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Walter Scheps

Chaucer and the Middle Scots Poets



For Scottish poets of the fifteenth century, Chaucer was, to use their expression, the “A per se” of poets writing in English. Dunbar calls him, “The noble Chaucer, of makaris flour,”¹ and it is his death which begins the doleful rollcall in *Lament for the Makaris*. In *The Goldyn Targe*, Chaucer again is preeminent:

O reverend Chaucere, rose of rethoris all,
As in oure tong ane flour imperiall,
That raise in Britane evir, quho redis rycht,
Thou beris of makaris the tryumph riall;
Thy fresch anamalit termes celicall
This mater coud illumynit have full brycht:
Was thou noucht of oure Inglisch all the lycht,
Surmounting eviry tong terrestriall,
Alls fer as Mayis morow dois mydnycht?
(253-61)

James I, the supposed author of *The Kingis Quair*, yokes Chaucer and Gower together, and his description is somewhat similar to Dunbar's:

¹*Lament for the Makaris* (l. 50). This and all subsequent references are to *The Poems of William Dunbar*, ed. W. Mackay Mackenzie (Edinburgh, 1932).

...my maisteris dere,
 Gowere and chaucere, that on the steppis satt
 Of rethorike, quhill thai were lyvand here,
 Superlatiue as poetis laureate
 In moralitee and eloquence ornate...²
 (*The Kingis Quair*, st. 197)

For Henryson, he is "worthie Chaucer glorious" whose "gudeliie termis and...Joly veirs" can "cut the winter nicht and mak it schort."³ Gavin Douglas's praise of Chaucer is a paeon of aureate exuberance:

...venerabill Chaucer, principal poet but peir,
 Hevynly trumpat, orlege and reguler,
 In eloquens balmy, cundyt and dyall,
 Mylky fontane, cleir strand and roys ryall,
 Of fresch endyte, throu Albion iland braid...⁴
 (Prologue to Bk. I, *Eneyados*, 339-43)

Although Blind Harry does not explicitly mention Chaucer, he undoubtedly was influenced by him,⁵ and we may safely assume that his sentiments, if available, would not differ appreciably from those cited above, which in turn are similar to those of the English Chaucerians, Lydgate, Hoccleve, and Hawes.⁶

Even a cursory examination of Chaucer's influence on fifteenth-century poetry is enough to indicate how extensive it was, far more extensive, for example, than Milton's influence on poetry of the eighteenth century

²"*The Kingis Quair*" Together with "A Ballad of Good Counsel," ed. W.W. Skeat, *STS*, NS1 (Edinburgh & London, 1911). All references are to this edition.

³*Testament of Cresseid*, stanzas 6, 9. This and all subsequent references are to *The Poems and Fables of Robert Henryson*, ed. H. Harvey Wood, 2nd ed. (London, 1958).

⁴Virgil's "*Aeneid Translated into Scottish Verse by Gavin Douglas, Bishop of Dunkeld*," ed. David F.C. Coldwell, *STS*, 3rd Series 25, 27, 28, 30 (Edinburgh & London, 1951-64). All references are to this edition.

⁵The connection was first noted by W.W. Skeat, "Chaucer and Blind Harry," *The Modern Language Quarterly*, 1 (1897), pp. 49-50.

⁶These are most conveniently found in Caroline F.E. Spurgeon, *Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion: 1357-1900*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 1925). See also Alice S. Miskimin, *The Renaissance Chaucer* (New Haven & London, 1975).

and, at least in England, with equally melancholy results. There is no major poet writing in English during the fifteenth century who is not, in his own mind at least, a disciple of Chaucer. The qualification is an absolute necessity because in the fifteenth century the distinction between those works actually composed by Chaucer and others which, for reasons to be discussed shortly, only seemed to be his could not be made with any degree of certainty. Indeed, for sheer bulk, the pseudo-Chaucer outweighs the real, and thus when a poet pays general homage to "Chaucer" it is entirely possible that he is referring to such spurious Chaucerian pieces as *Gamelyn*, *The Assembly of Ladies*, *The Flour and the Leaf*, et al. With regard to Henryson and Douglas the problem does not arise since they specifically cite *Troilus and Criseyde*⁷ and *The Legend of Good Women*⁸ respectively; but neither James I nor Dunbar mentions specific works, and it is only by a full consideration of the Chaucer canon that the meaning of their references to Chaucer can be understood.

