

An Anglo-Norman Poem by Edward II, King of England

Author(s): Paul Studer

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AN ANGLO-NORMAN POEM BY EDWARD II, KING OF ENGLAND.

EDWARD II is one of the most pathetic figures in English history. The tragedy of his downfall has thrown into relief his checkered and inglorious career. But it has also awakened the sympathy of posterity with a man unfitted by training and temperament to wield the destinies of a kingdom. His utter failure in strategy and statecraft, his lamentable lack of tact and common sense have been duly emphasized. On the other hand, his love of sport and his devotion to his friends have not been overlooked. But too little has been made of one of his redeeming points, his taste for art and music. It is true, a man may be endowed with poetic genius and none the less turn out to be a very bad king. His talent does not relieve him from the grave responsibilities he has incurred, it does not absolve him from incompetence, and less still from weakness and cowardice. But it kindles in our hearts a keen sense of grief that such a man was placed by fate in a position for which he was so utterly unsuited.

Edward II valued more highly a skilful fiddler than an able minister of state. He forsook his peers and revelled in the society of minstrels, strolling players and other men of low repute. He soon acquired their vices of gambling and hard drinking. But, on the other hand, he shared their enthusiasm for the lighter forms of art, and took some pains to make himself proficient in music and verse. All this has long been common knowledge, but little opportunity has hitherto been afforded us to test the merit of his achievements. This is not very surprising. The songs with which the king and his boon companions heightened their mirth, or dispelled the gloom of a cheerless reality, were doubtless never committed to writing. Both words and melodies perished with their authors, not leaving behind them even a lingering echo. Indeed it is almost a miracle that of the songs composed by Edward II one at least should have been preserved. It is a song of sorrow, the last probably he ever sang; and he must have sung it with a heavy heart.

Fabyan, in his *New Chronicles of England and France*¹, after relating the circumstances of the deposition of the king, adds:

¹ Ed. H. Ellis, 1811, pp. 430-32.

Than Edwarde thus remaynyng in pryson as fyrste in the castell of Kenelworth, and after in the castell of Barkle, took great repentaunce of his former lyfe, and made a lamentable complaynt for that he hadde so greuously offendyd God; whereof a parte I have after sette out but not all, leste it shulde be tedyous to the reders or herers.

Dampnum mihi contulit tempore brumali
Fortuna satis aspera vehementis mali.
Nullus est tam sapiens, mitis, aut formosus,
Tam prudens virtutibus, ceterisque famosus,
Quin stultus reputabitur et satis dispectus
Si fortuna prosperos avertat effectus.

Theyse, with many other after the same makynge, I have seen, which are reportyd to be of his owne makynge in the tyme of his enprysonement; the whiche, for lengthe of tyme, I have lefte out of this werke, and shewed the effecte of them in Englysshe, as folowyth.

Whan Saturne with his colde isy face
The grounde with his frostys turneth the grene to whyte,
The tyme of wynter which trees doth deface
And causyth all verdure to a voyde quite:
Than fortune, whiche sharpe was with stormys not alyte,
Hath me assautyd with hir frowarde wyll,
And me beclyped with daungeours right yll.

What man in this worlde is so wyse or fayre,
So prudent, so vertuose, or famous under thayre,
But that for a foole, and for a man despysed,
Shalbe take, whan fortune is from hym devyded?

Alas now I crye, but no man doth me moone,
For I sue to them that pytye of me have noone.
Many with great honours I dyd whylom advaunce,
That nowe with dyshonoure doon me styng and launce;
And such as some tyme dyd me greatly feere,
Me dyspyse and let not with sclaunder me to deere.

O mercyfull God, what love they dyd me shewe!
And with¹ detraction they do me hacke and hewe.
Alas, moste synfull wretche, why shulde I thus complayne,
If God be pleasyd that I shulde thus² susteyne
For the great offence before by me doone?
Wherefore to the good Lorde I wyll retourne efte soone,
And hooly commytte me thy great mercy untill,
And take in pacyence all that may be thy wyll;
And all onely the serve with all dylygence.
Alas! that before this tyme I had not that cence.
But nowe good Lorde, which arte omnypotent,
Beholde me mooste wretchyd and greatly penytent;
And of my trespace forgyvenes thou me graunt,
And by what sorowe my carkes is now daunt,
Graunt it may be to my sowle remedy,
That the sooner I may attayne³ it by:
For to the swete Jhesu I yelde my⁴ sore wepyng,
As aske of the pardon for my grevouse synnyng.

