Early Poems, ca. 1483–1488

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John Skelton

Edited with Introduction and Commentary by

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THE COLLECTED POEMS OF JOHN SKELTON

VOLUME I: PROLEGOMENA & EARLY POEMS, ca. 1483–1488

PART 2: *Five Shorter Poems, ca. 1483–1488*

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Introduction

The Poems: Texts and Authorship

Of the Deth of the Noble Prynce Kynge Edwarde the Forth

Kinsman and Yonge, in their *Canon and Census* of Skelton's works, consider all five of these early poems to be dubious, an excessively severe verdict based on virtually no evidence.

To begin with the weightiest of them, the poem spoken by the soul of King Edward IV, the sixteenth-century editors thought that Skelton wrote it. The authority for that opinion, as far as we know, was Henry Dabbe or Tab, whose Skeltonic collection Richard Lant printed ca. 1545 as *Certayne bokes compyled by mayster Skelton, Poet Laureat.* In that book the poem's title is given as: "Of the deth of the noble prynce Kynge Edwarde y^{e} forth, per Skeltonidem Laureatum." The ascription to "Skelton Laureate" must have been in Tab's copy, which was probably, though not necessarily, a manuscript, and probably, though not necessarily, contemporary with Skelton himself.

There have been three arguments urged against Skelton's authorship. First, that he was too young to have written the poem in 1483–5; second that the style of the poem is different from that of his elegy for the Earl of Northumberland, datable to 1489, and third, that an employee of Henry VII would not have written a lament for a Yorkist king.[1] These arguments, however, no longer have any weight because we now know, first, that the astrological date described in the opening stanza of *The Bowge of Court* is 19 August, 1482, when Edward IV was still alive, and second, that the house where the narrator of that poem falls asleep and dreams, Powers Key, belonged to John Howard, Duke of Norfolk, who was

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[1]Friederich Brie, *Englische Studien* 37 (1907): 87–88; Maurice Pollet, *John Skelton* (Paris: Didier, 1962), 255.

to be killed at Bosworth fighting for Richard III.[1] The young Skelton, therefore, was alive and well and moving in Yorkist circles in the early 1480s and—apparently—writing very well too. In fact, Skelton's fortunes, as I have suggested elsewhere, seem to have sunk and risen with the fortunes of his Howard patrons.[2] It remains true that later on as a writer on Henry VII's staff he might not have wished to advertise a previous Yorkist connection. Even although informed listeners to or readers of *The Laurel*, written ca. 1495, would have noticed a number of wry, even sharp references to contemporary politics, one understands why Skelton would not have included a poem on Edward IV in Dame Occupacyon's bibliography of his work in *The Laurel*..

The poem made enough of an impression to survive in three manuscript copies as well as Lant's printed text.

1. *B.L. Ms Additional 29,729, ff. 8–9.* This manuscript, dated 1558, belonged to John Stowe. It was copied from a manuscript written by John Shirley, a fifteenth-century translator and scribe (1366–1456), in which the poem on Edward IV was ascribed to Lydgate. Since both Lydgate and Shirley were dead long before Edward IV died, the poem is a later addition to the manuscript, and "Stowe struck through the faulty inscription and inserted the name of Skelton in his own hand."[3] Oddly enough, when Stowe had Thomas Marsh include the poem in his collected *Pithy pleasaunt and profitable workes of maister Skelton* (1568), he printed Lant's text as reprinted by John Day, ignoring or forgetting the MS he already owned (Printers, though, always preferred printed copy to manuscript, and Stowe may have simply given in to Marsh's preference).

2. *Corning MS 7, ff. 131–2.* Alexander Dyce knew and consulted this manuscript, which in his day belonged to Miss Richardson Currer (1785–1861). In the earlier twentieth century it had disappeared, but then turned up again in the collections of the Corning

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[1]Melvin Tucker, "Setting in Skelton's *Bowge of Court,*" *English Language Notes* 4 (1970): 168–75; Brownlow, ed., *The Book of the Laurel* (Newark, De: University of Delaware Press, 1990), 228–30.

[2]*The Laurel*, 82–5.

[3]Kinsman, *"A Lamentable of Kyng Edward the IIII," Huntington Library Quarterly* 29 (1966): 95–108, 97.

Glass Museum, who bought it in 1951 from a London firm. The poem, under the title "A Lamentable of Kyng Edward the IIII," is the last item in the manuscript, which is taken up mostly with a copy of Mandeville's *Travels*. Robert Kinsman, who provides a transcript, believed this to be the best of the remaining texts.

3. *BL. Ms. Harleian 4011, ff. 169–70.* Friederich Brie found this version of the poem, and revealed its existence in his article in *Englische Studien* in 1907. Carleton Browne published it in 1939 in *Religious Lyrics of the Fifteenth Century*.[1] The manuscript contains some poems by Lydgate as well as "The Libelle of English Policy." The poem on Edward IV is the thirteenth item out of fourteen.

Lant's printed text appeared ca. 1545 in *Certayne Bokes compyled by mayster Skelton, Poet Laureat* (*STC* 22598). Everyone assumes that Lant was printing from a manuscript (but this is not necessarily the case), also that Lant's copy was defective because lines 37–48 are missing. That omission, of course, was probably a simple compositor's error. Had there been a process of "regularizing" or sophistication in the printing of this book, as Kinsman thought? Although printing always entailed some modification of manuscript spelling, Lant seems to have treated his copy respectfully.

