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'Loke well about, ye that lovers be' (IMEV 1944) and a
Sixteenth-Century Reader's Response to John Hardyng's
Account of Joan of Kent.

A sixteenth-century annotation occurring in one of the extant manuscripts of John Hardyng's verse *Chronicle* of British history provides not only an invaluable insight into the annotator's response to Hardyng's account of Joan of Kent, mother of Richard II, but also a newly discovered fragment of a medieval lyric, apparently added to the manuscript because the annotator believed that it shared thematic and ideological connections with Hardyng's narrative.¹

In the bottom margins of fols 95v–96r of New York, Pierpont Morgan Library MS Bühler 5,² a late fifteenth-century manuscript of Hardyng's *Chronicle*, a late sixteenth-century hand has jotted two stanzas of the medieval lyric beginning 'Loke well about, ye that lovers be'.³ The lyric, a satirical attack on women, most commonly consists of six stanzas, with the refrain 'Beware, therefore: the blynde eteth many a fly', although a seven stanza version is also known.⁴ The fragment in Bühler 5 comprises the final two stanzas of the lyric as they occur in the six-stanza form (or stanzas five and seven of the seven-stanza form); since it contains several variants not attested by the other witnesses it is worth citing in full:

Wommen of kynd hav condishiones thre:
þe ffyrst is þat they be full of deacett;
To spynne also yt is ther properte;
Women hav a wonderfall conceate,
For they weeppe oft, and all is but a slyght,
Aye when they lust the teares is in ther eye.
Whearfor beware: the blind etes many a flye.

Soothlye to saye, yff all this yearth sowabll

Weare parchment smothe, and papyr scrybabll,
 And þe great see, þat is callyd occyoun,
 Wear turnyd into yngke blakare then is sablle,
 Al styckes wear pennes, ech man a scryvener able,
 They could not wryt womennes tretchrye.
 Therfor beware: þe blynd etes manye a flye.

Not Sallamon the wysse, nor Sammson the stronge,
 Could euear in thear lyves rule a womane longe.
 Fynne quote⁵

The unique couplet at the end of the fragment is particularly striking, as it is unparalleled in the other versions.⁶ Although perfectly in keeping with the misogynistic sentiments of the piece, the absence of the couplet in the earlier copies seems to indicate that it was either composed at a later date and added to subsequent, but no longer extant, examples, or that its occurrence is unique to this fragment. The couplet appears to allude to the line 'Sampson the fort, and Salomon the sage' in the first stanza of the earlier and fuller version of the lyric, which the annotator may have been aware of, but failed to copy into the manuscript. Alternatively, it may have been appropriated from another unidentified work and appended to the end of the piece because of its relevance to the subject matter. Whether the sixteenth-century annotator of Bühler 5, presumably a man, was responsible for such an adaptation or appropriation, or whether he was merely duplicating somebody else's attempt to enhance the misogynistic tone of the stanzas, is impossible to determine.⁷ Regardless of how the couplet came to be linked to the stanzas, its addition nevertheless sustains the common misogynistic conceits and ideas of the lyric well.⁸

Of greater interest is the fact that the fragment does not appear to have been added to the margins of Hardyng's *Chronicle* arbitrarily. The annotation occurs at the bottom of the folios dealing with the reign of Edward III, or more specifically Hardyng's account of Joan, sixth countess of Kent's three husbands and the circumstances surrounding her marriage to Prince Edward, son and heir of Edward III:⁹

Erle Iohn of Kent dedde was afore sothely,
 Erle Emond's sonne, to whom Dame Iohan truly
 His sister was heire, whom therle Mountague
 Of Salisbury had wed of maiden newe,

And hir forsoke after [and] repudiate,
 Whom his styward *Sir* Thomas Holand wed
 And gat on hir Thomas erle of Kent late,
 And Iohn Holand hir other sonne she had.
 Thomas, their father, dyed of sickenes bested.
 The prince hir vowid vnto a knight of his,
 She said she would none but hymself I wis.

