; of no living man
To be abhorred; of every honest man
To be taken for a woman inclined to vice
Nothing at all; to virtue giving her due price.
Wherefore, concerning marriage, ye are thought
Such a fine paragon, as ne'er honest man bought.
And now, by these presents, I do you advertise
That I am minded to marry you; in no wise
For your goods and substance; I can be content
To take you as you are. If ye will be my wife,
Ye shall be assured for the time of my life,
I will keep you right well; from good raiment and fare
Ye shall not be kept; but in sorrow and care
Ye shall in no wise live; at your own liberty,
Do and say what ye lust; ye shall never please me
But when ye are merry; I will be all sad
When ye are sorry; I will be very glad
When ye seek your heart's ease; I will be unkind
At no time; in me shall ye much gentleness find.
But all things contrary to your will and mind
Shall be done otherwise; I will not be behind
To speak. And as for all them that would do you wrong
(I will so help and maintain ye) shall not live long.
Nor any foolish dolt shall cumber you; but I,
I, whoe'er say nay, will stick by you till I die.
Thus, good mistress Custance, the Lord you save and keep.
From me, Roister Doister, whether I wake or sleep,
Who favoureth you no less (ye may be bold)
Than this letter purporteth, which ye have unfold."
Now, sir, what fault can ye find in this letter?
Roist. Of truth, in my mind there cannot be a better.
Scriv. Then was the fault in reading, and not in writing,
No, nor I dare say in the form of enditing.
But who read this letter, that it sounded so naught?
Mery. I read it, indeed.
Scriv. Ye read it not as ye ought.
Roist. Why, thou wretched villain, was all this same fault
in thee?
Mery. I knock your costard if ye offer to strike me!
Roist. Strikest thou, indeed? and I offer but in jest?
Mery. Yea, and rap you again except ye can sit in rest −
And I will no longer tarry here, me believe!
Roist. What, wilt thou be angry, and I do thee forgive? −
Fare thou well, scribbler, I cry thee mercy indeed.
**Scriv.** Fare ye well, bibbler, and worthily may ye speed!

**Roist.** If it were another but thou, it were a knave.

**Mery.** Ye are another yourself, sir, the Lord us both save. Albeit in this matter I must your pardon crave. Alas, would ye wish in me the wit that ye have?

But as for my fault I can quickly amend. I will show Custance it was I that did offend.

**Roist.** By so doing her anger maybe reformed.

**Mery.** But if by no entreaty she will be turned, Then set light by her and be as testy as she, And do your force upon her with extremity.

**Roist.** Come on, therefore, let us go home in sadness.

**Mery.** That if force shall need all may be in a readiness – And as for this letter, hardly, let all go. We will know where she refuse you for that or no.

[Exeunt.]

END OF ACT III.
ACT IV.

SCENE I.

Enter Sym Suresby.

Sym. Is there any man but I, Sym Suresby, alone.
That would have taken such an enterprise him upon.
In such an outrageous tempest as this was,
Such a dangerous gulf of the sea to pass?
I think, verily, Neptune's mighty godship
Was angry with some that was in our ship,
And but for the honesty which in me he found,
I think for the others' sake we had been drowned.

But fie on that servant which for his master's wealth
Will stick for to hazard both his life and his health.
My master, Gawyn Goodluck, after me a day,
Because of the weather, thought best his ship to stay,
And now that I have the rough surges so well past,
God grant I may find all things safe here at last.
Then will I think all my travail well spent.
Now the first point wherefore my master hath me sent,
Is to salute dame Christian Custance, his wife
Espoused, whom he tendreth no less than his life.
I must see how it is with her, well or wrong,
And whether for him she doth not now think long.
Then to other friends I have a message or tway,
And then so to return and meet him on the way.
Now will I go knock that I may despatch with speed,
But lo, forth cometh herself happily indeed.

ACT IV, SCENE II.

[Still on Stage: Sym.]

Enter Custance.

Cust. I come to see if any more stirring be here.
But what stranger is this which doth to me appear?
Sym. I will speak to her. — Dame, the Lord you save and see.
Cust. What, friend Sym Suresby? Forsooth, right welcome ye be!
How doth mine own Gawyn Goodluck, I pray thee tell?
Sym. When he knoweth of your health he will be perfect well.
Cust. If he have perfect health, I am as I would be.

Sym. Such news will please him well, this is as it should be.

Cust. I think now long for him.

Sym. And he as long for you.

Cust. When will he be at home?

Sym. His heart is here e'en now, His body cometh after.

Cust. I would see that fain. 24: "I am eager (fain) to see that (ie. his body)."

Sym. As fast as wind and sail can carry it amain. − = ie. Gawyn's body. = with all speed.²

Cust. Now I shrew their best Christmas cheeks both togetherward.

ACT IV, SCENE III.
[Still on Stage: Custance, Sym.]

Enter Roister Doister and Merygreeke.

Cust. What mean these lewd fellows thus to trouble me still?

Sym Suresby here perchance shall thereof deem some ill, And shall suspect in me some point of naughtiness − And they come hitherward!

Sym. What is their business?

Cust. I have nought to them; nor they to me in sadness.

Sym. Let us hearken them; somewhat there is, I fear it.

29: Custance sees Merygreeke and Roister approaching, and fires a curse in their direction.

shrew = curse.

Christmas cheeks = Child and Flügel explain that this odd curse is simply an extension of the Medieval practice of using body parts in oaths (e.g. God's arms appears in this play); Christmas, he goes on, intensifies the curse, so that the full meaning becomes, "I curse their best cheeks, even the ones they wear at Christmas."

Farmer, however, wonders if Christmas cheeks is a reference to a holiday bonnet or head attire of some sort: cheeks may be short for "cheeks and ears", the name of a popular and "fantastic headdress" of the period. Unfortunately the earliest recognized use of this phrase was 1605, half a century after Roister was written.

togetherward = uncommon variation of together.

1-4: in this aside, Custance expresses her worry that if Sym sees Roister and Merygreeke talking to her, he will become suspicious regarding Custance's faithfulness to Gawyn during the latter's absence.

lewd = base.⁴

= perhaps. = reckon, judge.

= immorality.¹ = in this direction.

= ie. nothing to say to. = seriousness.

= "hear them out." = "something is going on"; the second half of the line may be an aside.
Roist. I will speak out aloud best, that she may hear it.

Mery. Nay, alas, ye may so fear her out of her wit.

Ralph. By the cross of my sword, I will hurt her no whit.

Mery. Will ye do no harm indeed? shall I trust your word?

Roist. By Roister Doister's faith, I will speak but in bord. −

Sirs, see that my harness, my target, and my shield,

Be made as bright now, as when I was last in field,
As white as I should to war again to-morrow:
For sick shall I be, but I work some folk sorrow.

Therefore see that all shine as bright as Saint George,
Or as doth a key newly come from the smith's forge,
I would have my sword and harness to shine so bright,
That I might therewith dim mine enemies' sight.

I would have it cast beams as fast, I tell you plain,
As doth the glittering grass after a shower of rain.
And see that in case I should need to come to arming,
All things may be ready at a minute's warning.
For such chance may chance in an hour, do ye hear?

Mery. As perchance shall not chance again in seven year.

Roist. Now draw we near to her, and hear what shall be said.

Mery. But I would not have you make her too much afraid.

Roist. Well found, sweet wife, I trust, for all this your sour look.

Cust. "Wife" – why call ye me wife?

Sym. [Aside.] "Wife?" This gear goeth a-crook.
Mery. Nay, mistress Custance, I warrant you, our letter
Is not as we read e'en now, but much better,
And where ye half 

For this same letter, ye will love him now therefore,
Nor it is not this letter, though ye were a queen,
That should break marriage between you twain, I ween.