Although the extensiveness of Chaucer's influence is generally conceded,⁹ its nature has rarely been studied in any detail. On the one hand, there are unsupported generalities about a "Chaucerian tradition,"¹⁰ on the other, citations of parallel passages, often commonplace, intended to show direct influence.¹¹ The problem with both approaches is a lack of perspective, and the choice they present between vacuity and punctilious attention to insignificant detail is singularly unattractive. What needs to be done, as Dr. Johnson says, is to begin with perception not principle. Each of the poets who is ordinarily considered to be a Scottish Chaucerian is highly individualistic, and the similarities among them, while noteworthy, are not nearly as important as the differences. Each poet is influenced by, and appropriates, often with modification, those aspects of Chaucer's genius which most nearly approximate his own: for James I, Chaucer would seem to be, as the translator of Boethius, primarily a philosophical poet; for Henryson, as he says, a poet who can simultaneously delight and instruct; for Blind Harry, as we shall see, a rhetorical guide; for Dunbar an inge-

⁷*Testament of Cresseid*, stanzas 6-10.

⁸*Eneyados*, Prologue to Bk. I, ll. 339-449.

⁹Especially by English and American scholars; the Scots tend to be somewhat more reluctant. See, for example, Tom Scott, *Dunbar: A Critical Exposition of the Poems* (Edinburgh & London, 1966) and especially his anthology of Middle Scots poetry, *Late Medieval Scots Poetry* (London, 1967), pp. 7-13.

¹⁰E.g., T.F. Henderson, *Scottish Vernacular Literature* (Edinburgh, 1910), pp. 64-5.

¹¹E.g., Skeat, "Chaucer and Blind Harry," p. 50, uses the commonplace simile "meek as a maid" in an attempt to demonstrate influence.

nious satirist and linguistic innovator¹²; and for Douglas in his *Eneyados* an expert metrist.¹³ It is not that the Scottish Chaucerians are narrow in their perception of Chaucer, but rather that they are intelligent enough to be selective in their use of the ideas and techniques which they have learned from him; and it is precisely this selectivity which distinguishes them from their English counterparts and which in part accounts for their superiority to them. The slavish imitator, Lydgate for example, is one who refuses to recognize the differences between himself and his model, a refusal which, for obvious reasons, would have been impossible for the Scots. Linguistic, cultural, and political differences prevent the Scots from making the same flaccid identification which the English Chaucerians had made with their master. Even James I, the least independent of the Scots Chaucerians,¹⁴ has little difficulty in retaining his individuality, this in spite of the fact that he makes no appreciable effort to do so.

As a necessary preliminary to an investigation of the Scots Chaucerians individually, there are three critical problems which must be discussed: 1) the Scottish literary tradition as opposed to the English, 2) the nature and extent of the Chaucer apocrypha, 3) the forms which Chaucerian influence can take, including the possibility of indirect Chaucerian influence.

It is a curious fact that much of what is called "Fifteenth-Century English Literature" is, like Skelton and most of Dunbar, not of the fifteenth century, or, like the Scots Chaucerians, not English, or, like the ballads, not literature. The only major writers who satisfy all three requirements are Lydgate and Malory, a monk and a prisoner, apparently the only occupations in fifteenth-century England conducive to the production of substantial literary works. Whatever may be said about the effects of the Wars of the Roses on English life, their effect on English literature seems

¹²See Deanna D. Evans, "William Dunbar as a 'Scottish Chaucerian,'" unpub. Ph.D. dissertation (Case Western Reserve U., 1971), esp. pp. 365-446.

¹³See the discussion of Chaucer's use of the decasyllabic couplet in William B. Piper, *The Heroic Couplet* (Cleveland & London, 1969), pp. 157-60. Piper's remarks on Chaucer apply equally well to Douglas, and Douglas's citation of the *Legend of Good Women*, referred to above, suggests that he was influenced in his *Aeneid* by Chaucer's metrical practices in a work whose prosody is among its most salient characteristics.

¹⁴See my essay, "Chaucerian Synthesis: The Art of *The Kingis Quair*," *SSL*, 8 (1971), pp. 143-65, and Caroline Spurgeon, I, xvi.

to have been to bring it to a virtual standstill;¹⁵ even the two writers of importance are looking back rather than forward, Malory to the Golden Age of Arthur, and Lydgate, through Chaucer, to Troy and Thebes.