When Dyce edited the poem, he took his text from the Kynge and Marsh page-for-page reprint of Lant (*STC* 22599), collating it with the other printed texts, but without knowing the printing order. He was able to compare his text with the manuscript belonging to Miss Currer, and so found the stanza omitted from all the prints. Dyce also consulted a version printed, with some modifications, in *The Mirror for Magistrates*. That text, though, has no authority.

Once one ascribes Lant's missing stanza to a compositor's error, it becomes just about impossible to give any one of these texts a decided priority over the others, each of them being derived, at some distance, from a lost original, and each of them showing the kind of copyist's freedom characteristic of manuscript transmission. I have therefore adopted Lant's text as the control, supplying the missing stanza from the Currer-Corning manuscript. Where the three manuscripts agree against Lant, I adopt their reading, with

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[1]Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1939, 250–53.

a few exceptions. At line 5 for instance, the manuscripts' reading destroys the rhyme, and in line 30 Lant's "sugerd," both the word and its idiosyncratic spelling, is a Skeltonic marker.

How Every Thynge Must Have a Tyme

This poem, too, was printed by Richard Lant for Henry Tab, and, like "Edward IV," was declared non-Skeltonic by Friederich Brie on no real evidence.

Four texts of the poem survive, three manuscripts plus Lant's print, all of them rather late:

1. *BL Ms Egerton 2642, f. 250v.* This text, written down sometime in the later sixteenth century, is followed by an eight-line stanza which seems to be a separate though related poem. Both texts are attributed to Skelton: "Finis quod Skelton laureatus."

2. *Trinity College, Dublin Ms 661 (E.4.31).* Another sixteenth-century manuscript, this one also ascribes the poem to Skelton: "q^{d} Skelton."[1]

3. *National Library of Scotland Ms Adv. 1.1.6 (the Bannatyne Manuscript).* George Bannatyne copied this manuscript in 1568. The four stanzas of the English piece, translated into Scots, are spliced into stanzas 6 and 9–11 of a poem in thirteen eight-line stanzas beginning "O god yat in tyme all thingis did begin."

4 *Lant's print, ca. 1545,* is the oldest of these texts. Its subscription, "Quod Skelton Laureate." may be the source of the Egerton and Dublin subscriptions.

F.M.Salter, writing in *TLS* (17 January 1935), suggested that George Bannatyne probably wrote the poem in the Bannatyne Ms. incorporating the lines from "On Time," also that he no doubt translated them into Scots English. He also declared that the manifestly inferior eight-line stanza added in the Egerton manuscript was not Skelton's. The main purpose of his short letter was to draw attention to the processes of scribal adulteration. Although he left the question of attribution open, he pointed out that Brie's mere opinions against Skelton's authorship were no evidence at all.

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[1]A.S.G.Edwards, "'On Time' and John Skelton," *Notes and Queries* 59.4 (December 2012): 494–6, describes the manuscript, which he unearthed, and provides a transcript.

As with the poem on Edward IV, we should take Tab's ascription seriously, and remove the poem from Kinsman and Yonge's list of "dubious pieces."

The text presented here is that of the earliest witness, Lant's print.

Prayers to the Trinity

Henry Tab provided the text of these three short poems in two eight-line stanzas that Richard Lant printed, and that Friederich Brie, once again, denied to Skelton on no evidence at all. In this case, though, an earlier witness to the text survives in BL Ms Additional 20059, ff.100v.–101. The manuscript itself "is a small vellum Registrum Cancellariae of the time of Edward II,"[1] but sometime around the turn of the sixteenth century someone copied five short religious poems on to its blank leaves, and this set of prayers to the Trinity is among them.

In the seventeenth century the manuscript belonged to Gabriel Wettinhal of Nantwich, Cheshire. To whom it belonged before him is unknown. There is no ascription to Skelton, but there is no reason to expect one in a late fifteenth-century copy of three very short, very early poems by Skelton. (The surviving texts of "Manerly Margery" are not ascribed to Skelton, either, but there is no doubt that the poem is his.) Carleton Brown, who printed this text of the poems, thought that their appearance in a Cheshire manuscript militated against Skelton's authorship, but (a) we do not know that the manuscript was in Cheshire when the poems were copied, and (b) even if they were, fifteenth–sixteenth-century Cheshire was not exactly on the backside of the moon. There was continual traffic between Chester, then a major seaport, and London, especially on the part of the gentry.

A third, probably later, text is known to exist. A sixteenth-century book of hours, lot 86 in the sale of John Meade Falkner's manuscripts by Sotheby's, 12–14 December 1932, includes a text of these poems "compiled and made by the poet Skelton." It is not clear whether the texts are printed or written into the book, which is described as "a late sixteenth-century book of hours."[2] One

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[1]Brown, *Religious Lyrics,* 299.

[2]I owe this information to A.S.G.Edwards and Lynne Mooney, "A New Ver-

would like to know more about this book, since no books of hours were printed in England after 1558, and the first Tridentine Primer in English did not appear until 1599, when it was printed overseas and imported surreptitiously into England.

The normal rules of editing would require that Additional 20059, as the older text, would provide the copy. We do not, however, know the age of Tab's copy, and since it seems to be superior both in substance and in accidentals, it provides the copy for this edition.