Cust. I did not refuse him for the letter's sake.
Roist. Then ye are content me for your husband to take?
Cust. You for my husband to take? nothing less truly.

Roist. Yea, say so, sweet spouse, afore strangers hardly.

Mery. And though I have here his letter of love with me,
Yet his ring and tokens he sent, keep safe with ye.

Cust. A mischief take his tokens, and him and thee too!
But what prate I with fools? have I naught else to do?
Come in with me, Sym Suresby, to take some repast.

Sym. I must ere I drink, by your leave, go in all haste,
To a place or two, with earnest letters of his.
Cust. Then come drink here with me.
Sym. I thank you!
Cust. Do not miss.
You shall have a token to your master with you.
Sym. No tokens this time, gramercies, God be with you.

[Exit.] 

Cust. Surely this fellow misdeemeth some ill in me,
Which thing but God help, will go near to spill me.
Roist. Yea, farewell, fellow, and tell thy master Goodluck
That he cometh too late of this blossom to pluck.

Let him keep him there still, or at leastwise make no haste,
As for his labour hither he shall spend in waste.

His betters be in place now.

Mery. As long as it will hold.

Cust. I will be even with thee, thou beast, thou mayst be bold!

Roist. Will ye have us then?

Cust. I will never have thee!

Roist. Then will I have you?

Cust. No, the devil shall have thee!

I have gotten this hour more shame and harm by thee,
Than all thy life days thou canst do me honesty.

Mery. Why now may ye see what it cometh to, in the end,
To make a deadly foe of your most loving friend; –

And, i-wis, this letter, if ye would hear it now –

Cust. I will hear none of it.

Mery. In faith, would ravish you.

Cust. He hath stained my name for ever, this is clear.

Roist. I can make all as well in an hour.

Mery. As ten year. –

How say ye, will ye have him?

Cust. No.

Mery. Will ye take him?

Cust. I defy him.

but = unless.
spill = ruin.

= Gawyn's surname.
= ie. "to pick this flower in its full bloom," a metaphor
  for winning Custance - the flower - for himself.
88: "let him remain there (on the ship), or at least be
  in no rush to leave it".
89: "for he will be wasting his efforts if he chooses to
  come here."
90: "he has been replaced by better people."
92: a wry aside.
94: Custance switches to the contemptuous thee
  (now that Sym has left the stage) in addressing Roister
  to reveal her loathing for the man. Farmer thinks this
  line may be an aside.
  bold = sure, certain.

100: Roister, either naively or obnoxiously, simply
  rephrases his question of line 96.

104: "than you could show respect (honesty) for me
  over your entire lifetime."

life days = lifetime; the phrase life days had been in
  use since the days of Old English, or the Anglo-Saxon
  period; its synonym "lifetime" entered the language in
  the 14th century.

106-7: Merygreeke is likely warning Roister (and not
  Custance) about what will happen if he makes an
  enemy of the woman he loves; we remember that the
  parasite had admonished Roister earlier in the scene not
  to frighten her.

may ye see = "you will see".

friend = frequently used, as here, to mean "lover".

108: this line is addressed to Custance.
i-wis = certainly.

112: ie. "truly, it would sweep you off your feet."

118: "as in ten years;" another witty aside.
Mery. At my word?

Cust. A shame take him.
Waste no more wind, for it will never be.

Mery. This one fault with twain shall be mended, ye shall see.
Gentle mistress Custance, now, good mistress Custance!
Honey mistress Custance, now, sweet mistress Custance!
Golden mistress Custance, now, white mistress Custance!
Silken mistress Custance, now, fair mistress Custance!

Cust. Faith, rather than to marry with such a doltish lout,
I would match myself with a beggar, out of doubt.

Mery. Then I can say no more; to speed we are not like.

Except ye rap out a rag of your rhetoric.

Cust. Speak not of winning me, for it shall never be so!

Roist. Yes, dame, I will have you, whether ye will or no!
I command you to love me, wherefore should ye not?

Mery. To her! That is well said.

Roist. Shall I so break my brain
To dote upon you, and ye not love us again?

Mery. Well said yet!

Cust. Go to, you goose!

Roist. I say, Kit Custance,
In case ye will not ha'ze, — well, better "yes," perchance!

Cust. Avaunt, louse! pick thee hence.

Mery. Well, sir, ye perceive,
For all your kind offer, she will not you receive.

Roist. Then a straw for her, and a straw for her again,
She shall not be my wife, would she never so fain —
No, and though she would be at ten thousand pound cost!

128: = breath.
= two.
= a term of endearment.
= marry. = "without a".
141-2: spoken as an aside to Roister.
\textit{Speed we are not like} = "we are unlikely to succeed (speed)".

142: roughly, "unless you can quickly spin out a winning bit of amorous discourse", but with more humour.

Note also the rare alliteration in this line.
Udall borrowed the expression \textit{rag of rhetoric} from John Skelton's \textit{Replycacion}: "A lytell ragge of rethorique."
\textit{rap out} = common transitive phrase conveying a sense of rapid and sudden disclaiming.\(^1\)
\textit{rag} = scrap.\(^1\)

\(^1\) = why.
= inflaming, arousing,
= "take it to her!"
= "drive myself mad"\(^{13}\) or "exhaust my brain".\(^1\)

157: \textit{Go to} = common phrase for "get out of here".
\textit{goose} = common term for "fool".

= older nickname for Christian (Custance's forename) as well as for Christopher. The Elizabethan playwright Christopher Marlowe was nicknamed thus.\(^27\)
= "have us".\(^5\)
= begone! = lout\(^5\) or ne'er-do-well.\(^5\) = "get out of here."\(^5\)

167: \textit{a straw for (one)} was a common expression of contempt.\(^1\)
= "no matter how eager she might be to."
169: "even if she were worth, or paid me, 10,000 pounds!"\(^{11}\)
Mery. Lo, dame, ye may see what an husband ye have lost.

Cust. Yea, no force, a jewel much better lost than found.

Mery. Ah, ye will not believe how this doth my heart wound. How should a marriage between you be toward. If both parties draw back, and become so froward?

Roist. Nay, dame, I will fire thee out of thy house, and destroy thee and all thine, and that by and by!

Mery. Nay, for the passion of God, sir, do not so.

Roist. Yes, except she will say yea to that she said no.

Cust. And what — be there no officers, trow we, in town To check idle loiterers, bragging up and down?

Where be they, by whom vagabonds should be repressed, That poor silly widows might live in peace and rest? Shall I never rid thee out of my company? I will call for help. — What ho, come forth, Trupenie!

Enter Tom.

Trup. Anon. What is your will, mistress? did ye call me?

Cust. Yea. Go run apace, and as fast as may be, Pray Tristram Trustie, my most assured friend, To be here by and by, that he may me defend.

Trup. That message so quickly shall be done, by God's grace, That at my return ye shall say, I went apace.

[Exit.]

Cust. Then shall we see, I trow, whether ye shall do me harm.
Roist. Yes, in faith, Kit, I shall thee and thine so charm.

That all women incarnate by thee may beware.

Cust. Nay, as for charming me, come hither if thou dare,
I shall clout thee till thou stink, both thee and thy train,
And coil thee mine own hands, and send thee home again.

Roist. Yea, sayest thou me that, dame? Dost thou me threaten?
Go we, I will see whether I shall be beaten!
Mery. Nay, for the pashe of God, let me now treat peace,
For bloodshed will there be in case this strife increase.
Ah, good dame Custance, take better way with you.

Cust. Let him do his worst.
Mery. [To Custance.] Yield in time.

Roist. Come hence, thou.

[Exeunt Roister Doister and Merygreeke.]

ACT IV, SCENE IV.
[Still on Stage: Custance.]