For hir beaute all onely he hir tooke,
 And wed hir so and to Guyan went;¹⁰

Although Hardyng's account of the circumstances prior to Joan's engagement to Prince Edward is succinct, it does refer to her involvement in a famous love-triangle with William Montagu, fifth earl of Salisbury, and Sir Thomas Holland. In November 1349 Joan's marriage of 1340 to Montagu was set aside by papal bull after Holland claimed that he and Joan had entered into a clandestine marriage in 1339. Following this, Holland and Joan married officially, but Holland died in 1360. By the summer of 1361, without the knowledge and consent of Edward III, Joan was engaged to Prince Edward, but since they were related in the third degree, papal dispensation had to be obtained before their nuptials could take place. They finally married at Lambeth on 6 October 1361 with Edward III's consent. Although contemporary documentation relating to Joan's marriage to Montagu implies that she was forced into the union, some medieval chroniclers appear to have viewed her with suspicion, questioning her morals and accusing her of committing infidelity during her first marriage. Adam of Usk, for example, makes a disparaging comment about her 'slippery ways'.¹¹

Whilst Hardyng's readers may, or may not, have known the intricacies of the circumstances he alludes to, his chronicle provides enough information for them to recognise that Prince Edward's marriage to Joan was unusual. His reference to Joan's legendary 'beaute', a quality similarly praised by her contemporary Jean Froissart, emphasises the fact that the marriage was a love-match, and even though Hardyng's account is not different in this respect from other late medieval chroniclers, who observe the unusual circumstances of the betrothal, the notion of a royal marriage resulting from love may have been something that the sixteenth-century reader and annotator of Bühler 5 disapproved of.

In his article on Joan of Kent, Karl Wentersdorf suggests that Hardyng casts similar aspersions on Joan's character to Henry Knighton in his *Cronicon*,

implying that she spurned her original husband, Montagu, for Holland.¹² However, this interpretation depends solely on one's definition of Hardyng's use of the word 'repudiate', to which the *Middle English Dictionary* ascribes several definitions: abandoned, divorced or condemned.¹³ If 'repudiate' in this instance is taken to mean 'condemned' then Hardyng may indeed be suggesting that Joan was forsaken and condemned by her husband for something that his *Chronicle* fails to elaborate on. If, on the other hand, one interprets 'repudiate' as 'abandoned' or 'divorced', it could be argued that Hardyng is condemning Montagu for forsaking his wife and divorcing her. Since Hardyng uses the same word elsewhere in the *Chronicle* to mean all three definitions it is difficult to determine which he intended.¹⁴ His specific intention, however, is not necessarily important in this particular instance. What is significant is that the sixteenth-century annotator who elected to copy the misogynistic verses next to the text appears to have read and interpreted Hardyng's verses in a negative light, viewing Joan's first two marriages as examples of the 'deacett' and 'tretchrye' intrinsic to women, so vehemently satirised in the lyric.

The opening lines of the lyric from which he copied two later stanzas warns against being enamoured of beautiful women and allowing 'lustes' to 'leede' instead of reason:

Loke well about, ye that louers be;
 Lat nat youre lustes leede you to dotage;
 Be nat enameryd on all thyng that ye se —
 Sampson the fort, and Salomon the sage
 Deceuyd were, for all theyre gret corage;
 Men deme hit ryght that they see with ey;
 Beware, therefore: the blynd eteth many a fly.¹⁵

Moreover, subsequent stanzas build upon the theme of women's lack of 'stedfastnes' in love, linking it with other negative qualities emphasised in the Bühler 5 fragment:

The feyrest owtward well can they peynt,
 Theyre stedfastnes endureth but a season;
 ffor they feyne frendlynes & worchen treson.
 And for they ar changeabyll naturally,
 Beware, therefore: the blinde eteth many a fly [...]

Though all the world do his besy cure
 To make wemen stond in stabylness,
 Hit wol nat be, hit ys agayn nature;
 The world ys do when they lak dowbylness;
 ffor they can lawgh and loue nat — thys ys expresse
 To trust on theym, hit ys but fantasy;
 Beware, therefore: the blynd eteth many a fly.¹⁶

It is possible, therefore, that the annotator knew the rest of the lyric, even if he failed to copy the other stanzas into the manuscript, and that its emphasis on love, lust and female beauty blinding and deceiving men struck a chord with him in the same way that the rest of the lyric's warning against women's 'changeabyll' nature did. The lines that he reproduced may have been selected because they summarise the main themes of the lyric well: women lie, weep to get what they want, are treacherous to men, and, as the unique Bühler couplet implies, they use their beauty and charm to ruin great men. Having read Hardyng's account of Joan's multiple marriages and great beauty, the annotator appears to have made a connection between the bewitching Joan and the deceitful women condemned by the lyric. His inclusion of the stanzas on women's 'condishiones' therefore acts as a commentary on, or confirmation of, man's blind susceptibility to women.