The Poems

"Edward IV" is, as Pollet remarked, a prosopopeia spoken in the voice of the dead king's soul, musing on the brevity of life and the futility of worldly power and ambition, and asking his people and his former friends for their prayers. The poem consists of eight twelve-line stanzas rhyming ABABBCBCCDCD, and it is an accomplished performance.

Edward IV was one of four usurpers of the English throne between 1399 and 1485: Henry IV, Edward IV, Richard III, and Henry VII. His reign, which began in March 1461 after his victory over Lancastrian forces at Mortimer's Cross, was interrupted by a brief restoration of the Lancastrian king Henry VI from October 1470 until April 1471, when the defeat of the Lancastrians at the battle of Barnet, followed by their final defeat at Tewkesbury in May, inaugurated Edward's second reign.

Except for the mention of Edward's queen, Elizabeth Woodville, whom he married in 1464, the poem's references are mostly to Edward's second period of rule, when his title was secure, and the civil wars of Lancaster and York were, for the time being, finished.

Edward was a brilliant soldier, one of the select company of great captains who are never defeated; but he also enjoyed the good things of life, and his court was known for its splendor. As he says in the poem, he defeated the French, and took a large tribute from them. He restored the finances of the crown, in part by energetic taxation, and became a very wealthy man. He did indeed encourage

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sion of a Skelton Lyric," *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 10 (1994): 506–10, 507, n.2. A Mr. Robert S. Pirie of Hamilton, Massachusetts, bought the book.

the Londoners to improve the city's fortifications, and he enjoyed improving his own properties. At Windsor he began building the magnificent chapel to St. George, completed under Henry VIII. He fortified and improved the Tower of London and Dover Castle, and he turned Nottingham Castle and Eltham Palace into splendid houses.

All this he acknowledges in the poem. He also confesses to excessive taxation and greed, and he readily admits that not everyone approved of his rule, the over-taxed commons in particular. Yet there is no hint of personal animus, no edge of satire, in the tone of the poem. As Carleton Brown, who accepted the ascription to Skelton, and admired the poem very much, writes, "The poet does not intrude himself either to praise or blame."[1] The king's statement reads almost like a confession, and ends with a plea to his people for their prayers.

Edward IV died unexpectedly on 9 April 1483, aged only forty-one. The verbal equivalent of a funeral monument, Skelton's poem is an act of religious charity towards the dead man, memorializing him, and inviting the reader's sympathy. It should also be understood as the plea of a soul in Purgatory for remembrance and prayers.

How Every Thynge Must Have a Tyme

Aphoristic moralizing poems, very popular in the sixteenth century, had little appeal for readers in the twentieth century, which is no doubt one reason why Skelton's more recent editors were so ready to drop this poem from the canon of his work. Yet this, too, is an accomplished poem on a popular theme well known from its treatment in the book of Ecclesiastes, 3.1–8:

> All things have their season, and in their times all things pass under heaven.
> A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted.
> A time to kill, and a time to heal. A time to destroy, and a time to build.
> A time to weep, and a time to laugh. A time to mourn, and a time to dance.

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[1] *Religious Lyrics of the Fifteenth Century,* xxvii.

> A time to scatter stones, and a time to gather. A time to embrace, and a time to be far from embraces.
> A time to get, and a time to lose. A time to keep, and a time to cast away.
> A time to rend, and a time to sew,. A time to keep silence, and a time to speak.
> A time of love, and a time of hatred. A time of war, and a time of peace.

Skelton's poem, in fact, is virtually a paraphrase of the passage in Ecclesiastes. His last stanza, with its reference to the weather, provides a localized English coda.

Prayers to the Persons of the Holy Trinity

These three little prayers are composed in eight-line stanzas rhyming ABABBCBC, which is a shortened variant of the stanza used for the poem on King Edward IV. They have a structure similar to that of the prose *collect*s, the short prayers used in the Mass and the Offices of the Church. A collect consists of three parts: an invocation, a contemplative description of the person addressed, and a brief petition, all syntactically integrated into a single sentence. Although Skelton's prayers are a little more expansive than that, each has the basic structure of invocation, description, and petition.

The style is the elevated, rather Latinate or "aureate" style associated chiefly with John Lydgate, and popular among writers of the period, especially those who, like Skelton, wished to expand the lexical and syntactical range of the written language. It is well suited, as here, to the expression of difficult theological dogmas, which Skelton evidently wished to state as correctly as possible in his verse.

Even so, one can also see in the poems the influence of the contemplative, affective devotions that were so popular in the English Catholicism of Skelton's time, to the Blessed Virgin, for instance, to the Five Wounds, to the Holy Ghost as an inspiring flame, and to the wounded, suffering Jesus.

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Of the Deth of the Noble Prynce Kynge Edwarde the Forth / per Skeltonidem Laureatum.

Miseremini mei / ye that be my freendis:
This world / hathe enformyd me down to fall.
How may I endure when that every thing endis?
What creature is made / to be eternall?
Now is ther no helpe / but pray for me all:
Thus Edward seyth / that late was your kynge
And xxii. yeres rulyd / this imperyall,
Some men to pleasure / and some to no lykyng.
Forgevenes I aske / of my mysdoynge:
What avaylyth hit / frendys to be my foo?
I may not resyst / nor amend your complayning
Quia ecce nunc in pulvere dormio

I ly now in molde / as it is naturall
As erth / unto erth / hath his reverture.
What ordeyned god / to be terestryall
Without recours / to the erth of nature?
Who to lyve ever / may be sure?
What is it to trust / on mutabylyte
Syth that in this world / no thynge may indure?
For I am now gone / that late was in prosperyte:
To presume theruppon / it is but vanyte,
Not certayne / but as a chery fayre full of wo.
Reygned not I late / in greate felycyte?
Et ecce nunc in pulvere dormio

Where was in my life / such one as I
Whyle Lady Fortune / with me had contynuaunce?
Graunted not she /me to have victory
In Englond to rayne / and to contribute Fraunce?
She toke me by the hand / and led me a daunce,
And with her sugerd lyppys / on me she smyled:
And for her dyssemblyd countenaunce
I coud not beware / tyll I was begyled.