Cust. So, sirrah, if I should not with him take this way,
I should not be rid of him, I think, till doom's day.

I will call forth my folks, that, without any mocks,
If he come again we may give him raps and knocks.
Madge Mumblecrust, come forth, and Tibet Talkapace.
Yea, and come forth too, mistress Annot Alyface.

Enter Annot, Tibet and Madge.

Annot. I come.

Tibet. And I am here.

Mumb. And I am here too, at length.

Cust. Like warriors, if need be, ye must show your strength.
The man that this day hath thus beguiled you, 
Is Ralph Roister Doister, whom ye know well inowen.
The most lout and dastard that ever on ground trod.

Tibet. I see all folk mock him when he goeth abroad.

Cust. What, pretty maid, will ye talk when I speak?

Tibet. No, forsooth, good mistress!

Cust. Will ye my tale break? − He threateneth to come hither with all his force to fight, I charge you, if he come, on him with all your might.

Mumb. I with my distaff will reach him one rap.

Tibet. And I with my new broom will sweep him one swap. And then with our great club I will reach him one rap.

Annot. And I with our skimmer will fling him one flap.

Tibet. Then Trupenie's firefork will him shrewdly fray. And you with the spit may drive him quite away.

Cust. Go, make all ready, that it may be even so.

Tibet. For my part I shrew them that last about it go. [Exeunt.]

ACT IV, SCENE V.
[Still on Stage: Custance.]

Enter Tom and Tristram Trustie.

Cust. Trupenie did promise me to run a great pace, My friend Tristram Trustie to fet into this place. Indeed he dwelleth hence a good start, I confess: But yet a quick messenger might twice since, as I guess, Have gone and come again. Ah, yond I spy him now!

Tom. Ye are a slow goer, sir, I make God avow. My mistress Custance will in me put all the blame, Your legs be longer than mine − come apace for shame!

Cust. I can thee thank, Trupenie, thou hast done right well.

Tom. Mistress, since I went no grass hath grown on my heel, But master Tristram Trustie here maketh no speed.

Cust. That he came at all, I thank him in very deed, For now have I need of the help of some wise man.

Trust. Then may I be gone again, for none such I am.

Tom. Ye may be by your going − for no Alderman

= skulking coward.¹
= out and about, out of his house.

27: another expression describing an interruption. break = cut short.¹
= her club-like rod used for spinning; see Act I.iii.1
= blow.⁵
= ladle, or implement for skimming liquid.¹,⁵
= poker. = severely = assault or frighten away.¹
= curse. = ie. are slow to arm and join the fight.

45: Custance remains on stage.

Entering Characters: Custance's servant Tom has finally returned with Tristram Trustie, a trusted friend of Gawyn, and through him Custance.

= fetch. = from here. = distance.¹
= hurry.
= "am able to thank you".

13: this is the second use in our play of this proverbial expression, indicating here that Tom has not paused once in his efforts to retrieve Trustie. = ie. is very slow.

19: Trustie responds with formulaic modesty.

21-22: Tom's response is rather sarcastic!
Can go, I dare say, a sadder pace than ye can.

Cust. Trupenie, get thee in. Thou shalt among them know, How to use thyself like a proper man, I trow.

Tom. I go.

[Exit.]

Cust. Now, Tristram Trustie, I thank you right much. For, at my first sending, to come ye never grutch.

Trust. Dame Custance, God ye save, and while my life shall last, For my friend Goodluck's sake ye shall not send in wast.

Cust. He shall give you thanks.

Trust. I will do much for his sake.

Cust. But alack, I fear, great displeasure shall be take.

Trust. Wherefore?

Cust. For a foolish matter.

Trust. What is your cause?

Cust. I am ill accumbred with a couple of daws.

Trust. Nay, weep not, woman, but tell me what your cause is. As concerning my friend is anything amiss?

Cust. No, not on my part; but here was Sym Suresby −

Trust. He was with me and told me so.

Cust. And he stood by While Ralph Roister Doister with help of Merygreeke, For promise of marriage did unto me seek.

Trust. And had ye made any promise before them twain?

Cust. No, I had rather be torn in pieces and slain, No man hath my faith and troth, but Gawyn Goodluck, And that before Suresby did I say, and there stuck, But of certain letters there were such words spoken −

Trust. He told me that too.

Cust. And of a ring and token, −

by your going = "to judge by your pace". Alderman = a civil officer or magistrate of a city or ward; aldermen were proverbial for their slow or deliberate progress: hence the inclusion of the following in two 17th century collections of proverbs: "He is paced like an alderman." sadder pace = slower or more grave walking speed. = behave. = respectable or worthy.

32: the sense is, "I don't have to ask you twice to come over when I need you."
grutch = complain.

= ie. "send for me in vain (in wast);" wast is used in place of waste for the sake of the rhyme.

= perhaps meaning "is pending" or "is on the horizon."

43: "why?"

56: Trustie has already heard about the incident with Roister from Sym.

= "in front of the two of them?" Trustie is concerned that Custance may have made a promise to marry Roister in front of a witness, which would make such a vow that much more binding.

= in front of. = ie. "held my ground".

= regarding.
That Suresby I spied did more than half suspect,
That I my faith to Gawyn Good luck did reject.

\[= perceived.2\]

**Trust.** But there was no such matter, dame Custance, indeed?

**Cust.** If ever my head thought it, God send me ill speed!
Wherefore, I beseech you, with me to be a witness,
That in all my life I never intended thing less,
And what a brainsick fool Ralph Roister Doister is,
Yourself know well enough.

\[= bad luck.1\]

**Trust.** Ye say full true, i-wis.

**Cust.** Because to be his wife I ne grant nor apply.
Hither will he come, he sweareth, by and by,
To kill both me and mine, and beat down my house flat.
Therefore I pray your aid.

**Trust.** I warrant you that.

**Cust.** Have I so many years lived a sober life,
And showed myself honest, maid, widow, and wife,
And now to be abused in such a vile sort?
Ye see how poor widows live all void of comfort.

**Trust.** I warrant him do you no harm nor wrong at all.

**Cust.** No, but Mathew Merygreeke doth me most appall,
That he would join himself with such a wretched lout.

**Trust.** He doth it for a jest, I know him out of doubt.

**Cust.** Then shall we hear his mind.

**ACT IV, SCENE VI.**
\[[Still on Stage: Custance and Trustie.]]

Enter Merygreeke.

**Mery.** Custance and Trustie both, I do you here well find.

\[= "treated"; Custance is her usual ironic self.\]

**Cust.** Ah, Mathew Merygreeke, ye have used me well.

\[= once and for all.3\]

**Mery.** Now for altogether ye must your answer tell.
Will ye have this man, woman, or else will ye not?
Else will he come, never boar so brim nor toast so hot.

\[= "never was a boar so fierce"; Udall had originally written brymme here; if the intended word is breme (though written as brim in all the editions), then the editors' collective definition of brymme, or brim, as "fierce" is correct (the OED also cites this line for the same said definition).

It is worth pointing out that the OED indicates in a separate entry that brim, or breme, when applied to a boar, usually referred to its being in heat; however, as Udall has kept this play scrupulously clean, he certainly does not intend this meaning.\]
**Trust. And Cust.** But why join ye with him?

**Trust.** For mirth?

**Cust.** Or else in sadness?

**Mery.** The more fond of you both hardly yat matter guess.

**Trust.** Lo, how say ye, dame?

**Mery.** Why do ye think, dame Custance, That in this wooing I have meant ought but pastance?

**Cust.** Much things ye spake, I wot, to maintain his dotage.

**Mery.** But well might ye judge I spake it all in mockage. For why? Is Roister Doister a fit husband for you?

**Trust.** I daresay ye never thought it.

**Mery.** No, to God I vow. And did not I know afore of the insurance Between Gawyn Goodluck and Christian Custance? And did not I for the nonce, by my conveyance.