Most blessyd Jhesu
Roote of all vertue,
Graunt I may the sue
In all humylyte;

¹ MS. Now with.

² MS. this.

³ MS. thy grace atteyn.

⁴ MS. me.

Sen thou for our good
 Lyste to shede thy blood,
 And stretche the upon the rood
 For our inquite.

And thou moost mylde mother and vyrgyn most pure,
 That barest swete Jhesu, the worldys redempture,
 That shynyst and florysshed as flowre moost sure ;
 And lyke as nardus of his swete odoure,
 Passyth all other, so thou in all honoure,
 Surmountys all sayntis, by thy great excellence,
 Wherefore to praye for my grevouse offence¹.

I the beseche,
 Moost holsome leche,
 That thou wylte seche,
 For me suche grace.

That² my body vyle
 My sowle shall exyle,
 Thou brynge in short whyle
 It in rest and solace.

Fabyan's account is disappointing. Not a word is said about the document in which the song was preserved. We are not even told in what language it was written. From the chronicler's ambiguous wording we might almost infer that Edward wrote it in Latin, if we did not know from other sources that he was so ignorant of that language, that at his coronation he had to take his oath in the French form. Fabyan purposes to give an English version of part of the king's poem, but he fails to grasp the meaning of certain passages, and where he understands aright, he drowns the author's simple style in flowery and pedantic language. It is fortunate for the king and for Anglo-Norman poetry that his literary reputation does not rest solely on the evidence of this translation.

The Anglo-Norman original has been preserved in a unique MS. of the Longleat Collection. For the purpose of this edition Lord Bath, the present owner, very generously placed the MS. at my disposal. I take this opportunity to express to him my sincere gratitude. The MS. is mentioned in the *Historical MSS. Commission Report*, vol. III, p. 180, but the account given of it is so inaccurate that a fresh description will not be superfluous³. It is usually referred to under the title of *Tractatus varii Theologici saec. XIII et XIV*, and consists of a bound volume, octavo size, containing 170 folios of vellum. The handwriting belongs clearly to two different periods. The Latin texts which make up the bulk of the volume are in an early thirteenth century hand, while

¹ *These seven lines are omitted in edit. 1542.*

² *that when, edit. 1533, 1542, 1559.*

³ *In the Report all the Latin items are wrongly described and I suspect that the accounts of various MSS. have been confused.*

the French texts have been added on blank pages and in margins during the first half of the fourteenth century, certainly not later than 1350. The following are the principal items :

Fol. 1 is torn in half from top to bottom. The recto is blank ; the verso contains *Anglo-Norman Proverbs*, those near the bottom of the page alone being complete : e.g. 'Il valdroit plus de refuser que d'estre refusé. Celuy fait malement qe prent le repas de un jour qe li fra perdre cent, etc.' These proverbs are continued at the foot of the next folio.

Fol. 2 r°. A *Latin Homily* : 'Dilectus meus misit manum suam per fenestram ac ventū¹ meus conturbatur quia adtactum eius Bonum est...'

Fol. 6 r°. An *Anglo-Norman Lapidary* : 'Coment hom deit conustre peres precioses.' This will be included in the edition of A.-N. Lapidaries which I am preparing in collaboration with Miss J. Evans.

Fol. 9 r°. A *Latin Homily* : 'Nichil amarius peccato et si quidam videantur dulcia in primis. Unde Salomon in novissimis felle amarius invenies peccatum...'

Fol. 21 v° at the bottom of the page and in the margin, an *Anglo-Norman Dialogue on the Ages of Man* : 'Ore agardetz danz vayllards | Jolité de ceste part, etc.' (36 lines).

Fol. 33 r°. A Latin treatise entitled *Brevis Hortulus*, chiefly in prose, but fols. 36 v° to 40 r° are in verse. It consists of 81 chapters. Chap. 1 begins, '[V]idetur in deum cadere necessitas rerum faciendarum...'. The explicit after the table of contents [fol. 33 v°] runs as follows : 'Explicit libellus qui potest dici Brevis Hortulus eo quod breviter in eo tamquam in ortulo fructus dulces excerpantur.'

