

Period Political Songs

Bards in the SCA are often criticised for writing verse that is not always 'nice'. I thought that I would include a couple of songs to show how mild we are in comparison to period practice.

This is a filk (yes, they can be period) by an unknown author using the tune of a popular hymn of the time. It celebrates the murder of Edward II's 'favourite' Piers Gaveston by the Barons in 1312. As well as being openly flaunted as the King's lover, he was regarded by many as being the person who actually ran the country. His friends and relations were pushed into positions of power and this was also resented by both the Barons and the commoner people.

De Petro de Gavestone

Vexilla regni prodeunt,
fulget cometa comium
Comes dico Lancastræ
qui domuit indomium
Quo vulneratus pestifer
mucronibus Walensium,
Truncatus est atrociter
in sexto mense mesium
Impleta sunt quæ censuit
auctoritas sublimium
Mors Petri sero patuit, —
regnavit diu nimium
Arbor mala succitur
dum collo Petrus cæditur: —
Sit benedicta framea
quæ Petrum sic aggreditur !
Beata manus jugulans !
beatus jubens jugulam !
Beatum ferrum feriens
quem ferre nollet sæculum !
O crux, quae pati pateris
hanc miseram miseriam,
Tu nobis omnem subtrahe
miseriæ materiam !
Te, summa Deus Trinitas,
oramus prece sedula,
Fautores Petri destruas
et conteras per sæcula ! AMEN

You didn't think that I would leave it untranslated did you?

The banners of the kingdom go forth, the comet of Earls shines, I mean the Earl of Lancaster, who tamed him whom nobody else could tame; whereby the pestiferous one being wounded by the blades of the Welsh, was disgracefully beheaded in the sixth month. What the authority of the powers above has been fulfilled; the death of Peter at last has been effected — he reigned much too long. The bad tree is cut down, when Peter is struck on the neck: — Blessed be the weapon which thus approached Peter! Blessed be the hand which executed him! blessed the man who ordered the execution! blessed the steel which struck him whom the world would not bear any longer! O Cross, which allowed to be suffered this wretched misery, do thou take from us all the material of misery. Thee, highest God in Trinity, we pray earnestly, destroy and crush for ever the maintainers of Peter. AMEN

The following is the start of a song written during the reign of Henry III in the early thirteenth century. For reasons of space I only have the translation (these things are long).

Song on the Corruptions of the Time

How wide and how long is the web of crimes with which our breasts, choked with vices, are enveloped, tell and reveal. O muse, with a mournful countenance, if you care to touch the heart of the spectator with your lament. The wretched and profane people seem to form their wishes in consideration, not of

the price of virtue, but of flax or wool: what is done in the evening is unwrought in the morning. O cares of men! O how much emptiness there is in things! Every eye is blind to justice; every mind is large in injustice; a thousand hopes of men and the differing aspects of things depend on the dice and uses of fortune. When chaste maidens join in dance with the strumpet, when the Arabs play the pauper under the robe of a beggar, when Tydeus denies his faith to his Polynices, then, if you are admitted to the spectacle, my friends, can you restrain your laughter? If you are anxious to know all men by their several failings, who practise sloth, who are the plotters of treason, who are the servants of Mammon, who are the despisers of God, we must observe the manners of every age of life. The boy, as he learns the use of feet, hates the doors, flies abroad; he respects things and honour less than the least; anger and joy succeed each other with short intervals, for the changes are sudden. The youth flies from his tutor and confinement; he delights in horses, dogs, dice and wine, a hunter of his pleasures, whose occupation is with women, a slow provider of useful things, prodigal of money. When arrived at manhood, that he may rule the citizens and dictate to the prætor, that he may extend his possessions with a longer cable, and fill his bags with greater treasure, he seeks riches and friendships and is a slave to honours. (and six more pages)

These are taken from:

Wright, Thomas (1839) *The Political Songs of England: From the Reign of John to that of Edward II*
Camden Society, London.