Read his letter in a wrong sense for dalliance?

That if you could have take it up at the first bound.

We should thereat such a sport and pastime have found, That all the whole town should have been the merrier.

**Cust.** Ill ache your heads both! I was never wearier, Nor never more vexed since the first day I was born!

**Trust.** But very well I wist he here did all in scorn.

**Cust.** But I feared thereof to take dishonesty.

**Mery.** This should both have made sport and showed your honesty, And Goodluck, I dare swear, your wit therein would 'low.

**Trust.** Yea, being no worse than we know it to be now.

**Mery.** And nothing yet too late; for when I come to him, Hither will he repair with a sheep's look full grim,
52 By plain force and violence to drive you to yield.
54 Cust. If ye two bid me, we will with him pitch a field,
I and my maids together.
56 Mery. Let us see! be bold.
58 Cust. Ye shall see women's war!
60 Trust. That fight will I behold!
62 Mery. If occasion serve, taking his part full brim,
I will strike at you, but the rap shall light on him,
When we first appear.
66 Cust. Then will I run away
As though I were afear'd.
68 Trust. Do you that part well play
And I will sue for peace.
70 Mery. And I will set him on.
Then will he look as fierce as a Cotswold lion.
72 Trust. But when goest thou for him?
74 Mery. That do I very now.
76 Cust. Ye shall find us here.
78 Mery. Well, God have mercy on you!
80 Cust. There is no cause of fear; the least boy in the street –
82 Cust. Nay, the least girl I have, will make him take his feet.
But hark! methink they make preparation.
84 Trust. No force, it will be a good recreation!
86 Cust. I will stand within, and step forth speedily,
And so make as though I ran away dreadfully.

ACT IV, SCENE VII.
[Still on Stage: Trustie.]

Enter Roister Doister [with his army of servants, including]
Merygreeke, Dobinet, and Harpax

1 Roist. Now, sirs, keep your ray, and see your hearts be stout.
But where be these caitiffs? Methink they dare not rout!
How sayest thou, Merygreeke? – what doth Kit Custance say?

Mery. I am loth to tell you.

Roist. Tush, speak, man – yea or nay?

Mery. Forsooth, sir, I have spoken for you all that I can,
But if ye win her, ye must e'en play the man,
E'en to fight it out, ye must a man's heart take.

Roist. Yes, they shall know, and thou knowest, I have a stomach.

Mery. “A stomach,” quod you, yea, as good as e'er man had!

Roist. I trow they shall find and feel that I am a lad.

Mery. By this cross, I have seen you eat your meat as well
As any that e'er I have seen of or heard tell.
"A stomach," quod you? He that will that deny,
I know, was never at dinner in your company.

Roist. Nay, the stomach of a man it is that I mean.

Mery. Nay, the stomach of a horse or a dog, I ween.

Roist. Nay, a man's stomach with a weapon, mean I.

Mery. Ten men can scarce match you with a spoon in a pie.

Roist. Nay, the stomach of a man to try in strife.

Mery. I never saw your stomach cloved yet in my life.

Roist. Tush, I mean in strife or fighting to try.

Mery. We shall see how ye will strike now, being angry.

Roist. Have at thy pate then, and save thy head if thou may.

Mery. Nay, then have at your pate again by this day.

Roist. Nay, thou mayst not strike at me again in no wise.

Mery. I cannot in fight make to you such warrantise:
But as for your foes, here let them the bargain bie.

Roist. Nay, as for they, shall every mother's child die.
And in this my fume a little thing might make me
To beat down house and all, and else the devil take me!

Mery. If I were as ye be, by Gog's dear mother,
I would not leave one stone upon another,
Though she would redeem it with twenty thousand pounds.

= wretches. = assemble for the purpose of offering battle.4

= with the phrase a stomach, Roister means he has courage, but Merygreeke repeatedly and deliberately misunderstands Roister by taking a stomach to mean "appetite".

= man of spirit or courage.15

= another oath sworn on the cross of a sword.

= think or expect.

= prove, test.

= full, satiated.

40: Have at (something) = phrase used to signal the beginning of a fight or confrontation; Roister threatens to strike Merygreeke, though Farmer suggests he actually hits Merygreeke, who either way now strikes Roister.
Pate = head.

= a guarantee.5

= ie. buy the bargain, an expression meaning "pay the penalty (for their actions)".

= fury.

54: Roister should completely tear down Custance's house.

= ransom it, ie "pay me to forbear from destroying it".
Roist. It shall be even so, by His lily wounds.
Mery. Be not at one with her upon any amends.

Roist. No, though she make to me never so many friends, 
Nor if all the world for her would undertake, 
No, not God himself neither, shall not her peace make, 
On, therefore, march forward! — Soft, stay a while yet.
Mery. On.

Roist. Tarry.
Mery. Forth.
Roist. Back.
Mery. On.
Roist. Soft! Now forward set!

Enter Custance.

Cust. What business have we here? Out! alas, alas!

[Custance, feigning fright, runs back inside.]

Roist. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! 
Didst thou see that, Merygreeke, how afraid she was? 
Didst thou see how she fled apace out of my sight? 
Ah, good sweet Custance, I pity her by this light.
Mery. That tender heart of yours will mar altogether, — 
Thus will ye be turned with wagging of a feather.

Roist. On, sirs, keep your ray.
Mery. On, forth, while this gear is hot.
Roist. Soft, the arms of Caleys, I have one thing forgot!
Mery. What lack we now?
Roist. Retire, or else we be all slain!
Mery. Back, for the pash of God! back, sirs, back again! 
What is the great matter?
Roist. This hasty forthgoing 
Had almost brought us all to utter undoing. 
It made me forget a thing most necessary.
Mery. Well remembered of a captain, by Saint Mary.
Roist. It is a thing must be had.
Mery. Let us have it then.

Roist. But I wot not where nor how.

Mery. Then wot not I when.

Roist. Of a chief thing I am to seek.

Mery. Tut, so will ye be, when ye have studied a week. — But tell me what it is?

Roist. I lack yet an headpiece.

Mery. The kitchen collocavit, the best hens to grease.

Run, fet it, Dobinet, and come at once withal. And bring with thee my potgun, hanging by the wall.

[Exit Dobinet.]

I have seen your head with it, full many a time, Covered as safe as it had been with a skrine:

And I warrant it save your head from any stroke, Except perchance to be amazed with the smoke. I warrant your head therewith, except for the mist, As safe as if it were fast locked up in a chist. And lo, here our Dobinet cometh with it now.

Re-enter Dobinet.

Dob. It will cover me to the shoulders well enow.

Mery. Let me see it on.

Roist. In faith, it doth metely well.

Mery. There can be no fitter thing. Now ye must us tell = know.

= lacking. 24

122: something like, "you could think about this all week, and you will still be missing something;" in this aside, 4 Merygreeke seems to be suggesting that Roister can be expected to continuously look for excuses not to go forward with the attack.

= a helmet.

127: collocavit = a kitchen utensil, probably a pot or pail, since Merygreeke is suggesting it be used as a helmet; perhaps meaning collock, a pail. 1

the best hens to grease = a difficult clause to interpret, but Child gives it a shot: assuming collocavit to be a pail in which scraps are collected and then used to feed chickens, Child proposes "which is used to fatten up (grease) the best hens."

Roister is of course the hen due to his cowardice. Williams has an additional take on this clause; he suggests Merygreeke may be speaking with double-meaning here: while the audience hears the line as written, he intends Roister to hear "the best hence to Greece", i.e. the best from here to Greece.

= fetch. = with it.

= a child's gun (perhaps a corruption of popgun), or any ineffectual gun or pistol, used humorously here for any gun. 1, 4, 5

= scrine, i.e. a chest or box.