Fol. 41 r°. A Latin treatise entitled *Speculum [de Mysteriis] Ecclesiae*. 'De sacramentis ecclesiasticis ut tractarem...' (cf. Migne, *Patrolog.* vol. 177, pp. 335 sq.).

Fol. 57 r°. A Latin treatise entitled *De Compunctione Cordis*. 'Cum te intueor Beate Demetri frequenter insistentem mihi et omni cum vehementia exigentem de cordis compunctione sermonem admiror valde...'

Fol. 76 v°. An *Anglo-Norman poem by King Edward II*.

Fol. 77 v°. *Chastel de leal amour*, an *Anglo-Norman poem* of 75 lines, beginning : 'Du chastel d'amurs vus demaund | Qe le est luy primere fundament | D'amer lealment...' There are at least four other MSS. of this poem which shows the obvious influence of the *Roman de la Rose* (cf. P. Meyer, *Bull. Soc. d. anc. textes fr.* 1875, pp. 26, 30, and *Romania* XIII, p. 503).

Fols. 78 v° and 79 r°. Blank.

¹ *Vulgate, Cant. v. 4* : 'per foramen et venter meus intremuit ad tactum ejus.'

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Fol. 79 v^o. *De la Diffinission de Amur*, in A.-N. prose, beginning: 'Amur est seigneur de lui mesmes E ne est al comandement de nuly ne al priere ne al conseil de nuly...'

Fol. 80 r^o. *Verba domini ad Abbatem*, a collection of Latin sermons beginning: 'Egredere de terra et de cognitione (= cognatione) et de domo patris tui et valde (= vade ?) ad terram quam monstravero tibi¹...'

Fol. 143 r^o. A *Latin Treatise* beginning: 'Triplex est divine scripture cognitio secundum historiam, allegoriam, et tropologiam. Historia est res gesta...'

Fol. 156 r^o. *Salomon in proverbiiis*, Latin version of proverbs ascribed to Salomon, 'Aqua frigida anime sitienti nuncius bonus de longinqua terra. Omnes prelati ecclesie tam superiores quam inferiores...'

Fol. 170 is a fragment out of a service book bound up with the present volume. It tells the life of some Saint and refers to the burial of Abbess Sexburgh, the wife of Earconbert 'rex cantuariorum,' whose sepulchre was found at Grantacester.

The poem of Edward II occupies folios 76 v^o and 77 r^o. It is written in double columns and from the nature of the handwriting it would seem to have been transcribed before 1350. Nevertheless it is not possible to assume that we have it in the king's own hand. There are unmistakable indications that the version in the Longleat MS. is the copy of a scribe and not an autograph. The rubric alone makes this sufficiently clear. But whoever the scribe may have been, he was a contemporary of the king, and his testimony, even though it be not absolutely conclusive, must at all events be accepted as strong evidence in favour of royal authorship. Professor Tout has suggested to me that the poem may have been written by one of the king's friends and utilised in the active propaganda which was carried on—apparently with a considerable amount of success²—to arouse popular sympathy with the deposed monarch and facilitate his restoration. But however plausible such an explanation might seem, it is not borne out by internal evidence. The tone of the poem, the line of arguments, the touches of deep personal feeling unmistakably stamp the work as genuine.

It bears obvious signs of Provençal influence. In form and style it has all the characteristics of the *canço*. It opens with a reference to the season of the year, and ends with an *envoy*. After the fashion of

¹ *Gen.* xii, 1: 'et veni in terram quam monstrabo tibi.'