Now from this worlde / she hath me excyled
when I was lothyst / hens for to go:
And I am in age / but as who sayth a chylde,
Et ecce nunc in pulvere dormio

I se well they lyve / that dowbyll my yeris:
Thus dealid the world / with me as it lust,
And hathe me made / to yow that be my perys,
Example to thynke on had-I-wyst.
I storyd my cofers / and allso my chyst
With taskys takyng / of the comenalte:
I toke ther tresure / but of ther prayeris mist,
Whome I beseche / with pure humylyte
For to forgeve / and have on me pety.
I was your kyng / and kept yow from yowre foo:
I wold now amend / but yt woll not be.
Ecce nunc in pulvere dormio.

I had ynough / I helde me not content
Without remembraunce / that I shulde dye,
And more to encrese / was myne entent:
I knewe not how longe / I shulde it occupy.
I made the tower strong / I wyst not why:
I knew not to whome / I purchasyd Tetersall:
I amendyd Dover / on the mountayne hye:
And London I provoked / to fortify the wall.
I made Notyngam / a place royall,
Wyndsore / Eton / and many other mo.
As Westmynster, Eltham / I went from them all,
Et ecce nunc in pulvere dormio

Where is now / my conquest and victorye?
Where is my ryches / and my royall aray?
Where be my coursers / and my horses hye?
Where is my gret plesure / my solas / and play?
As vanyte to nought / all is wandred away.
O lady Bes / long for me may ye call:
Now ar we departyd / tyl domys day,
But love ye that lorde / that is soverayn of all.
Where be my castels / and buyldynges royall?
But Wyndsore alone / now I have no mo,

And of Eton / the prayers perpetuall.
Et ecce nunc in pulvere dormio
Why sholde a man / be proud or presume hye?
Saynt Bernard / thereof nobly doth trete,
Seyth a man / is but a sack of stercorry
And shall returne / unto wormys mete.
Why / what cam of Alexaunder the greate?
Or els of strong Sampson / who can tell?
Were not wormes ordeyned / theyr flesh to frete
And of Salamon / that was of wyt the well?
Absolon / profferyd his heare for to sell,
Yet for all his bewte / wormys ete him also.
And I but late / in honour dyd excell,
Et ecce nunc in pulvere dormio

I have pleyd my pageyond / and now am I past:
Ye wot well all / I was of no great yeld.
This al thyng concludyd / shalbe at the last:
When deth approchyth / lost is the felde.
Then sythen this world / me no lenger uphelde,
Nor nought wolde conserve me / here in my place,
In manus tuas domine / my sprite up I yelde,
Humbly besechyng / thee god of thy grace.
O ye curtes commyns / your hertys unbrace,
Benyngly to pray for me also:
For ryght wel you know / your kyng I was,
Et ecce nunc in pulvere dormio

Finis.

¶*Ye may here now in this ryme*
How Every Thynge / Must Have a Tyme`

¶Time is a thyng / that no man may resyst
Tyme is trancytory / and Irrevocable
Who saith the contrary / tyme passith as him lyst
Tyme must be takyn / in season covenable`
Take tyme when tyme is / for tyme is ay mutable
All thynge hath tyme / who can for it provyde
Byde for tyme who will / for tyme will no man byde

¶Tyme to be sad / and tyme to play and sporte
Tyme to take rest / by way of recreacyon
Tyme to study / and tyme to use comfort
Tyme of pleasure / and tyme of consolacyon
Thus tyme hath his tyme / of dyvers maner facyon
Tyme for to eate and drynke / for thy repast
Tyme to be lyberall / and tyme to make no wast

¶Tyme to travell / and tyme for to rest
Tyme for to speke / and tyme to holde thy pease
Tyme wolde be usyd / when tyme is best
Tyme to begyn / and tyme for to cease
And when tyme is / put thy selfe in prease
And when tyme is / to holde thy selfe a-backe
For tyme well spent / can never have lacke

¶The rotys take theyr sap / in tyme of vere
In tyme of somer / flowres fresh and grene
In tyme of harvest / men theyr corne shere
In tyme of wynter / the north wynde waxeth kene
So bytterly bytynge / the flowres be not sene
The kalendys of Janus / with his frostes hore
That tyme is / when people must lyve upon the store

¶Quod Skelton Laureate.

Prayers to the Persons of the Holy Trinity

To The Father of Hevyn

¶O Radyant lumynary of lyght intermyinable,
Celestyall father / potencyall god of myght:
Of hevyn and erth / O lorde incomperable
Of all perfectyons the essencyal most perfyght:
O maker of mankynde / that formyd day and nyght
Whose power imperyall / comprehendyth every place:
Myne hert / my minde / my thought / my hole delyght
Is after this lyfe / to see thy gloryous face.