The proverbial refrain used to emphasise the blindness of men in love and the 'dowebylness' inherent in women, was popular in the late medieval and Early Modern period, and occurs in a number of literary pieces, including a lyric ascribed to Lydgate, Skelton's 'A Replycacion Agaynst Certayne Yong Scolers Abjured of Late', and Florio's *First Fruites*.¹⁷ A related proverb, however, which states that 'To wear a horn (to be a cuckold) and not know it will do one no more harm than to eat a fly and not see it', indicates that by the sixteenth century the paradigm of unwittingly swallowing a fly may have been linked specifically to cuckoldry and that the annotator may have understood this.¹⁸ This notion occurs, for example, in Edward Gosynhyll's *The Schoolhouse of Women* (1560), which uses the proverb to describe female adultery and the risk husbands take of rearing illegitimate offspring as a result of being cuckolded: 'God wot the blind eateth many a fly;/ So doth the husband often iwis/ Father the child that is not his'.¹⁹ Shakespeare too, in the early seventeenth century, employs a variation on the same theme to connote adultery in *The Winter's Tale* (c. 1611), when Leontes believes Hermione has betrayed him with Polixenes: 'How blest am I [...] There may be in the cup a spider steep'd, and one may

drink, depart, and yet partake no venom; for his knowledge is not infected: but if one present Th'abhor'd ingredient to his eye, make known how he hath drunk, he cracks his gorge, his sides, with violent hefts: — I have drunk, and seen the spider' (II. i. 26–63). Whilst Shakespeare alters the fly to a spider, the correlation between duplicitous women and blindly swallowing something repugnant remains constant.²⁰

When placed in context with the aforementioned medieval lyrics, which use the proverb to warn against the wiles of women, such occurrences point towards the adage being employed in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to indicate sexual promiscuity and deceptiveness in women. Assuming that the sixteenth-century annotator of Bühler 5 interpreted Hardyng's reference to Joan's former marriages as problematic, the connection between the refrain and illegitimate offspring may offer a more significant explanation for his copying the fragment next to the text. If princes marry twice-wed, or questionable, women, the legitimacy of their heirs becomes problematic and the royal succession suspect.²¹ The annotator may or may not have been aware of the malicious attacks on Richard II's legitimacy that had circulated a century before, but the ambiguous tone of Hardyng's narrative, together with his references to Joan's celebrated beauty and multiple marriages appear to have made her a palpable target for the reader, who sought to call attention to the text by reproducing the misogynistic verses below it.

Two of the predominant socio-political and theological concerns in medieval England, which continued to be of immediate concern in the sixteenth-century, were the issues of legitimacy, particularly royal legitimacy, and the subservience of the female in relation to the male. In a century that saw King Henry VIII marry six women, two of whom were attainted and beheaded for adultery, and which placed enormous precedence on the legitimacy of heirs, particularly with regards to the royal succession, it would not be surprising if the person who added the two stanzas of 'Loke well about, ye that lovers be' viewed the multiple marriages of Joan of Kent, and Prince Edward's decision to marry her for 'hir beaute' rather than her political appropriateness or chastity, as problematic. Living under the governance of a Tudor monarchy obsessed with dynastic legitimacy and royal absolutism, perhaps the annotator, believing that women were slippery creatures, felt motivated to express the commonly held concern that a sovereign should exercise prudence when choosing a spouse. To this end he copied a fragment of misogynistic complaint literature beside Hardyng's text.

1 For a study and edition of the two versions of Hardyng's *Chronicle* see my Ph.D. thesis 'John Hardyng's *Chronicle*: A Study of the Two Versions and a Critical Edition of Both for the Period 1327–1464' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Hull, March 2004). Other examples of the early reception history of Hardyng's *Chronicle* are considered in my "'A Good Exampell to Avoide Diane": Reader Responses to John Hardyng's *Chronicle* in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries', *Poetica*, 63 (2005), 19–35. I am currently preparing new editions of both versions for publication with TEAMS Middle English Texts and Boydell and Brewer's Medieval Chronicles Series.

2 For descriptions of Bühler 5 see C. U. Faye, *Supplement to the Census of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts in the United States and Canada*, continued and edited by W. H. Bond (New York: The Bibliographical Society of America, 1962), p. 389; Charles Ryskamp (ed.), *Twenty-First Report to the Fellows of the Pierpont Morgan Library, 1984–1986* (New York, 1989), p. 28; and my 'John Hardyng's *Chronicle*', pp. 84–89.