² For a detailed account of the activities of the king's sympathisers, the reader is referred to Professor Tout's monograph on *The Captivity and Death of Edward of Carnarvon*, Manchester University Press, 1920. Appendix II contains an interesting note on the poem.

troubadours, the poet addresses his song to a lady¹ whose real name he conceals under the *senhal* of 'La Bise,' i.e. 'The Doe.' If due allowance is made for the uncertainty of scansion in later Anglo-Norman poetry, the versification is very regular. All the stanzas are built on a uniform pattern and run on two rhymes each, and these rhymes are much purer than those of contemporary Anglo-Norman works. It is true that we find *-é* rhyming with *-ié*, e.g. *esprové : preysé* (= *prisie*) 4 : 6, *encumbrer* (= *encumbrier*) : *pener* 14 : 16. On the other hand original *ei* is always written *oi* and rhymes with itself or with etymological *oi* (cf. stanzas iv and viii), the only exception being *merci : otry* 38 : 40, where *-oi* appears to rhyme with *-i*; or should we read *otry*? As one might expect, the number of syllables is not constant, at least if judged by continental canons. The bulk of the verses are octosyllabic, but lines varying from six to ten syllables are also found, and some of them at least can hardly be the result of faulty transcription. In other respects, however, the poem compares favourably with the fourteenth century products of Northern France. It is free from their mannerism and artifice, and possesses a directness of speech and an accent of deep sincerity which they seldom exhibit.

In the time of Edward II Provençal literature had passed the zenith of its splendour. In fact the exuberant growth of troubadour poetry showed signs of decay even before the crusade of Simon de Montfort ruined its haunts and chilled its inspiration. But before the work of destruction was complete, the poetic leaven of Provence had permeated Western Europe, and called into existence the lyric vein of Italy and Spain, of Northern France and England. Ever since the days of Queen Eleanor troubadours found appreciative audiences among the Normans settled in this country, and counted among their disciples kings and princes. In his devotion to poetry Edward II continued the traditions set up by his illustrious predecessor Richard Cœur-de-lion and those which his mother² brought from Castile, where Provençal art had found a second home. The king's song is a rare and valuable specimen of Anglo-Norman lyric poetry. In addition it possesses artistic merit and real historic interest; it is therefore well worthy of an edition.

I have found it necessary to introduce a few corrections, but in such cases the reading of the MS. has always been recorded in the footnotes. Minor alterations are indicated by means of brackets; words and letters

¹ Even with the assistance of Professor Tout's authority and learning I have not succeeded in identifying the lady to whom the king dedicated his poem.

² The influence of Eleanor of Castile was probably not very considerable as she died when Edward of Carnarvon was only seven years old.

between () should be suppressed, those between [] should be added. For the benefit of those who are not familiar with Old French I have added an English translation which renders the meaning almost verbatim, but does not attempt to reproduce the rhythm of the original nor the harmonious effect of its rhymes.

DE LE ROI EDWARD LE FIZ ROI EDWARD, LE CHANSON
QE IL FIST MESMES.

I.

- 1 En teps de iver me survynt damage,
Fortune trop m'ad traversé :
Eure m'est faili tut mon age.
Bien sovent l[e]ay esprové :
5 En mond n'ad si bel ne si sage,
[Ne] si curtois ne si preysé,
Si eur(e) ne lui court de avantage,
Que il ne serra pur fol clamé.

II.

- Ma clamour face, mes rien n'ataint :
10 A cel(uy) que grace ne puit trover,
Terrien amur [est] tost esteint.
Ne me deveroye trop affier !
Les grans honurs ay fest a meynt
Que ore me queront encumbrier ;
15 Poy sui amé et meins pleint :
En fort prison me font pener.

III.

- Pener me funt cruelement—
E duint qe bien l'ai deservi.
Lour fausse fai en parlement
20 De haut en bas me descendi.
(Hay !) sire de salu, jeo me repent ;
(Et) de toutz mes mals vus cri merci :
Ceo qe le corps soufre de torment,
Soit a l'alme joie et merci.

IV.

- 25 Merci me ert, si com(e) je croy,
 [Et] les honurs et les bontez
 Qe a mon poair sovent fesoy
 A mes amys et mes privetz.
 Si je ey(e) mesfet, ceo poise moy :
 30 A lor consayl estoie jurez.
 Ceo qe ai mesfet encontre ma foy,
 Beu sire Dieu, vus le savez.

V.

- Vus le savetz apertement,
 Car nul n'est si bien covery,
 35 Qe ne le voyetz tut clerement :
 Le bien le mal tut altresì ;
 Solom ceo freetz jugement.
 Mes mals la mene ou(e) ta merci !
 (E) de moy facez vostre talent,
 40 Car quoyer et corps a vous otry.