¶Whose magnyfycence / is incomprehensybyll:
All argumentys of reason / which far doth excede.
Whose deite dowtles / is indyvysybyll:
From whom all goodnes / and vertu doth procede.
Of thy support / all creatures have nede:
Assyst me good lorde / and graunte me of thy grace
To lyve to thy pleasure / in worde, thought and dede:
And after this lyfe / to see thy gloryous face.

To the Seconde Person.

¶O benygne Iesu / my soverayne lorde and kynge,
The only sonne of God / by filiacyon:
The second person / withouten begynnynge,
Both God and man / our fayth makyth playne relacyon:
Mary thy mother by way of incarnacyon:
Whose gloryous passyon / our soulys doth revyve.
Agayne all bodely / and goostely trybulacyon
Defende me / with thy pyteous woundys fyve.

¶O pereles prynce / payned to the deth,
Rufully rent / thy body wan and blo:
For my redempcyon / gave up thy vytall breth:
Was never sorow / lyke to thy dedly wo.
Graunt me / out of this worlde when I shall go
Thyne endles mercy / my preservatyve.
Agaynst the worlde / the flesh / and the devyll also
Defende me / with thy pyteous woundys fyve.

To the Holy Gooste.

¶O Firy fervence / inflamyd with all grace
Enkyndelyng hertes / with brandys charytable,
The endles rewarde / of pleasure and solace:
To the father / and the son / thou art communycable
In *unitate* / which is inseperable.
O water of lyfe / O well of consolacyon,
Agaynst all suggestyons dedly / and dampnable
Rescu me good lorde / by your preservacyon.

¶To whome is apropryed / the holy ghost by name,
The thyrde person / one God in Trinite:
Of perfyt love / thou art the ghostly flame,
O myrrour of mekenes / pease and tranquylyte:
My conforte / my counsell / my parfyt charyte.
O water of lyfe / O well of consolacyon,
Agaynst all stormys / of harde adversyte
Rescu me good lorde / by your preservacyon.

AMEN.

Quod Skelton Laureate.

Textual Notes

Of the Deth of the Noble Prynce Kynge Edwarde the Forth

The texts collated are those of the three manuscripts, BL Ms. Additional 29,729, ff. 8–9 (*Ad*), Ms Corning MS 7, ff. 131–2 (*C*), and Ms. Harleian 4011, ff. 169–70 (*H*), plus that of Lant, *Certain Bokes* (*L*). The reading within the lemma is from *L* unless otherwise indicated. The control text for ll.37–48 is Corning Ms. 7.

In editing these texts, for the reader's convenience, I have regularized u/v, and i/j, and modernized *to* for *too*, and *the* for *thee*. I have also modernized Skelton's word-separations (e.g., *a gayne*), unless the separation seems rhythmically important.

1. *Miseremini mei*] Miserere mei *C.*
–. be] ben *H.*
2. This] For þe *C;* The *Ad*.
–. enformyd] *C,H,Ad;* formyd *L*.
–. down to] to *C;* for to *H,Ad*.
3. How may I] How myȝt I *C;* What thynge *Ad*
–. when that] when *C, H;* wher *Ad.*
4. What] Or what *Ad*.
–. made] *C,H,Ad;* borne *L*.
5. Now is ther no helpe] *C,H;* Now is no helpe *Ad;* Now there is no more *L*.
–. me all] my soule] *C,H,Ad;*
6. Thus Edward seyth] C,H,Ad; Thus say I Edward *L*.
–. that late was your kynge] þat late was kyng *C;* for latt I was kynge *H*.
7. And xxii] *C,Ad;* And xxiii *L*; xxiii *H*.
–. rulyd] I reynyd *H;* rulid here *Ad*.
8. men to] *C,H,Ad;* unto *L.*
–. some to no lykyng] sum men to liekyng *C;* som men nott to lykyng *H*.
9. forgevenes] *C* (for ȝeueins), *H,Ad;* Mercy *L*.
–. of my mysdoynge] of all my mysdoyng *C;* for my nyse doyng *H*.
10. hit / frendys] ȝow now *C;* it you *H;* it *Ad*.
11. I may not] *C,H,Ad*; Syth I can not L.
—. complayning] playnynge *Ad.*
12. *Quia*] For *C,Ad*.
13. ly] *C,H,Ad;* slepe *L*.

