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Classics of the Alcohol Literature

A Sixteenth-Century English Alewife and Her Customers— Skelton's *Tummyng of Elynour Rummyng*

BRITANNICARUM *literarum lumen ac decus*—thus the great Erasmus referred to John Skelton (1460?–1529), the tutor of Henry Duke of York who was later to be King Henry VIII. Skelton was one of the ablest satirists of his age and received much recognition during his lifetime. His most famous poems were attacks on Cardinal Wolsey who once had been his friend.

Skelton's light sketching of characters may have been influenced by French writers but his subjects and ideas show more of the influence of the German satirist Sebastian Brant.

One of Skelton's most popular productions was his poem *The Tummyng* of Elynour Rummyng*, an alewife who apparently kept an alehouse a few miles from Henry VIII's castle Nonsuch. This poem is presented here as descriptive of the kind of folk who gathered at low-class alehouses of the sixteenth century. It was “. . . a lewde sorte | To Elynour resorte,” and lewd, in Skelton's times, did not mean so much lascivious but rather of lowly order.

It is interesting that nearly all who turn up at Elynour's place were women. It was a place to go to for gossiping as well as for ale. No ceremony, no formality; women came in any kind of old rags, even “unbrased.” The good alewife was not much neater than her patrons. Her ale might have been a tasty brew but also certainly an unhygienic one.

Did the customers drink much? They “. . . drynke tyll they stare.” Some of them were chronic alcoholics, such as the woman who “. . . dranke so of the dregges | The dropsy was in her legges.” The custom of women frequenting the alehouse was perhaps not universally accepted, for “Some, lothe to be espyde, | Start in at the backe syde.”

The text of the poem is reprinted here from Alexander Dyce's edition of *The Poetical Works of John Skelton* (London; Thomas Rodd, 1843).

E. M. J.

*Brewing.

The Tunnyng of Elynour Rummyng

Tell you I chyll,
 If that ye wyll
 A whyle be styll,
 Of a comely gyll
 That dwelt on a hyll:
 But she is not gryll,
 For she is somewhat sage
 And well worne in age;
 For her vysage
 It would aswage
 A mannes courage.
 Her lothely lere
 Is nothyng clere,
 But ugly of chere,
 Droupy and drowsy,
 Scurvy and lqwsy;
 Her face all bowsy,
 Comely crynklyd,
 Woundersly wrynkled,
 Lyke a rost pygges eare,
 Brystled wyth here.
 Her lewde lypes twayne,
 They slaver, men sayne,
 Lyke a ropy rayne,
 A gummy glayre:
 She is ugly fayre;
 Her nose somdele hoked,
 And camously croked,
 Never stoppyng,
 But ever droppynge;
 Her skynne lose and slacke,
 Grained lyke a sacke;
 With a croked backe.
 Her eyen gowndy
 Are full unsowndy,
 For they are blered;
 And she gray hered;
 Jawed lyke a jetty;
 A man would have pytty

To se how she is gumbed,
 Fyngered and thumbed,
 Gently ioynted,
 Gresed and annoynted
 Up to the knockels;
 The bones [of] her huckels
 Lyke as they were with buckels
 Togyther made fast:
 Her youth is farre past:
 Foted lyke a plane,
 Legged lyke a crane;
 And yet she wyll iet,
 Lyke a iolly fet,
 In her furred flocket,
 And gray russet rocket,
 With symper the cocket.
 Her huke of Lyncole grene,
 It had ben hers, I wene,
 More then fourty yere;
 And so doth it apere,
 For the grene bare thredes
 Loke lyke sere wedes,
 Wyddered lyke hay,
 The woll worne away;
 And yet I dare saye
 She thynketh herselfe gaye
 Upon the holy daye,
 Whan she doth her aray,
 And gyrdeth in her gytes
 Styched and pranked with pletes;
 Her kyrtel Brystow red,
 With clothes upon her hed
 That wey a sowe of led,
 Wrythen in wonder wyse,
 After the Sarasyns gyse,
 With a whym wham,
 Knyt with a trym tram,
 Upon her brayne pan,
 Lyke an Egyptian,

Capped about:
 Whan she goeth out
 Herselfe for to shewe,
 She dryveth downe the dewe
 Wyth a payre of heles
 As brode as two wheles;

She hobbles as a gose
 With her blanket hose
 Over the falowe;
 Her shone smered wyth talowe,
 Grised upon dyrt
 That baudeth her skyrt.

