London, British Library, Harley 2253

London, British Library, Harley 2253, contains over one hundred religious and secular texts written in French, English and Latin. The manuscript itself can be dated to ca. 1250, though many of the texts will have originated earlier. It was compiled by a scribe in the Marches region, probably someone working in the town of Ludlow in Shropshire, who may have had native connections with Warwick. This same scribe was also responsible for the collection of texts in London, British Library, Harley 625, and appears to have had access to a large number of exemplars in Latin, French and English. He compiled a number of these exemplars for the compilation of Harley 2253, which appears to have been compiled for edification and for entertainment, probably at the request of a considerable volume. Among the non-English contents of Harley 2253 are hagiographies, prayers, prayers, devotions, instruction for religious observances, biblical stories, historical texts, and descriptions of the Holy Land. The fifty-three English texts, which include King Horn, are all from the time of shift from the thirteenth century, as Derek Pearsall states: “It contains unique copies of poems and groups of poems whose loss would wipe out our knowledge of whole areas of English poetry, some of which are absent from the medieval manuscripts for the study of lyrical poems. It is a vital witness to secular poetic texts composed in English in particular, for Derek Pearsall states: “It contains unique copies of poems and groups of poems whose loss would wipe out our knowledge of whole areas of English poetry, some of which are absent from the medieval manuscripts for the study of lyrical poems.”

There appears to be little thematic structuring of the material in Harley 2253; rather, the English lyrics are interspersed with French and Latin texts, and are not themselves organized into groupings such as ‘religious’, ‘secular’ or ‘political’, as is the case of the poems edited below. The lyrics from Spring to Earth upon Earth, found at folio 59 verso, is a well-known Cinica in cinem reversiti, “Remember man that you are dust and to dust you shall return”, used in the Ash Wednesday liturgy. This version is the original text that may date from the eleventh century; the many later versions often expand these four lines.

Earth upon Earth

Erpe toc of erpe erpe wyr woh,
Erpe ethe erpe to be erpe droh;
Erpe leyde erpe erpe ynoh.
Do hevede erpe erpe erpe ynoh.

5. G. L. Brook, ed., The Harley Lyric (Manchester, 1943); Ker, Facsimile of British Museums MS. Harley 2253, CRS 625, pp. xx–xxi.
Altyoun

This secular love lyric, contained at folio 61 verso, opens with the refrain, the traditional description of spring, that here leads into a refrain that the poet is suffering for long. The burden, or refrain, with its double iteration, of a joyful song that through a careless abandon serves to emphasize the unceasing love-sickness of the speakers in the stanzas. Altyoun is described in terms of courtly love, which run through the second and third stanzas, interpreted with the poet's melancholic remarks. Altyoun is the representative example of the Spang. The speaker, who now, and make love, while the poet must contend with his equally ardent desires and desperation to find a lover.

Altyoun

Bernard Merch ant Averil,
When spryng is come to spryng,
Be lustefoul hal hire wyl
On lyte lad to syngage.
Lys hibbe in love-longinge
For semlocke of ary sungage:
He may me blisse bringe,
Icham in hire handoun.

An handy hap Ichaboe spreth,
Kisht from hirent it is me nent;
From alle wytnames mi love is tot,
Ant lyth on Altyoun.

On hyre hire her is sayt ynoth,
Hire browe broune, hire eye blake,
Wip lossum thre he on me leb,
Wip middel smale ant wel ymakte.
Bone he me wolde to hire take
Some burn hire owen make,
Longe to hyvyn chytle forstake,
Ant, feye, fallen adoun.
An handy hap eor.

Nihirres when Ye veerde ant wake,
For myn wonges waxe won,
Leved, al for pane sake,
Longinge is stirs me on
In world pis con to wyer mon
Pat al hire bounce calle con.
Hire sywee is whittore ben pe sywe,
Ant feytre may in tone.
An henly hap eor.

Icham for wrynyng al forwaker,
Wesy to waver in waver,
Lesst any rewe me my make
Ychaboe ystryned seer.
Beere is hydren wylye seer
Pen mauntene exustore.
Geveox under gore,
Herkne to my roon.
An henly hap eor.

S sneak love lyric, at folio 71 verso of Harley 2253, who now, and make love, while the poet must contend with his equally ardent desires and desperation to find a lover. This secular love lyric, at folio 71 verso of Harley 2253, runs through the second and third stanzas, interpreted with the poet's melancholic remarks. Altyoun is the representative example of the Spang. The speaker, who now, and make love, while the poet must contend with his equally ardent desires and desperation to find a lover.

Spring

Lexent ys come wip love so coars;
Wip bloosmene ant wip briddes roote;
Par al pis blisse bryndep.
Dayesites in pis dales,
Notes suuer of mynregale,
Ich byndeful hym brendep oo;
Away is huere winters wo.
When wode-sve springep,
His hales singep feely fele,
Ant wyllep on huere wyntene wynt
Par al pe wode wyntep.

Be rase caylep hire wid,
He leven on pe lyhte wode
Woxen al wip blynde.
Be more mandepe hire bleo;
Be like is lasson to so,
Ve rivel ant pe fille
Woxen pe wode drakes,
Miles merype hurdye makes
Ase streem pat strykep stille.
Moly menely, to dop mow,
Icham Icham on al jo
For love pe likes ille.

Be more mandepe hire lyht,
So dop de sevlyn some bygray
When bydete singep breme.
Drawes donkelep dounees,
Deores wip huere doune roonees
Domes foree dowens.
Woxen wapent under cloze,
Wyntem waxen wyntende ponerse
So wel hit wol hem segen.
Set me shall wante wille of on
Dis wanne wende Y wolde forgen,
Ant wyth in wode be flemme.

FRANN

Wester's woodruff
in underfal profusion
warble; abundant joy
puts on; redness
wi//ingneJI
,erch; beatm
chervil
Woo
AnimaiJ; delight;
mateJ
P(,mionate men; complain;
ring; J"mune
thvse
badly
brightly
Dews; soak
Animals; secret
Wishes; declare
dod
wonderful/y
suit/befit
lack; my desire
fil
them
wealth of joy; forego
as a creature; banished

FRANN

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