14. As] Þat *C,Ad;* Fore *H*.
—. his] þe *C,Ad*.
15. terestryall] terrestyall *H*.
16. Without] Wyth *H*.go 7
—, to the erth] to erþe *C,Ad;* off erthly *H*.
17. Who to lyve ever / may be] Who for to lyve euer may be *C;* Euyre ffor to lyve who may be *H;* no man lyvyng can be ever *Ad*.
18. is it] it is *Ad.*
—. on] þe *C;* on this *Ad*.
19. Syth that in] Of þis...whan *C,H;* of the...whill *Ad*.
20. For I am now gone] *C,H* (*omit* For),*Ad;* now am I *L*.
—. that] wych *H*.
21. vanyte] *C,H,Ad;* a vanyte *L*.
22. Not] Now *C;* No *H,Ad*.
—. as] *omit H,Ad*.
23. not I] I not *C,H; omit Ad.*
—. late] *C,H,Ad;* of late *L*.
—. in great] whylome in *C;* in my *Ad.*
26. Whyle] Whyle þat *C,Ad;* Whiles *H.*
—. Lady fortune] my fortune *C,H,Ad.*
—. with me had] had *C,Ad;* had here *H;*
27. not she / me to have] yt she not me with *C;* nott she to me the *H;* it not me she with *Ad.*
28. contribute] trybute *Ad.*
29. a daunce] to daunce *C;* the daunce *H.*
30. sugerd] suger *C,H,Ad.*
—. she smylyd] smylyd *C.*
31. And] *C,H,Ad;* But what *L*.
—. dyssemblyd] dyssemblande *H;* dissemblynge *Ad.,*
32. I coud not] Not coude *C,Ad.*
33. Now from this worlde] Owtt off this lond *H.*
34. when I was lothyst / hens] Whan I was most loþe *C,Ad.*
35. And I am] And I *H;* And as *Ad*.
—. as who] *C,H;* but as who *L.*
—. a child] butt a child *H,Ad.*
37–48. *Omit L.* Supplied from Corning Ms 7.
37. that] *omit Ad.*
38. dealid the world] this world delyth *H;* dealythe the world *Ad.*
—. it lust] hit lyst *H;* he liste *Ad.*
39. be] byn *H*.
41. my cofers] hucches, cofers *H.*
—. all so my] *omit H*.
—. chyst] *H,Ad;* chestys *C.*
42. taskys] tresore *H.*

—. the] my *H.*
43. I toke] For *H;* I had *Ad.*
—. but of] that I toke *H.*
—. mist] I myst *H,Ad.*
44. Whom] Now whom *H.*
45. For to forgeve and have on me pety] Of forgefnesse, of me to have pite. *H.*
47. now] *omit H.*
—. yt] now hit
48. *Ecce*] Quia ecce *H.*
49. I helde] and helde *Ad.*
51. And] *omit H.*
—. to encrese was myne entent] *C,H,Ad;* ever to incroche / redy was I bent *L*.
52. I knewe not how longe] And not beyng ware *C;* Beyng nott warre *H;* Not beynge ware *Ad.*
53. I wyst] butt I wyst *H;* and wyst *Ad*.
54. I knew not] Nor *H.*
55. on] in *Ad.*
—. mountayne] mount so *Ad.*
56. And London I provoked] & London provokyd *C,Ad;* And provokyd london *H.*
—. the wall] with wall *C;* þer wall *H.*
58. and Eton] *C,H;* Eton *Ad;* Eltam *L.*
59. As Westmynster, Eltham] *C,Ad;* Westmynster and Eltham *H;* Yet at the last *L.*.
—. I went from them all] & sone went I from all *C;* yit went I from all *H;* and sone I went them fro all *Ad.*
60. *Quia*] & now quia *C.*
61. now / my conquest] my gret conquest *H.*
—. and] and my *C.*
62. is] is now *C;* be *H;* ar *Ad.*
—. ryches] rentis *H.*
—. And my] my *Ad.*
63. coursers] gret coursers *C.*
—. hye] so hy *H.*
64. Where] And where *C.*
—. gret plesure] *C,H,Ad* (plesuris).
—. my solas] solas *C,H; omit Ad.*
65. As] All as *Ad.*
—. all is wandred] all went ys *C;* all ys gon *H;* is gon *Ad.*
66. O lady Bes] O fayre lady bess *C;* Lady besse *H;* and my fayr lady besse *Ad.*
—. long for me] for me long *H.*

—. ye] yow *Ad.*
67. Now ar we] *C,Ad;* Whe be *H;* For I am *L.*
—. departyd] partyd *Ad.*
—. tyl] on to *C;* untyll *H;* unto *Ad.*
68. But love ye that lorde] þerfore, love, love ȝe þat lord *C;* I lovyd you, lady *H;* therfore love ye that lorde *Ad,.*
—. that is soverayn of all] þat ys eternall *C,Ad;* my souerayne ouerall *H.*
69. be] ar now *C,Ad;*
—. castels / and buyldynges] byldynges & my castelles *H.*
70. alone now I have] of all have I *C;* off them I haue *H.*
71. the] ther *H.*
—. prayers] praier *Ad.*
72. *Et ecce nunc*] For nunc in wyndsore *C;* Quia ecce nunc *H;* Quia nunc *Ad.*
73. a man] ye *H;* man *Ad.*
—. or] and *H.*
74. thereof nobly doth] doþe þere of nobly *C,H;* ther of dothe notably *Ad.*
75. Seying] *C,H,Ad;* Sayth *L.*
—. is but a] ys a *C;* is made of a *Ad.*
—. stercorry] sterqueryte *C.*
76. returne] torne C.
—. to] unto *Ad.*
77. What cam] *C,H,Ad.* Why what *L.*
78. Or els] Or *C,Ad;* And *H.*
79. Were not] Was not *C,Ad.*
—. theyr flesh to] þer fleshe for to *H;* them to *Ad.*
80. And of] Of *C,Ad;* And *H.*
—. that] whyche *C,Ad.*
—. was of wyt] off wytt was *H;* was the wis *Ad.*
81. Absolon] And Absolon *H;* Of Absolon *Ad.*
—. profferyd] oferid *Ad.*
—. for to] to *C,Ad.*
82. For] *C,H,Ad;* Yet for *L.*
—. bewte] beavtes *H.*
—. wormys] ȝet wormys *C.*
83. but late in honour] late in honour *C,Ad;* latte Edward that *H.*
85. and] *omit* L.
86. Ye wot well all] Well ȝe wot *C,Ad;* I wyll þat ye wytt *H.*
—. of no] not of *C,Ad.*
87. This] Butt *H.*
—. al thyng concludyd / shalbe] all concludid shall be *C;* all thyng consumyth *H;* all thynges shalbe concludyd *Ad.*
88. When] For when *C.*