Primus Passus

And this comely dame,
 I understande, her name
 is Elynour Rummynge,
 At home in her wonnynge;
 And as men say
 She dwelt in Sothray
 In a certayne stede
 Bysyde Lederhede.
 She is a tonnysh gyb;
 The devyll and she be syb.

But to make up my tale,
 She breweth nopy ale,
 And maketh therof port sale
 To travellars, to tynkers,
 To sweters, to swynkers,
 And all good ale drynkers,
 That wyll nothyng spare,
 But drynke tyll they stare
 And brynge themselfe bare,
 With, Now away the mare,
 And let us sley care,
 As wyse as an hare!

Come who so wyll
 To Elynour on the hyll,
 Wyth, Fyll the cup, fyll,
 And syt there by stylle,
 Erly and late:
 Thyther cometh Kate,
 Cysly, and Sare,
 With theyr legges bare,
 And also theyr fete
 Hardely full unswete;
 Wyth theyr heles dagged,
 Theyr kyrtelles all to-iagged,
 Theyr smockes all to-ragged,

Wyth tytters and tatters,
 Brynge dysshes and platters,
 Wyth all theyr myght runnyng
 To Elynour Rummynge,
 To have of her tunnyng:
 She leneth them on the same
 And thus begynneth the game.

Some wenches come unlased,
 Some huswyves come unbrased,
 Wyth theyr naked pappes,
 That flyppes and flappes;
 It wygges and it waggas,
 Lyke tawny saffron bagges;
 A sorte of foule drabbes
 All scurvy with scabbes:
 Some by flybyttten,
 Some skewed as a kyttten;
 Some wyth a sho clout
 Bynde theyr heddies about;
 Some have no herelace,
 Theyr lockes about theyr face,
 Theyr tresses untrust,
 All full of unlust;
 Some loke strawry,
 Some cawry mawry;
 Full untydy tegges,
 Lyke rotten egges.
 Suche a lewde sorte
 To Elynour resorte
 From tyde to tyde:
 Abyde, abyde,
 And to you shall be tolde
 Howe hyr ale is solde
 To Mawte and to Molde.

Secundus Passus

Some have no mony
 That thyder commy,
 For theyr ale to pay,
 That is a shreud aray;
 Elynour swered, Nay,
 Ye shall not beare away
 My ale for nought,
 By hym that me bought!
 With, Hey, dogge, hay,
 Have these hogges away!
 With, Get me a staffe,
 The swyne eate my draffe!
 Stryke the hogges with a clubbe,
 They have dronke up my swyllynge
 tubbe!
 For, be there never so much prese,
 These swyne go to the hye dese,
 The sowe with her pygges;
 The bore his tayle wrygges,
 His rumpe also he frygges
 Agaynst the hye benche!
 With, Fo, ther is a stench!
 Gather up, thou wenche;
 Seest thou not what is fall?
 Take up dyrt and all,
 And bere out of the hall:
 God gyve it yll prevynge
 Clenely as yvell chevyngel
 But let us turne playne,
 There we lefte agayne.
 For, as yll a patch as that,
 The hennes ron-in the mashfat;
 For they go to roust
 Streyght over the ale ioust,
 And donge, whan it commes,
 In the ale tunnes.
 Than Elynour taketh
 The mashe bolle, and shaketh
 The hennes donge away,
 And skommeth it into a tray
 Whereas the yeest is,
 With her maungy fystis:
 And somtyme she blennes