VI.

- A vus me octroy, sire Jhesu,
 Pardon et grace requerant.
 Jeo solay estre tant cremu,
 Ore me vont toutz despisant :
 45 L'em m'apele 'rois abatu,'
 Et tut le secle me veit gabant ;
 Mes plus privetz me unt desu :
 Trop tart le vey apertemant.

VII.

- Apertement me unt defy [?],
 50 Les quels me unt issi tray ;
 Moud lur quidai estre amis,
 Ore me ount tutz degerpi.
 Je lur donay meint juel de pris,
 Que ensi le me ount mery ;
 55 Je ay le plur et eàux le rys,
 M'est avys le ju (est) mal parti.

38 *MS.* Mes melles la. 40 *read* otry ? 48 *MS.* le ay.
 49 *MS.* Aperteynant ; *instead of* defy *we should expect a word in* -is.
 51 *MS.* amez.

VIII.

Parti me ount un ju sanz joye.
 Par tiel(e) tristour mi quoer se pleynt
 De cele en qi trover quidoie
 60 Femme leal : vers moy se feint.
 Isabeux tant amay, la bloye !
 Mes or(e) l'estencele est esteint
 De fyn amur ; pur ceo ma joie
 S'en est alé, com est de meint.

IX.

65 Meintenant sanz delay
 Bien serroit temps de morir,
 A moy cheitif que perdu ay
 Tutz honurs sanz recuverir.
 Allas ! dolent ! pur qei m'emay ?
 70 Puis q[ue] il est a Dieu pleys sir,
 Mult bonement le suffirai :
 (De) tout me durray a luy servir.

X.

De luy servir mettray m'entent(e) ;
 Mult me desplet qe ensi ne fis.
 75 N'est pas mervoyle, si me dement,
 Si terrien honor m'est faylliz !
 Mon quoer contrite soy present
 A cel(y) q'en crois pur nous fu mys,
 Mes voyl[e] bien qe me repent
 80 De mes mals q[ue] ay fest tut dis.

XI.

Tut dis enfeble en fermerie
 (Sui) par ceaux que felons sunt ;
 [Qui] par lur ruste reverie
 Troys roys eslu en ount ;
 85 Le plus jofne par mestrie
 Coroune de oor·porter en fount :
 Jhesu luy gard(e), le fiz Marie,
 De treson, que Dieu confund !

60 *MS.* Fme lealte

61 *MS.* Beux tant.

71 *MS.* suffirai.

81 *MS.* Mys enfeble fermeriy.

XII.

- Deux confund[e] ses enemys !
 90 E luy faceo un roy moud sage,
 [Et] enpernant et poystifs
 De meyntenir pris e barnage !
 E que toutz ceaux soyent jus mys,
 Q'ennyoy luy querount ou (en)damage !
 95 E si moy serroit acomplis
 Le greingnur desir de mon corage.

XIII.

- Mon corage pas ne se pleint
 De terrien honur regretere ;
 Mais douce Jhesu, qe nous ad reint
 100 Par son saunk precieuse et chiere,
 Par la priere de toutz ly seins,
 Q'en sa glorie sount parcenere,
 A cele joie tost nous meint,
 Q'en nule temps [ne] peust finere !

XIV.

- 105 Finer m'estut, ne voyl plus dire.
 Va t'en chaunson igneument
 A La Bise du par Kenire
 Si la ditez brefment :
 Qe quant le serf se saut de ire,
 110 Et ou(e) ses perches bestes purfent,
 Gard(e) soy q'el(e) n'eyt mester de mire !
 Tant se porte sagement !

XV.

- Sages et fouz, trestouz vus pri,
 Pur moy priez communement
 115 (A) Marie, la mere de mercy,
 Que Jhesu norist, omnipotent :
 Que pur les joyes q'ele uist de ly,
 Q'ele luy prie devoutement,
 Qe de touz trays eye mercy,
 120 (Et) de touz forjuges falcement !

Explicit.

102 *could also be read* partenere. 119 *MS.* eyt mercy.
 107 *could be read* du parke vire.

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I append the following literal translation into English :—

OF KING EDWARD, THE SON OF KING EDWARD,
THE SONG WHICH HE MADE.

I.