In Scotland the tendency to abandon the present for the mythic past is limited primarily to a very few romances and to some of the popular ballads. The past in which the Scots are most interested is their own, which is at once both historical and immediately relevant, since for them history must have seemed to consist only of endlessly repetitive attempts by the English to destroy their sovereignty. Before the fifteenth century, the most important literary document of Scottish authorship is Barbour's *Bruce* (1375), a panegyric the popularity of which may have prompted Blind Harry to write his life of *Wallace* one hundred years later.¹⁶ The precariousness of Scotland's existence as an independent nation appears to have exerted a profound influence on her literature. In addition to Bruce and Wallace, both of whom achieved renown at the expense of the English, the great heroes in fifteenth-century Scotland are the borderers, many of whose exploits are celebrated in the ballads. Since these men were usually hunted by forces of their own king as well as by the English, their bravery captured the popular, if not the literary, imagination—a poet seeking the king's favor could hardly praise his enemies—, and stories about them seem to have been much in demand, as the subject matter of many of the early ballads suggests.

Robin Hood, too, was quite popular in Scotland and for essentially the same reason.¹⁷ The Scots could not fail to see the similarity between his struggle against tyranny and their own, and more particularly between him and heroes like Douglas and Wallace. In fact there is good reason to believe that Blind Harry to a large extent bases his description of Wallace on traditional accounts of Robin Hood,¹⁸ and should this be so it would hardly be surprising. Typical of the Scots' preference for their own heroes to those of antiquity is the fact that the author of the *Ballad of the Nine Nobles*

¹⁵I realize that this antique view has lost much credit in recent years, but those who reject it have yet to put forward a more credible or persuasive explanation for the decline in the quality of English, as opposed to Scottish, nondramatic writing during this period.

¹⁶See my essay, "Barbour's *Bruce* and Harry's *Wallace*: The Question of Influence," *TLS*, 17 (1972), pp. 19-24.

¹⁷In their first year of operation as printers (1508) Chepman and Myllar published "The Lytle Gest of Robin Hood."

¹⁸Some similarities are noted in passing by Joost De Lange, *The Relation and Development of English and Icelandic Outlaw Traditions* (Haarlem, 1935) and Maurice Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend* (London, 1961).

adds Bruce to the Nine Worthies because he "venkust the mychty Kyng / Off England, Edward, twyse in fycht."¹⁹

Characteristic of their dislike for authority even when embodied in Robin Hood, the popular audience, after having invested him with great physical strength enfeebles him to the point that he is bested by an assortment of tradesmen, tinkers, tanners, butchers, *et al.* But even though this is a later development, the interest of Scottish authors, and presumably their audiences, in ordinary people who are faced with extraordinary situations can be amply documented in the earlier literature. In the tale of *Rauf Coilyear*, for example, the hero is a seller of charcoal whose spirited discussion with Charlemagne about the nature and extent of imperial, as opposed to individual, sovereignty sets up the context, and to a lesser extent the tone, for similar confrontations in Dunbar's numerous petitions to the King and in several of Henryson's *Fables*, especially *The Parliament of forfuttit Beistis* and *The Lyon and the Mous*.

We tend to regard an author's preoccupation with the events of daily life as peculiarly modern, but this interest is one of the features which distinguishes medieval Scottish literature from most English literature of the same period. One reason for this phenomenon, the ever-present danger of Scotland's extinction, which required constant attention to those elements in Scottish life which made it worth preserving, has already been suggested. The avenues of escape into the past had been closed, the mythic past being either irrelevant, as in the case of Troy and Thebes, or merely "Suthron" as in the Arthurian material, and the historical past being little different from the present. Another reason, this one literary rather than historical or cultural, is given by Henderson who notes the relative superiority, in both quality and quantity, of minstrelsy to romance in medieval Scotland:

In those early times the carols, and rounds, and rude rhymes were almost the only means of voicing the nation's sentiments, and formed a sort of presage of our present daily press. On the other hand, the more elaborate poems scarcely touched the present at all. In these long Romances we have passing glimpses of ancient manners and customs, but they make known little or nothing of the main concerns of the nation; they are mainly translations or paraphrases of translations, and deal with times already remote from those of the narrator, and with adventures in love and war of heroes and heroines belonging to a partly mythical antiquity.²⁰

In short, the Scots poets, oral and lettered, are primarily secularists concerned with this world and its affairs, writing about military skill and individual courage for example, not as abstract heroic qualities, but as neces-

¹⁹This is quoted by A.W. Ward and A.R. Waller, *The End of the Middle Ages*, CHEL II (Cambridge, 1908), p. 280. See also W.H. Schofield, *English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer* (New York, 1906), p. 317.