—. approchyth] apperith *H.*
—. lost] *C,H,Ad;* then lost *L.*
89. Then sythen] But seþyn *C;* Sith *H;* but sith *Ad.*
—. this] þe *C,Ad.*
—. me no lenger uphelde] no lenger me vp help *C;* no lenger vpheld *H;* woll me no lengar vpheld *Ad.*
90. Nor nought wolde conserve] No conseruyd *H.*
—. me here in] me *C,Ad;* to me *H.*
—. place] play *Ad.*
91. up I] I *C,Ad.*
92. besechyng / thee god of] besechyng euer *C*; I besech thee off *H;* evar besechynge *Ad.*
93. O] And *C,H*
—. ye curtes] courtteys *C,Ad.*
—. commyns] commyners *H,Ad,.*
—. your hertys] doth your hertes *H.*
—. unbrace] embrace *Ad.*
94. to pray] now to pray *L.*
95. As I forsayd] *H;* As I arst seyd *C;* As ferst sayd *Ad;* For ryght wel you know *L.*

How Every Thynge / Must Have a Tyme.

Three texts are collated: Lant's print, *Here after foloweth certayne bokes compyled by mayster Skelton Poet Laureat*. Printed by Richard Lant for Henry Tab, ca.1545 (*STC* 22598: *L),* Sig. C5v; BL Ms Egerton 2642, f. 250v. (*E*), and Trinity College, Dublin Ms 661 (*TC*). The reading within the lemma is from *L* unless otherwise indicated.

"Dyspleasure," l.11, is probably an error in *TC* and *E*, since it seems to require an antonym which "consolacyon" does not supply. If it is an error, then *TC* and *E*, as their tendency to agree suggests, either derive from a common source, or one from the other, and *L* is an independent, and superior, witness.

4. covenable] convenable *TC,E.*
5. when] while *E.*
6. hath] have *E.*
7. Byde for] Byde *TC;* abyde *E.*
11. pleasure] dyspleasure *TC,E.*
13. for to] to *TC.*
15. Tyme to] Tyme for to *TC,E.*
19. put] to put *TC,E.*
20. holde] draw *TC,E.*
—. a-backe] backe *TC,E.*

22. The rotys] Tyme Rootes] *TC,E*.
24. corne] cornes *TC*.
26. the] that *TC,E*.
28. upon] on *TC,E*.
Subscription] Quod Skelton Laureate *L;* q[d] Skelton *TC;* finis quod Skelton laureatus *E*.

After l.28 but before the subscription, *E* has an extra 8-line stanza of manifestly inferior quality that cannot be by Skelton. A.S.G.Edwards suggests (*N&Q* 59 [2012]: 494–6), probably rightly, that this is a separate poem:

> Thus ech thing hath his tyme of godes Creacyon
> forr the vse of man by dewe Suppertacyon
> And man by prayse god with honour divyne
> with thankes most worthy As scriptures defyne
> ffor which hath a man ells but weerynes and labour
> In this vayne Lieff moore ffull of myserye
> therefore to bee merye, and gyve to god his honoure
> ys his dewe porcyon, and speciall felycytie

Prayers to the Persons of the Holy Trinity

The reading within the lemma is from Lant (*L*), collated with the text from BL Ms Additional 20059, ff.100v–101 (*Ad*), which seems to be an inaccurate copy of the original underlying Lant's edition.

To The Father of Hevyn

1. lumynary] luminar *Ad*.
4. the essencyal] essenciall *Ad*.
5. that] thow *Ad*.
6. Myne] My *Ad*.
–. my thought] & all *Ad*.
10. which far] truly hit *Ad*.
12. goodnes / and vertu] grace & godenesse *Ad*.
13. thy] his *Ad*.
14. of thy] thy *Ad*.

To the Seconde Person

Title] *Person*] *Ad*. *Parson L.*
3. withouten] without *Ad*.

7. Agayne] Agaynest *Ad*.
9. to] unto *Ad*.
11. my] our *Ad*.
14. Thyne] Thy *Ad*.
—. my] my chefe *Ad*.

To the Holy Gooste

2. charytable] most charitable *Ad*.
4. communycable] coniunctable *Ad*.
8. your] thy *Ad.*
9. apropryed] approched *Ad*.
12. O myrrour] Emperour *Ad*.
16. your] thy *Ad*.