3 I discovered this hitherto unidentified fragment whilst undertaking research for my Ph.D. thesis on Hardyng and it has since been included in the *New Index of Middle English Verse* ed. Julia Boffey and A. S. G. Edwards (London: British Library, 2005), under entry number 1944. Editions of the lyric are printed in R. H. Robbins, *Secular Lyrics of the XIV and XV Centuries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), pp. 224–25 and R. T. Davies, *Medieval English Lyrics* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), pp. 238–40.

4 The lyric is extant in four other manuscripts: Cambridge, Trinity College MS O. 9. 38, fol. 28r (seven stanzas); Cambridge, Trinity College R. 3. 19, fol. 207r; Rome, English College MS 1306, fol. 75v; London, British Library, Harley 2251, fol. 149v. Quotation taken from Robbins, *Secular Lyrics*, p. 224.

5 The most notable variants between this and the other manuscripts include 'but a slyght'; 'Soothlye to saye, yff all this yearth sowabll'; 'and papyr'; and the final couplet.

6 See Robbins, *Secular Lyrics*, p. 224.

7 My own attempts to find the couplet in other lyrics have proved unsuccessful. Of the annotator little can else be gleaned. Other annotations within the manuscript, and a comparative analysis of the textual variants in the Bühler copy of Hardyng's *Chronicle* with other extant witnesses, suggest that the manuscript had an early London provenance (see Peeverley, 'John Hardyng's *Chronicle*', 84–86).

8 Misogynistic conceits are common in medieval literature; see *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ll. 2414–17, for example, where Gawain attacks the deceitful nature of women stating: 'Bot hit is no ferly þaȝ a fole madde,/ And þurȝ wyles of wymmen be wonen to sorȝe,/ For so watz Adam in erde with one bygyled,/ And Salamon with fele sere, and Samson eftsonez'; taken from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* ed. by J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon, second edition revised by Norman Davis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 66. Of greater consequence to the lyric in question is Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, where the Wife of Bath notes each of the lyrics' 'condishiones thre' detailed in the lyric in her discussion of the abilities that women are blessed with at birth: 'For al swich wit is yeven us in oure byrthe;/ Deceite, wepyng, spynnyng God hath yive/ To wommen kyndely, whil that they may lyve' (see *The Riverside Chaucer* ed. by Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 110, ll. 400–402). A further connection between the two texts can be seen in several of the manuscripts of *The Canterbury Tales* and the lyric, which are accompanied at the appropriate moment by the Latin gloss 'Fallere flere statuit deus in mulier' ('Lying and weeping God gave to woman'). The notion that women desire sovereignty over men in the Wife's 'Prologue' and 'Tale' is similarly echoed in the lyric's reference to their manipulative tactics and in the second version of Hardyng's *Chronicle*, which addresses female sovereignty in the narrative concerning the foundation of Britain. Hardyng informs his audience that the women of this land desire sovereignty over their husbands far more than women of other

nations, because they 'haue it of nature' of the disruptive Albina and her sisters, who found the island before the arrival of Brutus: 'Nota that women desiren the souuerainte of alle thing, and to my consaite more in þis lond than in other, for þey haue it of nature of tho sustres' (Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Arch. Selden B. 10, fol. 9r). Finally, Irving Linn has written about the prevalence of the 'parchment sky' image employed in the final stanza of the annotation (see 'If all the Sky were Parchment', *PMLA*, 53 (1938), pp. 951-70), although he overlooks its occurrence in Henry Knighton's *Cronicon* for the period 1337-96: 'Si totum membrana solum, calamus nemus omne et tetis incaustum, scriptor et omnis homo, istorum facinus scribere non poterunt' in *Knighton's Chronicle 1337-1396* ed. by G. M. Martin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 304-7. For the motif in nursery rhymes, see Peter Opie and Iona Opie, *Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), pp. 436-38.

9 Joan (1328-85) was the daughter of Edmund of Woodstock, fourth earl Kent, granddaughter of Edward I, and mother of Richard II. She became countess of Kent (1352-85) after the death of her brother, John.

10 Taken from Bühler 5, fols 96r-96v; see also Henry Ellis (ed.), *The Chronicle of John Hardyng* (London, 1812), pp. 331-32.