²⁰*Scottish Vernacular Literature*, p. 19.

sities for national survival and devoting their attention even to colliers, tailors and shoemakers (Dunbar), and frogs and mice (Henryson).

When we turn to medieval English literature we find, not unexpectedly, that there is more of everything, homiletic and religious documents, romances, chronicles, etc., except the realistic description which characterizes the Scottish material. To be sure there are glimpses of daily life in the *Ancrene Riwe*, in the bourgeois romances like *Guy of Warwick*, and elsewhere, but these are usually fleeting and are almost always incidental to some larger purpose. Even *Piers Plowman*, which contains a wealth of realistic detail, does not present the real world as being significant except insofar as it reveals, and is emblematic of, Christian truths, a statement which with minimal modification would apply with equal validity to middle-English hagiography and mystical writings as well.²¹

Many middle-English carols and lyrics are realistic, but in England these are almost totally cut off from the literature written contemporaneously with them. Oral and written, or popular and literary, poetry seem to diverge much earlier in England than they do in Scotland. There is little if any evidence of lyric, ballad, or carol influence on fifteenth-century English poetry, whereas in Scotland Henryson feels no compunction about adopting the tone and form of the popular ballad in the *Bludy Serk*, and Blind Harry combines literary and oral conventions for his portrait of Wallace.²²

The one middle-English poet whose concerns answer most closely to those of the Scots is, of course, Chaucer. It is here that Gower falls by the way, for he demonstrates no appreciable interest in the physical universe for its own sake. The Man of Law's jocular comments on "Chaucer" are perfectly applicable to Gower:

²¹It may be objected that for the Scots writers, particularly Henryson, realistic detail is no less emblematic than for Langland. The crucial distinction, however, is that in Langland, no attempt is made to separate the literal from the allegorical; both levels are simultaneously operative as in Meed's trial at Westminster. In Henryson, on the other hand, the allegorical interpretation is invariably presented after the literal description and is most often denoted explicitly as the *moralitas*. In short, Henryson's passages containing realistic detail can exist independent of their allegorical signification, Langland's cannot.

²²The Scots seem always to have felt much more comfortable with their early literature than the English with theirs. Macpherson, for example, was esteemed for doing the same sort of thing for which Chatterton was driven to suicide, and Ramsay and Burns, because they presented themselves as unequivocal Scotsmen writing in their native tongue, were able to avoid the later censure heaped upon Bishop Percy even though the latter was considerably more altruistic and less devious in his revision of traditional material, Ramsay and Burns simply appropriating it and passing it off as their own.

But nathelees, certeyn,
 I kan right now no thrifty tale seyn
 That Chaucer, thogh he kan but lewedly
 On metres and on rymyng craftily,
 Hath seyde hem in swich Englissh as he kan
 Of olde tyme, as knoweth many a man;
 And if he have noght seyde hem, leve brother,
 In o book, he hath seyde hem in another.
 (Intro., *MLT*, 45-52)²³

It is in Chaucer, not in Gower, that we find realistic descriptions of a widow and her humble farm, a hard-headed miller, squawking geese, and perhaps even a Golden Spangled Hamburg.²⁴ Given the Scots' interest in such things, little wonder that their poets select Chaucer as a model worthy of emulation.

Although we are now closer to establishing the Chaucer canon than at any other time since the poet's death, a definitive solution to the problem seems unlikely. The fifteenth-century manuscripts in which the works are contained are far more helpful in establishing the text than the canon, and the ascription to Chaucer of works written by someone else is an error which even the best modern editions may make.²⁵ When we go back to the fifteenth century, the possibility of error is so great that it seems almost a certainty. From the specific references cited earlier we know that Henryson and Douglas assumed Chaucer to have written *Troilus and Criseyde* and the *Legend of Good Woman* respectively. From internal evidence it is probable that Dunbar ascribed to Chaucer *Sir Thopas* and *The Wife of Bath's Prologue*. James I may have known Chaucer as the author of part or all of the *English Romaunt of the Rose*, *Troilus and Criseyde*, *The Knight's Tale*, and the translation of Boethius, whereas Blind Harry, as Skeat points out, uses *Troilus and Criseyde*, the *General Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales*, and the *Knight's Tale*.

²³The *Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F.N. Robinson, 2nd rev. ed. (Cambridge, Mass., 1957). All citations are to this edition.