The donge of her hennes
 And the ale together;
 And sayeth, Gossyp, come hyther,
 This ale shal be thycker,
 And flowre the more quicker;
 For I may tell you,
 I lerned it of a Jewe,
 Whan I began to brewe,
 And I have founde it trew;
 Drinke now whyle it is new;
 And ye may it broke,
 It shall make you loke
 Yonger than ye be
 Yeres two or thre,
 For ye may prove it by me;
 Beholde, she sayde, and se
 How bryght I am of ble!
 Ich am not cast away,
 That can my husband say,
 Whan we kys and play
 In lust and in lykyng;
 He calleth me his whytyng
 Hiss mullyng and his mytyng,
 His nobbes and his conny,
 His swetyng and his honny,
 With, Bas, my prety bonny,
 Thou art worth good and monny.
 This make I my falyre fonny,
 Til that he dreme and dronny;
 For, after all our sport,
 Than wyll he rout and snort;
 Than swetely together we ly,
 As two pygges in a sty.
 To cease me semeth best,
 And of this tale to rest,
 And for to leve this letter,
 Because it is no better,
 And because it is no swetter;
 We wyll no farther ryme
 Of it at this tyme;
 But we wyll turne playne
 Where we left agayne.

Tertius Passus

Instede of coyne and monny,
 Some brynge her a conny,
 And some a pot with honny,
 Some a salt, and some a spone,
 Some theyr hose, some theyr shone;
 Some ran a good trot
 With a skellet or a pot;
 Some fyll theyr pot full
 Of good Lemster woll:
 An huswyfe of trust,
 Whan she is athrust,
 Suche a webbe can spyn,
 Her thryft is full thyn.

Some go streyght thyder,
 Be it slaty or slyder;
 They holde the hye waye,
 They care not what men say,
 Be that as be maye;
 Some, lothe to be espyde,
 Start in at the backe syde,
 Over the hedge and pale,
 And all for the good ale.

Some renne tyll they swete,
 Brynge wyth them malte or whete,
 And dame Elynour entrete
 To byrle them of the best.

Than cometh an other gest;
 She swered by the rode of rest,
 Her lypes are so drye,
 Without drynke she must dye;
 Therefore fyll it by and by,
 And have here a pecke of ry.

Anone cometh another,

As drye as the other,
 And wyth her doth brynge
 Mele, salte, or other thyng,
 Her harvest gyrdle, her weddyng
 ryng,

To pay for her scot
 As cometh to her lot.
 Some bryngeth her husbandes hood,
 Because the ale is good;
 Another brought her his cap
 To offer to the ale tap,
 Wyth flaxe and wyth tow;e;
 And some brought sowre dowe;
 Wyth, Hey, and wyth, howe,
 Syt we downe a rowe,
 And drynke tyll we blowe,
 And pype tyrlly tylrlowe!

Some layde to pledge
 Theyr hatchet and theyr wedge,
 Theyr hekell and theyr rele,
 Theyr rocke, theyr spynnyng whele;
 And some went so narrowe,
 They layde to pledge theyr wharrowe,
 Theyr rybskyn and theyr spyndell,
 Theyr nedell and theyr thymbell:
 Here was scant thryft
 Whan they made suche shyft.

Theyr thrust was so great,
 They asked never for mete,
 But drynke, styll drynke,
 And let the cat wynke,
 Let us washe our gommes
 From the drye crommes.

Quartus Passus

Some for very nede
 Layde downe a skeyne of threde,
 And some a skeyne of yarne;
 Some brought from the barne
 Both benes and pease;
 Small chaffer doth ease
 Sometyme, now and than:

Another there was that ran
 With a good brasse pan;
 Her colour was full wan;
 She ran in all the hast
 Unbrased and unlast;
 Tawny, swart, and sallowe,
 Lyke a cake of tallowe;

I swere by all hallow,
It was a stale to take
The devyll in a brake.

And than came haltyng Jone,
And brought a gambone
Of bakon that was resty:
But, Lorde, as she was testy,
Angry as a waspy!
She began to yane and gaspy,
And bad Elynour go bet,
And fyll in good met;
It was dere that was farre fet.

Another brought a spycke
Of a bacon flycke;
Her tonge was verye quycke,
But she spake somewhat thycke:
Her felow did stammer and stut,
But she was a foule slut,
For her mouth fomyd
And her bely groned:
Jone sayne she had eaten a fyest;
By Christ, sayde she, thou lyst,
I have as swete a breth
As thou, wyth shamfull deth!

Than Elynour sayde, Ye callettes,
I shall breake your palettes,
Wythout ye now cease!
And so was made the peace.