Commentary

Of the Deth of the Noble Prynce Kynge Edwarde the Forth

1. *Miseremini mei* / ye that be my freendis] From the book of Job, 19.21–22: *Miseremini mei, miseremini mei, saltem vos, amici mei, quia manus Domini tetigit me* ("Have pity on me, have pity on me, at least you my friends, because the hand of the Lord hath touched me"): to be understood here as spoken by a holy soul in Purgatory, asking for the prayers of his friends and former subjects.
2. enformyd me] Designed me, shaped me.
7. xxii. yeres] Edward ruled for 22 or 23 years depending whether one counts the period of Henry VI's brief restoration in 1470–71.
12. *Quia ecce nunc in pulvere dormio*] Job 7.21: *Ecce nunc in pulvere dormiam; et si mane me quæsieris, non subsistam* ("Behold now I shall sleep in the dust: and if thou seek me in the morning, I shall not be").
13. molde] Earth.
16. recours] Return, reversion.
22. chery fayre] Cherry-fair. A fair held for the sake of the fruit, usually a fairly boisterous, high-spirited affair, hence a symbol for the intensity and brevity of life's pleasures.
28. contribute] Render tributary, levy tribute upon. (This is *OED*'s only instance of this use.)
—. Fraunce] Threatened by an English invasion, in 1475 Louis XI paid Edward £15,000 plus an annual pension of £10,000.
30. sugerd] The rather unusual preterite or past participle spelling -erd is a mark of Skelton's spelling. See Brownlow, *Laurel,* l.73: "He hathe tastid of thensugerd pocioune."
35. as who sayth] "As people say" or "as it is said."
37. dowbyll my yeris] Edward was only 41 when he died.
40. had-I-wyst] "If I had known." A common noun phrase expressing regret for something done in ignorance of its true nature or of its likely consequences.
42. taskys] Taxes, imposts, duties, &c.
52. occupy] Own, possess.
54. to whome] I.e., for whom.

—. purchasyd] Took possession of.
—. Tetersall] Tattershall Castle, Lincolnshire. A great tower of brick, built by Ralph, 3rd Baron Cromwell, who had been treasurer to Henry VI. After Edward's time, Henry VII granted it to his mother, Lady Margaret Beaufort (Dyce).
55. Dover] I.e., Dover Castle. Edward spent £10,000 to repair and fortify the Dover Castle.
56. provoked] Incited.
—. the wall] The improvement of London's walls took place during the mayoralty of Sir Ralph Josceline in 1476 (Thomas Fuller, *Worthies*, ed. John Nicholls, 2 Vols, 1811, 1.433).
57. Notyngam] Nottingham Castle.
58. Wyndsore] Edward began the rebuilding of the present St. George's Chapel, completed under Henry VIII.
59. Eltham] Eltham Palace, in the borough of Greenwich, a favorite Tudor residence. Edward built the great hall.
66. lady Bes] Edward's queen, Elizabeth Woodville, ca.1437–92.
67. departyd] Separated.
70. Wyndsore alone] Edward was buried in St. George's chapel, Windsor.
71. Eton] Henry VI founded Eton College. Ironically enough, when Edward became king, he cancelled the royal grants to the school, and removed its treasures to St. George's. The clergy and scholars of Eton had small reason to pray for him.
74–5. Saynt Bernard...a sack of stercorry] Stercorry = excrement, < Latin *stercor*, dung. Dyce quotes from *Meditationes piissime de cognitione humanæ conditionis,*attributed to St. Bernard, "*Nihil aliud est homo, quam sperma fœtidum, saccus stercorum, cibus vermium.*"
77–81. Alexander, Sampson, Absolon, and Solomon often figure in treatments of the *ubi sunt* motif.
79. frete] Devour, < OE *fretan*.
85. pleyd my pageyond] Played out my pageant, acted my part.
91. *In manus tuas domine*] Words spoken by Christ upon the Cross (Luke 23.46), and the first words of a response at Compline, *In manus tuas, Domine, Commendo spiritum meum* ("Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit").

How Every Thynge / Must Have a Tyme

2. trancytory] < French *transitoire* < post-Augustan Latin *transitorius,* used by Christian writers to mean transient, passing.
4. covenable] A variant of *convenable*, appropriate, fitting.
15. travell] Work.
19. put thy selfe in prease] I.e. exert yourself, put yourself forward.

"Prease" = crowd, throng.
21. lacke] Blame.
22. vere] Spring.

Prayers to the Persons of the Holy Trinity.
To The Father of Hevyn

1. lumynary] Light-emitting body, usually either the sun or the moon. Cf. Isaiah, 60.19: "Thou shalt no more have the sun for thy light by day, neither shall the brightness of the moon enlighten thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee for an everlasting light, and thy God for thy glory." Cf. also John 1.5–9. "Luminary" was a new word at the time of this poem: *OED*'s first example is from Caxton, 1489.

To the Seconde Person.

2. filiacyon] According to *OED*, a surprisingly late word; Skelton's is the first use given, the second from a sermon by John Donne.
7. Agayne] I.e., against.
8. Defende me / with thy pyteous woundys fyve] There was a considerable devotion to the Five Wounds in 15–16C England. In 1569, the northerners rallied to the banner of the Five Wounds.
10. Rufully rent / thy body wan and blo] Cf. *Woffully Araid*, ll.5,38.

To the Holy Gooste

1. Firy fervence / inflamyd with all grace] Cf. Acts.2.1–4, describing the gift or grace of the Holy Spirit: "parted tongues as it were of fire, and it sat upon every one of them."
–. fervence] Intensity of feeling, of love.
2. brandys] Pieces of burning wood, useful for setting fire to something.
5. *unitate*] This is the ablative of Latin *unitas,* the state of being one.
6. O water of lyfe] Cf. Apocalypse, 22.1: "And he showed me a river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb," a passage always understood by the Church as symbolizing the Holy Ghost.
–. O well of consolacyon] Cf. the meeting of Jesus with the Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob, John 4.6–15, in particular 4.14: "But the water that I will give him, shall become in him a fountain of water springing up into life everlasting."

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