= "guarantee it will save". = stunned, stupefied. 3

= ie. chest, common spelling in mid-16th century. 1

= enough; Dobinet is commenting on the ample size of the pot or pail.

145: Roister now puts on the collocavit.

= "fits" or "will work suitably well."
Trust. What mean you to do, sir, commit manslaughter?

Roist. To kill forty such is a matter of laughter.

Trust. And who is it, sir, whom ye intend thus to spill?

Roist. Foolish Custance here forceth me against my will.

Trust. And is there no mean your extreme wrath to slake? She shall some amends unto your good maship make.

Roist. I will none amends.

Trust. Is her offence so sore?

Mery. And he were a lout she could have done no more. She hath called him fool, and dressed him like a fool, Mocked him like a fool, used him like a fool.

Trust. Well, yet the sheriff, the justice, or constable, Her misdemeanour to punish might be able.

Roist. No, sir, I mine own self will, in this present cause, Be sheriff, and justice, and whole judge of the laws; This matter to amend, all officers be I shall, Constable, bailiff, sergeant.

Mery. And hangman and all.

Trust. Yet a noble courage, and the heart of a man, Should more honour win by bearing with a woman. Therefore take the law, and let her answer thereto.

Roist. Merygreeke, the best way were even so to do. What honour should it be with a woman to fight?

= "go forward in ranks or in array."

154: Saint George to borrow = this strange expression actually appears frequently in 16th century literature, and, like the very common "Saint George for England", was primarily used as a battle cry. Several editors suggest borrow specifically means "protect", or "be a surety for", while the OED defines it as "security for one's honour"; Child thus glosses the phrase as "St. George be my pledge".

The 13th century monk and writer Bartholomaeus Anglicus interestingly argued in one tract against the employment of saints' names in battle cries: "so at this day, those which wuld be loth to be called otherwise these christians, are not ashamed so call Saint George, to borrow, for the English, Saint Denis for Fraunce, S. Andrew for Scotlande," etc.

drum dub-a-dub afore = Merygreeke instructs the drummer to beat a military refrain in front of the advancing troops.

= the gh in words such as manslaughter could be pronounced as an "f" in this era, ie. slaufter, which would then rhyme with laughter.

= destroy.

= means, way. = mollify.

= ie. "accept no".

= if.

= addressed. = treated.

175-6: Trustie suggests Roister let the law take its course, if perhaps he wants to accuse Custance of some crime, such as slander.
Mery. And what then, will ye thus forgo and lese your right? 

Roist. Nay, I will take the law on her withouten grace.

Trust. Or, if your maship could pardon this one trespass, I pray you forgive her!

Roist. Hoh!

Mery. Tush, tush, sir, do not! Be good, master, to her.

Roist. Hoh!

Mery. Tush, I say, do not. And what! shall your people here return straight home?

Roist. Yea, levy the camp, sirs, and hence again each one.

But be still in readiness, if I hap to call. I cannot tell what sudden chance may befall.

Mery. Do not off your harness, sirs, I you advise, At the least for this fortnight in no manner wise. Perchance in an hour, when all ye think least, Our master's appetite to fight will be best. But soft, ere ye go, have one at Custance' house.

Roist. Soft, what wilt thou do?

Mery. Once discharge my harquebouse.

And, for my heart's ease, have once more with my potgun.

Roist. Hold thy hands, else is all our purpose cleanfordone.

Mery. And it cost me my life.

= abandon. = lose.
= without mercy.¹
= injury (of Custance's).

= the cry of "hoh!" could be used to command some activity to cease;¹ thus Roister, Williams suggests, may be calling for his "soldiers" to stand down.

201-2: "don't do this (ie. back down), sir! Go on, give it to her good!"

But Whitworth argues this speech should be assigned to Trustie, who is trying to dissuade Roister from commencing his attack; if this interpretation is correct, continues Whitworth, then line 202 should be written without commas - "be good master to her" - meaning, "prove you are a better master than she is." Whitworth would presumably further give Trustie line 206.

209: levy the camp = "break up the camp".¹ Roister's use of such military jargon emphasizes the absurdity of the scene. hence = "go back", "return home".

= occurrence.
= remove. = armour.

= ie. "I will take one shot".

= ie. harquebus, an early long-gun, longer than a musket, and from whose barrel extended a foot-long thin iron rod on which to rest the weapon.²

221-231: Merygreeke fires his weapon repeatedly through the end of the scene.¹²

222: have once more = ie. "I will fire again". potgun = see the note at line 129 above; interestingly, Udall spells potgun here as potgoon (whereas earlier he spelled it potgunne), suggesting a slightly modified pronunciation to make it rhyme with fordone.

= spoiled or ruined:² a compound word, for-done.¹ Roister worries that if Merygreeke fires his weapon, then war with Custance may break out after all - which is exactly what Merygreeke wants.

226: ie. "I will do this even if it costs me my life."
Roist. I say, thou shalt not.

Mery. By the matte, but I will. Have once more with hail shot.

I will have some pennyworth, I will not lese all.

ACT IV. SCENE VIII.
[Still on Stage: Trustie, Roister Doister and his army, with Merygreeke, Dobinet and Harpax, and at least one drummer.]

Enter Custance.

Cust. What caitiffs are those that so shake my house wall?

Mery. Ah, sirrah! now, Custance, if ye had so much wit, I would see you ask pardon, and yourselves submit.

Cust. Have I still this ado with a couple of fools?

Mery. Hear ye what she saith?

Cust. Maidens, come forth with your tools!

Enter Custance's army of servants, all armed for battle.

Roist. In array!

Mery. Dubbadub, sirrah!

Roist. In array!

They come suddenly on us.

Mery. Dubbadub!

Roist. In array!

That ever I was born, we are taken tardy.

Mery. Now, sirs, quit ourselves like tall men and hardy!

Cust. On afore, Trupenie! Hold thine own, Annot! On toward them, Tibet! for 'scape us they cannot! Come forth, Madge Mumblecrust, to stand fast together!

Mery. God send us a fair day!

Roist. See, they march on hither!

Tibet. But, mistress

Cust. What sayest thou?
Tibet. Shall I go fetch our goose?
Cust. What to do?
Tibet. To yonder captain I will turn her loose,
And she gape and hiss at him, as she doth at me,
I durst jeopard my hand she will make him flee.
Cust. On forward!
Roist. They come!
Mery. Stand!
Roist. Hold!
Mery. Keep!
Roist. There!
Mery. Strike!
Roist. Take heed!
Cust. Well said, Trupenie!
Trup. Ah, whoresons!
Cust. Well done, indeed.
Mery. Hold thine own, Harpax! down with them, Dobinet!
Cust. Now Madge, there Annot! now stick them, Tibet!
Tibet. All my chief quarrel is to this same little knave,
That beguiled me last day − nothing shall him save.
Dob. Down with this little quean, that hath at me such spite!
Save you from her, master − it is a very sprite!
Cust. I myself will Mounsire Graund Captaine undertake.
Roist. They win ground!
Mery. Save yourself, sir, for God's sake!
Roist. Out, alas! I am slain! Help!

= fetch.
= probably indicating Roister, but Tibet may mean Dobinet - see lines 74-75 below.
= if.
= "I dare bet my hand".
48ff: the armed bodies approach each other, and begin to brawl.

74-75: Tibet approaches Dobinet, her primary target in this fight.
beguiled = deceived.
77: quean = originally meaning simply "woman", but at this time transitioning to also mean prostitute or hussy. He of course refers to Tibet.
hath at me = "is coming at me" or "is trying to strike me".
such spite = "with such malice."
sprite (line 78) = spirit, ie. beyond human.