- 1 In winter woe befell me ;
By cruel Fortune thwarted,
My life now lies a ruin.
Full oft have I experienced,
5 There's none so fair, so wise,
So courteous nor so highly famed,
But, if Fortune cease to favour,
Will be a fool proclaimed.

II.

- My clamour rises—yet in vain ;
10 When favour once is lost,
Soon does man's love grow cold.
Too fondly have I trusted,
And honours done to many
Who now seek my destruction ;
15 They love me little, pity me less,
In prison they torment me.

III.

- Torment me, aye ! most cruelly—
Ev'n though 'twere well deserved.
Their evil faith in Parliament
20 From high has brought me low.
Lord of Salvation, I me repent ;
For all my sins forgiveness crave :
May from the pain the flesh endureth
The soul receive both joy and mercy.

IV.

- 25 Mercy, I trow, I needs shall reap
From precious gifts and kindly deeds
Which oft upon my friends and kin,
Within my power I did bestow.
If I have erred, it grieveth me :
30 But to their counsel was I sworn.
What I have sinned against the faith,
Alas ! dear Lord, full well Thou knowest.

V.

- Thou knowest well and openly,
For nought is there so well concealed
35 But is to Thee fully revealed,
Both good and ill all equally ;
Thereon will rest Thy judgments dread.
Deal with my sins mercifully !
But nonetheless Thy will be done,
40 For body and soul to Thee I yield.

VI.

I yield me all to Jesu,
 Craving His grace and pardon.
 Once was I feared and dreaded,
 But now all men despise me,
 45 And hail me 'crownless king,'
 A laughing stock to all.
 My dearest friends deceived me ;
 Too late I see it openly.

VII.

And openly have they defied me,
 50 Those who betrayed me thus ;
 Methought I had their love,
 Now have they all forsaken me.
 For many a jewel and many a gift
 I have now their reward.
 55 The tears are mine, but theirs the laugh ;
 The game's unfairly dealt.

VIII.

They've dealt to me a joyless game.
 And 'mid such grief my heart complains
 Of her whom fondly I believed
 60 A faithful wife—turned to deceit !
 Fair Isabel I dearly loved,
 But now love's spark is dead ;
 And with my love my joy is gone,
 As 'tis from many a heart.

IX.

65 And now 'twere time indeed
 That I in death should sleep,
 Since honours all I've lost
 Beyond recovery.
 And yet why be dismayed ?
 70 What God hath thus ordained
 Full meekly will I bear,
 And serve Him faithfully.

X.

His service be my constant thought.
 Ah ! why was it not ever so ?
 75 What marvel then that I am sad,
 And earthly grandeur faileth me ?
 O let my contrite heart be near
 To Him who suffered on the cross,
 That truly now I may repent
 80 Of all the sins that e'er I did.

XI.

For ever in captivity
 Those felons make me languish,
 Who in their crass insanity
 Three kings have now elected.
 85 Upon the youngest, in stately pomp,
 A crown of gold they've placed.
 Keep him, Jesu, the Son of Mary,
 From traitors, whom God confound !

XII.

May God confound his enemies,
90 And make of him a monarch wise,
Endowéd both with might and will
Fair fame to uphold and chivalry !
And let them all be brought to shame
Who seek to harm or injure him !
95 And then at last shall be fulfilled
The inmost wish of all my heart.

XIII.

My heart no longer will lament,
And weep o'er earthly honours ;
But let sweet Jesu, Who redeemed us
100 By His most precious blood,
Moved by the prayers of all the Saints
Who in His glory share,
Lead us ere long to that great joy
Which shall be without end.

XIV.

105 An end I'll make and say no more.
Hie thee, my song, on wings !
Go to the Doe beyond Kenire [= Kenilworth ?]
And tell it her in brief.
That when the stag is roused to wrath
110 And turns upon the hounds,
She may forgo the leech's care,
Bearing herself so wise.

XV.

Both wise and fool I would entreat,
Make prayers for me, ye all,
115 To Mary, the mother all merciful,
Who bore the almighty Lord,
That through the joys she had of Him
She may her Son beseech,
For all my sins and treacherous deeds
120 To grant me mercy yet.

MONTANA, SWITZERLAND.

PAUL STUDER.