Than thyder came dronken Ales;
And she was full of tales,

Of tydynges in Wales,
And of saint James in Gales,
And of the Portyngales;
Wyth, Lo, gossyp, I wys,
Thus and thus it is,
There hath ben great war
Betwene Temple Bar
And the Crosse in Chepe,
And there came an hepe
Of mylstones in a route:
She speketh thus in her snout,
Snevelyng in her nose;
As thoughe she had the pose;
Lo, here is an olde tyyppet,
And ye wyll gyve me a syyppet
Of your stale ale,
God sende you good sale!
And as she was drynkyng,
She fyll in a wynkyng
Wyth a barlyhood,
She pyst where she stood;
Than began she to wepe,
And forthwyth fell on slepe.
Elynour toke her up,
And blessed her wyth a cup
Of newe ale in cornes;
Ales founde therin no thornes,
But supped it up at ones,
She founde therin no bones.

Quintus Passus

Nowe in cometh another rabell;
Fyrst one wyth a ladell,
Another wyth a cradell,
And wyth a syde sadell:
And there began a fabell,
A clatterynge and a babell
Of folys fyllly
That had a fole wyth wylly,
With, Iast you, and, gup, gylly!
She coude not lye stylyly.
Then came in a genet,

And sware by saynct Benet,
I dranke not this sennet
A draught to my pay;
Elynour, I thé pray,
Of thyne ale let us assay,
And have here a pylche of gray;
I were skynnes of conny,
That causeth I loke so donny.
Another than dyd hyche her,
And brought a pottel pycher,
A tonnel, and a bottell,

But she had lost the stoppell;
 She cut of her sho sole,
 And stopped therwyth the hole.

Amonge all the blommer,
 Another brought a skommer,
 A frynging pan, and a slyce;
 Elynour made the pryce
 For good ale eche whyt.

Than sterte in mad Kyt,
 That had lyttle wyt;
 She semed somdele seke,
 And brought a peny cheke
 To dame Elynour,
 For a draught of lycour.

Than Margery Mylkeducke
 Her kyrtell she did uptucke
 An ynche above her kne,
 Her legges that ye myght se;
 But they were sturdy and stubbed,
 Myghty pestels and clubbed,
 As fayre and as whyte
 As the fote of a kyte:
 She was somewhat foule,
 Crokenecked lyke an oule;
 And yet she brought her fees,
 A cantell of Essex chese
 Was well a fote thycke,
 Full of maggottes quycke;
 It was huge and greate,
 And myghty stronge meate
 For the devyll to eate;
 It was tart and punyete.

Another sorte of sluttess,
 Some brought walnuttes,
 Some apples, some peres,
 Some brought theyr clyppynge sheres,
 Some brought this and that,
 Some brought I wote nere what,
 Some brought theyr husbandes hat,
 Some podynges and lynkes,
 Some trypes that stynkes.

But of all this thronge
 One came them amonge,
 She semed halfe a leche,
 And began to preche
 Of the tewsdai in the weke
 Whan the mare doth keke;
 Of the vertue of an unset leke;
 Of her husbandes breke;
 Wyth the feders of a quale
 She could to Burdeou sayle;
 And wyth good ale barme
 She could make a charme
 To helpe wythall a styth:
 She semed to be a wytch.

Another brought two goslynges,
 That were noughty froslynges;
 She brought them in a wallet,
 She was a cumly callet:
 The goslenges were untyde;
 Elynour began to chyde,
 They be wretchockes thou hast
 brought,
 They are shyre shakyng nought!

Sextus Passus

Maude Ruggy thyther skyped:
 She was ugly hypped,
 And ugly thycke lyped,
 Lyke an onyon syded,
 Lyke tan ledder hyded:
 She had her so guyded
 Betwene the cup and the wall,
 That she was there wythall
 Into a palsey fall;

Wyth that her hed shaked,
 And her handes quaked:
 Ones hed wold have aked
 To see her naked:
 She dranke so of the dregges,
 The dropsy was in her legges;
 Her face glystryng lyke glas;
 All foggy fat she was;
 She had also the gout

In all her ioyntes about;
 Her breth was soure and stale,
 And smelled all of ale:
 Such a bedfellow
 Wold make one cast his crow;
 But yet for all that
 She dranke on the mash fat.