80: Custance heads toward Roister, to whom she refers with a mock French title. Mounsire was a contemporary alternate spelling for Monsieur. Child sees a borrowing here from a verse in Heywood's Proverbs: "Thus be I by this, once le senior de graunde, / Many that command me, I shall commaunde."
80: Custance's army is beating back Roister's.

85: Custance has struck Roister. Merygreeke will come to Roister's "rescue".
92: Merygreeke fulfills his promise to pretend to try to strike at Custance, but actually lands a harsh blow on Roister.

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Roist. Slee else whom she will, by Gog, she shall not slee me!

Mery. How then?

Roist. Rather than to be slain, I will flee.

Cust. To it again, my knightesses! Down with them all!

Roist. Away, away, away! she will else kill us all.

Mery. Nay, stick to it, like an hardy man and a tall.

Roist. Oh bones, thou hittest me! Away, or else die we shall.

Mery. Away, for the pashe of our sweet Lord Jesus Christ.

Cust. Away, lout and lubber, or I shall be thy priest.

[Exeunt om.]

So this field is ours, we have driven them all away.

Tibet. Thanks to God, mistress, ye have had a fair day.

Cust. Well, now go ye in, and make yourself some good cheer.

Omnes pariter. We go.

[Exit Custance's Amazons.]

Trust. Ah, sir, what a field we have had here!

Cust. Friend Tristram, I pray you be a witness with me.

Trust. Dame Custance, I shall depose for your honesty, And now fare ye well, except something else ye would.

Cust. Not now, but when I need to send I will be bold. I thank you for these pains. And now I will get me in.

[Exit Trustie.]

Now Roister Doister will no more wooing begin. [Exit.]

END OF ACT IV.
ACT V.

SCENE I.

Enter Gawyn Goodluck and Sym.

Gawyn. Sym Suresby, my trusty man, now advise thee well.
And see that no false surmises thou me tell.
Was there such ado about Custance of a truth?

Sym. To report that I heard and saw, to me is ruth.
But both my duty and name and property
Warneth me to you to show fidelity.

It may be well enough, and I wish it so to be;
She may herself discharge, and try her honesty –

Yet their claim to her methought was very large.
For with letters, rings and tokens, they did her charge,
Which when I heard and saw I would none to you bring.

Gawyn. No, by Saint Marie, I allow thee in that thing.

Ah, sirrah, now I see truth in the proverb old,
All things that shineth is not by and by pure gold!

If any do live a woman of honesty,
I would have sworn Christian Custance had been she.

Sym. Sir, though I to you be a servant true and just,
Yet do not ye therefore your faithful spouse mistrust.

But examine the matter, and if ye shall it find
To be all well, be not ye for my words unkind.

Gawyn. I shall do that is right, and as I see cause why –
But here cometh Custance forth, we shall know by and by.

ACT V, SCENE II.

Entering Characters: we finally meet Gawyn Goodluck, Custance's affianced. Sym. Gawyn's servant, has reported to his master the incident of Act IV.iii between Custance on the one hand and Roister and Merygreeke on the other.

1: "be well advised".

2: Gawyn wants Sym to tell him everything regarding the events of Act IV.iii, but he wants only facts.

false surmises = incorrect information based on speculation.

Note that Gawyn appropriately addresses his servant with thou, while Sym will address his superior with the respectful you.

of a truth (line 3) = really, in truth.

= ie. what. = ie. "brings me sorrow".5
= natural disposition or character;3,5 Hazlitt prefers "peculiar place or function".

7: "instruct me that my loyalty (fidelity) lies only to you," i.e. he knows that he must do what is best for Gawyn by reporting the truth of what he saw, even if it hurts others to whom he would normally be sympathetic.

9: "Custance in the end may demonstrate she is guilty of no transgression, and prove (try)3 her faithfulness to you."
= ie. Roister and Merygreeke's. = great, ie. persuasive.

= ie. Mary, mother of Jesus. = "I approve of your conduct."8,9
= appropriate form of address to a servant.

16: this early variation of a still popular proverb is from Heywood: "All is not gold that glisters."

by and by = necessarily.1

17: "if there ever has lived an honest woman".

= affianced.5

22-23: "please investigate the matter, and if it turns out that all is as it should be, do not be harsh towards Custance because of what I reported to you."

= what.
= right away, soon enough.
Enter Custance.

**Cust.** I come forth to see and *hearken* for news good, for about this hour is the time of likelihood, That Gawyn Goodluck *by the sayings of Suresby* Would be at home, and lo, yond I see him, I! – What! Gawyn Goodluck, the only hope of my life! Welcome home, and kiss me, your true espoused wife.

**Gawyn.** Nay, soft, dame Custance; I must first, *by your licence*, see whether all things be clear in your conscience.

I hear of your doings to me very strange.

**Cust.** What! fear ye that my faith towards you should change?

**Gawyn.** I must needs mistrust ye be elsewhere entangled, For I hear that certain men with you have *wrangled* About the promise of marriage by you to them made.

**Cust.** Could any man's report your mind therein persuade?

**Gawyn.** Well, ye must therein declare yourself to stand clear, Else I and you, dame Custance, may not *join* this year.

**Cust.** Then would I were dead, and fair laid in my grave! – Ah, Suresby, is this the honesty that ye have, To hurt me with your report, not knowing the thing?

**Sym.** If ye be honest, my words can hurt you nothing, But what I heard and saw, I *might not but* report.

**Cust.** Ah, Lord, help poor widows, destitute of comfort! – Truly, most dear spouse, *nought* was done but for *pastance*.

**Gawyn.** But such kind of sporting is *homely dalliance*.

**Cust.** If ye knew the truth, ye would take all in good part.

**Gawyn.** By your leave, I am not half well skilled in that art.

**Cust.** It was none but Roister Doister, that foolish *mome*.

**Gawyn.** Yea, Custance, better, they say, a bad 'scuse than none.

**Cust.** Why, Tristram Trustie, sir, your true and faithful friend, Was privy both to the beginning and the end. Let him be the judge, and for me testify.

**Gawyn.** I will the more credit *that* he shall verify. And because I will the truth know e'en as it is, I will to him myself, and know all without miss. – Come on, Sym Suresby, *that* before my friend thou may *Avouch* the same words, which thou didst to me say.

[**Gawyn and Sym Exit.**]
ACT V, SCENE III.
[Still on Stage: Custance.]

1   Cust. O Lord! how necessary it is now of days

2   That each body live uprightly all manner ways,
    For let never so little a gap be open,
    And be sure of this, the worst shall be spoken.

3   How innocent stand I in this for deed or thought,
    And yet see what mistrust towards me it hath wrought!
    But thou, Lord, knowest all folks' thoughts and eke intents,
    And thou art the deliverer of all innocents.

4   Thou didst help the adulteress, that she might be amended,
    And be sure of this, the worst shall be spoken.

5   Much more then help, Lord, that never ill intended.

6   Thou didst help Susanna, wrongfully accused,

7   And no less dost thou see, Lord, how I am now abused.

8   Thou didst help Hester, when she should have died,

9   Help also, good Lord, that my truth may be tried.

   = now of days was a variation of "nowadays", the latter first appearing earlier, in the 14th century.
2-4: "every person must live a perfectly blameless life, because if there is even the slightest appearance of impropriety, people will talk about it, and your reputation will suffer accordingly."

   = also.
9: allusion to John 8:1-11: Jesus was presented by the Pharisees with an adulteress (adulteress) to judge; if she were to be convicted, she would have to be stoned to death (it was this point that Jesus famously said "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her"). After scribbling in the dust for a bit, Jesus forgave her, telling her "Go, and now sin no more." (translation of the Vulgate Bible from Vulgate.org).

   = ie. "she who", meaning herself.
11: allusion to the History of Susanna, a story told in Daniel 13 of Roman Catholic Bibles but considered apocryphal by the Protestants.