11 For contemporary documents relating to this matter and further details of Joan's marriages see Karl P. Wentersdorf, 'The Clandestine Marriages of the Fair Maid of Kent', *Journal of Medieval History*, 5 (1979), 203-29. For Usk's comments see Chris Given-Wilson (ed.), *The Chronicle of Adam Usk, 1377-1421* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 62-63: 'Sic per omnia de isto Ricardo contingebat; cuius produccioni natalium, quasi non ex patre regalis prosapie set ex matre lubrice uite dedita, multum sinistri predicabatur in uulgo, ut de multis auditis taciám' [Precisely the same things happened with this Richard, concerning whose birth many unsavoury things were commonly said, namely that he was not born of a father of the royal line, but of a mother given to slippery ways — to say nothing of the many other things I have heard].

12 'Eodem anno [1361] Edwardus princeps Wallie duxit uxorem filiam Edmundi comitis de Cancia, quam ante comes de Salisburia duxerat in uxorem, et diuorcio inter eos per dictam mulierem facto, dominus Thomas de Holond duxit in uxorem, pro cuius concupiscencia ut dicebatur diuorcium factum est. Tercio duxit eam princeps Wallie antedictus.' [In the same year, Edward, prince of Wales, took to wife the daughter of Edmund, earl of Kent, who had previously been married to the earl of Salisbury, and having secured a divorce from him had married Sir Thomas Holland, for whose desire for her it was said the divorce had been made. Thirdly she married the aforesaid Prince of Wales.] See G. H. Martin, *Knighton's Chronicle 1337-96* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 184-85; see also Wentersdorf, 'The Clandestine Marriages'.

13 See H. Kurath and S. M. Kuhn (eds), *Middle English Dictionary* (Ann Arbor: University of Western Michigan Press, 1956-99), 'repudiate'.

14 On balance it is more likely that Hardyng is not condemning Joan, but either being deliberately ambiguous to avoid implicating either party or being critical of Montagu. The second version of Hardyng's *Chronicle* is particularly careful to celebrate the role of women in British history, particularly those women relating to the royal ancestors of Richard, duke of York, and his son Edward IV, from whom the House of York justified their claim to the English throne and to whom Hardyng dedicated the second version of his text. For further discussion of this matter see my forthcoming case study of Hardyng's *Chronicle* in *Broken Lines: Genealogy in Medieval Britain and France*, edited by Edward Donald Kennedy and Raluca Radulescu (Leiden: Brepols, 2008).

15 Robbins, *Secular Lyrics*, p. 224.

16 Robbins, *Secular Lyrics*, p. 224.

17 See Boffey and Edwards, *New Index of Middle English Verse*, Number 2661; this

lyric also uses the proverb to warn 'yong men' against the guiles of women. W. W. Skeat attributed the lyric to Lydgate, although his suggestion remains a tentative one; see *Chaucerian and Other Pieces* (Oxford, 1897), vol. 7, pp. 295–96. See also Alexander Chalmers, *The Works of the English Poets*, (London, 1810), vol. 1, pp. 560, 564. Other references to the proverb may be found in Bartlett Jere Whiting, *Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases: From English Writings Mainly Before 1500* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 45 (B348); and Norris Palmer Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1950), p. 54 (B451). For Skelton's use of the phrase see John Scattergood, ed., *John Skelton, The Complete English Poems* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983) p. 380, ll. 152, 244, 252. Victor I. Scherb has written an interesting article on 'Conception, Flies, and Heresy in Skelton's 'Replycacion' (*Medium Ævum*, 62 (1993), 51–60), which is relevant in many ways to the hypothesis posited in this article. For Florio's use of the proverb 'The blynd eateth many a flye' see *Florio's First Fruites: Facsimile Reproduction of the Original Edition*, ed., Arundell del Re (Formosa: Taihoku University, 1936), chapter 19 'Prouerbes', p. 91 (fol. 34).

18 Tilley, *Dictionary*, p. 320 (H622).

19 See Katherine Usher Henderson and Barbara F McManus, *Half Humankind: Contexts and Texts of the Controversy about Women in England, 1540–1640* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), p. 145.

20 Compare with Thomas Middleton's *No Wit Like a Woman's*, II. i. 392–93 and Robert Greene's *Greene's Vision*, which mentions a fly instead of a spider, cited in *The Winter's Tale*, ed. by J. H. P. Pafford (London: Routledge, 1994).

21 For further discussion of the Renaissance obsession with cuckoldry and legitimacy in relation to the texts mentioned see Linda Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance* (Sussex: Harvester, 1984), pp. 24–31, and Julia Briggs, *This Stage-Play World: Texts and Contexts, 1580–1625* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 68–69.