There came an old rybybe;
 She halted of a kybe,
 She had broken her shyn
 At the threshold comyng in,
 And fell so wyde open
 That one myght se her token,
 The devyll thereon be wroken!
 What nede all this be spoken?
 She yelled lyke a calfe:
 Ryse up, on Gods halfe,
 Said Elynour Rummyng,
 I beshrew thé for thy cummyng!
 And as she at her did pluck,
 Quake, quake, sayd the duck
 In that lampatrams lap;
 Wyth, Fy, cover thy shap
 Wyth sum flyp flap!
 God gyve it yll hap,
 Sayde Elynour for shame,
 Lyke an honest dame.
 Up she stert, halfe lame,
 And skantly could go
 For payne and for wo.
 In came another dant,
 Wyth a gose and a gant:

She had a wide wesant;
 She was nothyng plesant;
 Necked lyke an olyfant;
 It was a bullyfant;
 A gredy cormerant.

Another brought her garlyke hedes;
 Another brought her bedes
 Of iet or of cole,
 To offer to the ale pole:
 Some brought a wymble,
 Some brought a thymble,
 Some brought a sylke lace,
 Some brought a pyncase,
 Some her husbandes gowne,
 Some a pyllow of downe,
 Some of the napery;
 And all this shyfte they make
 For the good ale sake.

A strawe, sayde Bele, stande utter,
 For we have egges and butter,
 And of pygeons a payre.

Than sterte forth a fysgygge,
 And she brought a bore pygge;
 The fleshe thereof was ranke,
 And her brethe strongly stanke,
 Yet, or she went, she dranke,
 And gat her great thanke
 Of Elynour for her ware,
 That she thyther bare
 To pay for her share.
 Now truly, to my thynkyng,
 This is a solempne drinkyng.

Septimus Passus

Soft, quod one, hight Sybbyll,
 And let me wyth you bybyll.
 She sat downe in the place,
 With a sory face,
 Wheywormed about;
 Garnyshed was her snout
 Wyth here and there a puscull,
 Lyke a scabbyd muscull.
 This ale, sayde she, is nopy;

Let us syppe and sopy,
 And not spyll a droppy,
 For so mote I hoppy,
 It coleth well my croppy.

Dame Elynoure, sayde she,
 Have here is for me,
 A cloute of London pynnes;
 And wyth that she begynnes
 The pot to her plucke,

And dranke a good lucke;
 She swynged up a quarte
 At ones for her parte;
 Her paunche was so puffed,
 And so wyth ale stuffed,
 Had she not hyed apace,
 She had defoyled the place.

Than began the sporte
 Amonge that dronken sorte:
 Dame Elynour, sayde they,
 Lende here a cocke of hey,
 To make all thyng cleane;
 Ye wote well what we meane.

But, syr, among all
 That sat in that hall,
 There was a pryckemedenty,
 Sat lyke a seynty,
 And began to paynty,
 As thoughe she would faynty;
 She made it as koy
 As a lege de moy;
 She was not halfe so wyse
 As she was pevysshe nyse.
 She sayde never a worde,
 But rose from the borde,
 And called for our dame,
 Elynour by name.
 We supposed, I wys,
 That she rose to pys;

But the very grounde
 Was for to compounde
 Wyth Elynour in the spence,
 To pay for her expence;
 I have no penny nor grote
 To pay, sayde she, God wote,
 For washyng of my throte;
 But my bedes of amber
 Bere them to your chamber.
 Then Elynour dyd them hyde
 Within her beddes syde.

But some than sat ryght sad
 That nothyng had
 There of theyr awne,
 Neyther gelt nor pawne;
 Suche were there menny
 That had not a penny,
 But, whan they should walke,
 Were fayne wyth a chalke
 To score on the balke,
 Or score on the tayle:
 God gyve it yll hayle!
 For my fyngers ytche;
 I have wrytten to mytche
 Of this mad mummynge
 Of Elynour Rummynge.
 Thus endeth the gest
 Of this worthy fest.

QUOD SKELTON, LAUREAT