   Susanna, the wife of the rich Jew Joakim in Babylon, was lusted after by two judges, or elders. One day they accosted her in her park, and asked her to sleep with them; if she refused, they would accuse her of adultery. Preferring not to actually sin, she dared them to take the latter course. When she was brought before the people, the elders testified that they had seen her commit adultery with a young man. When Susanna cried to God for help, He inspired a young Daniel to rise up and accuse the elders of bearing false witness. Through his examination of the pair, Daniel convinced the people that the elders were lying, and they were put to death.

   = M.G. Easton, in his famous 19th century Bible Dictionary, wrote of Esther, "that she was raised up as an instrument in the hand of God to avert the destruction of the Jewish people, and to afford them protection and forward their wealth and peace in their captivity, is also manifest from the Scripture account."

   = tested.
I trust of ill report the force shall be but weak.
And lo, yond they come, sadly talking together,
I will abide, and not shrink for their coming hither.

ACT V, SCENE IV.
[Still on Stage: Custance.]

Enter Gawyn Goodluck, Tristram Trusti and Sym Suresby.

Gawyn. And was it none other than ye to me report?

Trust. No, and here were ye wished to have seen the sport.

Gawyn. Would I had, rather than half of that in my purse!

Sym. And I do much rejoice the matter was no worse,
And like as to open it I was to you faithful,
So of dame Custance' honest truth I am joyful,
For God forfend that I should hurt her by false report.

Gawyn. Well, I will no longer hold her in discomfort.

Cust. Now come they hitherward, I trust all shall be well.

Gawyn. Sweet Custance, neither heart can think nor tongue tell,
How much I joy in your constant fidelity!
Come now, kiss me, the pearl of perfect honesty.

Cust. God let me no longer to continue in life,
Than I shall towards you continue a true wife.

Gawyn. Well, now to make you for this some part of amends,
I shall desire first you, and then such of our friends
As shall to you seem best, to sup at home with me,
Where at your fought field we shall laugh and merry be.

Sym. And mistress, I beseech you, take with me no grief;
I did a true man's part, not wishing you reprief.

Cust. Though hasty reports, through surmises growing,
May of poor innocents be utter overthrowing.
Yet because to thy master thou hast a true heart,
And I know mine own truth, I forgive thee for my part.

Gawyn. Go we all to my house, and of this gear no more.−
Go, prepare all things, Sym Suresby; hence, run afore.

Sym. I go.

[Exit.]
Gawyn. But who cometh yond, − Mathew Merygreeke?

Cust. Roister Doister's champion, I shrew his best cheek!

Trust. Roister Doister self, your wooer, is with him too. Surely some thing there is with us they have to do.

ACT V, SCENE V.
[Still on Stage: Gawyn, Custance and Trustie.]

Enter Merygreeke and Roister Doister.

Mery. Yond I see Gawyn Goodluck, to whom lieth my message; I will first salute him after his long voyage, And then make all thing well concerning your behalf.

Roist. Yea, for the pash of God.

Mery. Hence out of sight, ye calf.

Till I have spoke with them, and then I will you fet.

Roist. In God's name!

[Exit Roister Doister.]

Mery. What, master Gawyn Goodluck, well met! And from your long voyage I bid you right welcome home.

Good. I thank you.

Mery. I come to you from an honest mome.

Good. Who is that?

Mery. Roister Doister, that doughty kite.

Cust. Fie! I can scarce abide ye should his name recite.

Mery. Ye must take him to favour, and pardon all past; He heareth of your return, and is full ill aghast.

Gawyn. I am right well content he have with us some cheer.

Cust. Fie upon him, beast! then will not I be there.

Gawyn. Why, Custance, do ye hate him more than ye love me?
Cust. But for your mind, sir, where he were would I not be.

Trust. He would make us all laugh.

Mery. Ye ne'er had better sport.

Gawyn. I pray you, sweet Custance, let him to us resort.

Cust. To your will I assent.

Mery. Why, such a fool it is,
As no man for good pastime would forgo or miss.

Gawyn. Fet him to go with us.

Mery. He will be a glad man.

[Exit.]

Trust. We must to make us mirth, maintain him all we can.
And lo, yond he cometh, and Merygreeke with him.

Cust. At his first entrance ye shall see I will him trim.
But first let us hearken the gentleman's wise talk.

Trust. I pray you, mark, if ever ye saw crane so stalk.

ACT V, SCENE VI.
[Still on Stage: Custance, Gawyn and Trustie.]

Enter Merygreeke and Roister Doister.

Roist. May I then be bold?

Mery. I warrant you, on my word,
They say they shall be sick, but ye be at their board.

Roist. They were not angry, then?

Mery. Yes, at first, and made strange,
But when I said your anger to favour should change,
And therewith had commended you accordingly,
They were all in love with your maship by and by,
And cried you mercy that they had done you wrong.

Roist. For why no man, woman, nor child can hate me long.

Mery. "We fear," quod they, "he will be avenged one day,
Then for a penny give all our lives we may."

Roist. Said they so indeed?

Mery. Did they? yea, even with one voice –
"He will forgive all," quod I. Oh, how they did rejoice!

"unless you desire it". ³ = "I would rather not be."

= come.¹

= the sense seems to be "encourage" or "keep him going".¹,²

= scold.⁵

= "asked for your forgiveness".

= because.

The image of a crane stalking - walking in its deliberate high-stepping manner - was a common one in literature of the era as a symbol for haughtiness.
Roist. Ha, ha, ha!

Mery. "Go fet him," say they, "while he is in good mood, For have his anger who lust, we will not, by the Rood."

Roist. I pray God that it be all true, that thou hast me told, And that she fight no more.

Mery. I warrant you, be bold. To them, and salute them!

Roist. Sirs, I greet you all well!

Omnes. Your mastership is welcome.

Cust. Saving my quarrel – For sure I will put you up into the Exchequer.

Mery. Why so? better nay – wherefore?

Cust. For an usurer.

Ralph. I am no usurer, good mistress, by His arms!

Mery. When took he gain of money to any man's harms?

Cust. Yes, a foul usurer he is, ye shall see else.

Roist. Didst not thou promise she would pick no mo quarrels?

Cust. He will lend no blows, but he have in recompense Fifteen for one, which is too much of conscience.

27: "anyone who wants to can be the recipient of his ire, but we will not."  
by the Rood = an oath; a rood is a crucifix.

= sure.

35: Roister has finally gained enough courage to approach Custance and Gawyn.

= except for.

40: put you up = "formally accuse you", "take you to court".\(^1\)

The Exchequer is the administrative department responsible for the collection and dispersing of the crown's revenue; Farmer describes its primary functions as so: "recover debts due to the king, such as unpaid taxes, &c." Later it took on the role of a law court, in which a petitioner might ask for relief from such a debt.

Custance is beginning a rather complicated metaphor which will be explained gradually; for the moment she is hinting that she will take Roister to court over a matter of a "debt" she allegedly owes him.

= "why?" ie, "for what cause of action?"

44: "for being a usurer;" at the time Roister was written, the controlling statute (the Act Against Usury of 1545, passed during the reign of Henry VIII) limited interest on loans to 10% ("ten pounds in the hundred").

46-48: Roister and Merygreeke are naturally confused, since Custance received no loan of money from Roister.

= Roister, puzzled by Custance's continued hostility, addresses Merygreeke in this aside.  
mo = more.

54-55: Custance finally explains herself: she has been using usury as a rather strained metaphor for the "unfair" rate of blows she has been exchanging with Roister; for every blow he "lent", or landed, on her, he expected - and received - fifteen in return - an "unconscionable" interest rate of 1400%.

The joke is helped by the fact that the verb lend, used by Custance in line 54, was actually commonly used in phrases like "lend a blow to", meaning "to strike another", as well as in the modern sense of "lend money to".\(^1\)
Roist. Ah, dame, by the ancient law of arms, a man
Hath no honour to foil his hands on a woman.

Cust. And where other usurers take their gains yearly,
This man is angry but he have his by and by.

Gawyn. Sir, do not for her sake bear me your displeasure.

Mery. Well, he shall with you talk thereof more at leisure.
Upon your good usage, he will now shake your hand.

Roist. And much heartily welcome from a strange land.

Mery. Be not afeard, Gawyn, to let him shake your fist.

Gawyn. Oh, the most honest gentleman that e'er I wist.
I beseech your maship to take pain to sup with us.

Mery. He shall not say you nay, and I too, by Jesus,
Because ye shall be friends, and let all quarrels pass.

Roist. I will be as good friends with them as ere I was.

Mery. Then let me fet your quire that we may have a song.

Roist. Go.

[Exit Merygreeke.]

Gawyn. I have heard no melody all this year long.

Re-enter Merygreeke
[with Dobinet, Harpax and the musicians.]

Mery. Come on, sirs, quickly.

Roist. Sing on, sirs, for my friends' sake.

Dob. Call ye these your friends?

Roist. Sing on, and no more words make.

[Here they sing.]

57-58: a man...woman = the sense is, "there is no
honour for a man to foul or defile his hands by taking
arms against a woman," ie. "in laying his hands upon
a woman in violence".¹

foil = I have adopted the OED's interpretation of
"defile", but Farmer thinks foil refers to the tracks left
by a deer, so that it suggests "leaving a mark on".

60-61: The Act Against Usury referred to above banned
collecting any interest on loans "for one whole year";
see 37 Henry VIII, c. 9.

Custance's humorous complaint, therefore, is that,
like a transgressing usurer, Roister "demanded" to
collect his interest - all of the blows due him -
immediately (by and by).

63: "don't get mad at me just because Custance still
holds a grudge against you" - this is perhaps a bit
unchivalrous of Gawyn.

= "behaviour" or "treatment of Roister".¹

= foreign: Roister nods at Gawyn's recent return from
his sea voyage.

= hand.

= knew.

75: always thinking, Merygreeke slyly invites himself
to Gawyn's dinner.

= "I was before."

= "fetch your choir", ie. Roister's musicians.

99ff: it has been long debated whether the song in
question refers to the prayer for the sovereign (lines
101-120) immediately below, or whether it pertains to a
separate song, lyrics not included, which precedes the
prayer. Whitworth is of the former position, Child and
Flügel the latter.
Gawyn. The Lord preserve our most noble Queen of renown,
And her virtues reward with the heavenly crown.

Cust. The Lord strengthen her most excellent Majesty,
Long to reign over us in all prosperity.

Trust. That her godly proceedings the faith to defend,
He may 'stablish and maintain through to the end.

Mery. God grant her, as she doth, the Gospel to protect,
Learning and virtue to advance, and vice to correct.

Roist. God grant her loving subjects both the mind and grace,
Her most godly proceedings worthily to embrace.

Harp. Her highness' most worthy counsellors, God prosper
With honour and love of all men to minister.

Omnès. God grant the nobility her to serve and love,
With all the whole commonty as doth them behove.

AMEN

101ff: Flügel and Child believe the prayer is recited by the players while they kneel. The editors do all agree that the recipient of this particular prayer was likely Elizabeth, as it comes from the earliest extant edition of Roister, published in 1566.

Hazlitt notes that there may have been a different prayer presented when the play was first staged, assuming one of Elizabeth's predecessors was sovereign at that time. Cooper points out that ancient interludes frequently ended with prayers for the king or queen.

107: the title Defender of the Faith was first bestowed by Parliament on Henry VIII in 1521, and became an official title of all English sovereigns in 1544.¹³

¹ = the whole of the nation's people.¹ = behove.
Udall's Invented Words

Like all of the writers of the era, Nicholas Udall may have made up words when he felt like it, usually by adding prefixes and suffixes to known words, combining words, or using a word in a way not yet used before. The following is a list of words from *Ralph Roister Doister* that are indicated by the OED as being either the first or only use of a given word, or, as noted, the first use with a given meaning:

- aley
- anan
  
  His arms (an oath, variation of "God's arms")
- avouch (meaning sanction or confirm another's act)
- backare
- the phrase to bear with (meaning to put up with)
- begrime
- bibbler
- blank (meaning unsuccessful)
- block (meaning blockhead)
- bound (meaning leap)
- the phrase at first bound
- brag (meaning to strut or swagger)
- Brute **
- calf (as a term of abuse or endearment)
- carriage (meaning a figurative burden)
- cast (meaning a taste of something)
- choir (meaning a body of singers who perform secular music)
- collocavit
- curried
- curtsy (as a verb)
- custreling
- derry
- dub-a-dub
- dump (meaning a mournful song)
- the phrase up to one's ears
- entwite (meaning to make something the subject of reproach)
- exeat
- extempore
- faith (used alone as an interjection)
- in fee (applied figuratively)
- ferdegew
- foot (meaning to sing - speculative)*
- for (meaning conducive to)
- fraymaking
- gaining (as a noun)
- gauding
- gentman
- Gog's used in an oath (e.g. Gog's arms)
- heart of gold **
- gosse (euphemism for God)
- the phrase let no grass grow under one's heel (or foot, etc)
- merry Greek
- gristle (meaning a delicate person)
- heigh ho
- hoball
- hoddy-doddy
- honey (as the first word of a multi-word term of endearment, e.g. honey-mistress)
- hough (for ho)
house wall
ill-shent
jut (as a noun)
kite (describing a rapacious person)
knave (as a term of endearment)
knightess
kock's nownes, ie. Cock's nownes
lad (describing a man of spirit)
lamb (as a term of endearment)
lilburne
loucok
loutish
lumperdee / clumperdee
by the matte (an oath)
mumblecrust
new-set
nouns (used as or in an exclamation)
nurse (as a form of address)
pissing while
poop (meaning a tooting sound)
potgun (meaning a weak gun or popgun)
pranky
quoth you? (as an interrogative at the end of a quote)
revel-rout
roister-doister
roisting
sauce (as a noun - a vocative - ie. applied to a person)
scribbler
shake up (meaning to rebuke or abuse)
sheep (as an adjective, e.g. sheeps' look)
since (meaning already)
soothe (a verb, meaning to declare something to be true - speculative)*
sporting stock
such a (used as a comparative insult)***
suresby (used as a noun)
the phrase sweep a blow
swinge (meaning to beat)
thrum (used as an onomatopoeic sound)
tolerance
tomboy
toodle-loddle
truepenny
twang
wag (first use as noun, here meaning a mischievous person)
wag-pasty
wedding day **
whisking (as a noun)
worm (used to describe a tender creature)
worried (meaning to treat roughly - speculative)*
woough (for wow)

* three of the words are labeled as "speculative": this means that either the editor or the OED itself is uncertain that the OED's definition of the word as it was used by Udall is correct.

** the earliest extant edition of Ralph Roister Doister dates from 1566; there are three terms (Brute, heart of gold, and wedding day) which appeared in print in English literature before 1566. However, since Roister was certainly written and presented no later than the
period 1552-1555, credit for introducing these terms to English letters can be safely credited to Nicholas Udall.

*** the OED gives Udall credit for being the first to use such a as an insult (e.g. "you are such an ass"); however, the OED's discussion of the phrase is quite complex, and there were so many ways to use the expression such a even in the early 16th century, that we have perhaps overly-simplified the case for Udall.
FOOTNOTES

Footnotes in the text correspond as follows:
1. Oxford English Dictionary (OED) online.