²⁴See Lalia P. Boone, "Chauntecleer and Partlet Identified," *MLN*, 54 (1949), 78-81. What is significant here is not the identification of Chauntecleer with a specific kind of rooster, but the fact that Chaucer's description of him is sufficiently detailed to encourage such speculation.

²⁵See Robinson's discussion of the problem of the *English Romaunt of the Rose* in *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, pp. 872-3.

The crucial question, however, is whether the Scots Chaucerians could have been able to separate these works from others which, though not written by Chaucer, continued to be attributed to him well into the nineteenth century. All of the Scottish writers except James had the advantage, if such it can be called, of being able to consult printed editions of Chaucer, but these fifteenth-century editions were not of the collected works, the first collected editions being those of Pynson (1526) and Thynne (1532), each of which contained spurious poems as well as the authentic ones. Not printed in the fifteenth century are the following: *Book of the Duchess* (Thynne, 1532), *Legend of Good Women* (Thynne, 1532), *Romaunt of the Rose* (Thynne, 1532; ll. 1-1705), *Treatise on the Astrolabe* (Thynne, 1532), and fourteen of the twenty-one short poems.²⁶ It is interesting to note that Douglas's reference to the *Legend of Good Women* precedes the first publication of that work by nineteen years; obviously Douglas had access to manuscripts of Chaucer's works, and it is reasonable to assume that the other Scots Chaucerians consulted manuscripts as well.

When we turn from the printed editions to the manuscripts, we can see how fluid the Chaucer canon was during the fifteenth century. For example, although neither of Caxton's fifteenth-century editions of the *Canterbury Tales* includes *Gamelyn*,²⁷ this tale is preserved in twenty-five of the eighty-three (or eighty-four if the Morgan fragment of the *Pardoner's Tale* is included) manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales*.²⁸ So closely associated is *Gamelyn* with the *Canterbury Tales* that it appears only in manuscripts which also contain the authentic tales.

Various manuscripts also ascribe to Chaucer the following: *Beryn*, *The Court of Love*, *The Isle of Ladies*, *The Complaint of the Black Knight*, *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale*, *The Lamentation of Mary Magdalen* and more than twenty others.²⁹ In addition to these are works with either no manuscript ascription or ascription to someone other than Chaucer which appear in the same manuscript containing the

²⁶Of the shorter poems, only the following were printed in the fifteenth century: *The Complaint of Mars*, *Fortune*, *Truth*, *Gentilesse*, *The Complaint of Venus*, *Lenvoy de Chaucer a Scogan*, and *The Complaint of Chaucer to his Purse*.

²⁷See Eleanor P. Hammond, "On the Order of the *Canterbury Tales*: Caxton's Two Editions," *MP*, 3 (1905-06), pp. 59-78.

²⁸For a list of the *Gamelyn* manuscripts, see Francis R. Rogers, "The Tale of *Gamelyn* and the Editing of the *Canterbury Tales*," *JEGP*, 58 (1959), p. 49.

²⁹An excellent study of the Chaucer apocrypha has been made by Francis W. Bonner, "The Genesis of the Chaucer Apocrypha," *SP*, 47 (1951), 461-81. See also W.W. Skeat, *The Chaucer Canon* (Oxford, 1900).

authentic works. The extent of the problem is indicated by Bonner: "Almost all of the more than three-score pieces of the Chaucer apocrypha make their first appearance in the manuscripts of the fifteenth century."³⁰ Two notable exceptions are *The Testament of Love* (Thynne, 1532) and *The Flower and the Leaf* (Speght, 1598).

The absorption of apocryphal works into the Chaucer corpus is a process which is clearly documented by Skeat, Hammond,³¹ Bonner, and Miskimin, and hardly needs to be described here.³² What becomes clear from even this brief discussion is the crucial importance of the apocryphal material to any study of Chaucer's influence on fifteenth-century literature. For most of the century, the manuscripts provide the only evidence for ascribing specific works to Chaucer, and the absence of a collected edition before 1526 tends to perpetuate their authority, there being no authority of equal weight to dispute them. And when such an authority does appear, it supports, rather than refutes, the tendency of the manuscripts to ascribe anonymous poems, especially love poems,³³ to Chaucer. That the Scots Chaucerians accepted all the manuscript ascriptions to Chaucer is unlikely, but it is even less likely that they rejected all of them; and only intensive analysis of a kind which is beyond the scope of this essay can help to make clear the highly selective process by which Chaucer came for each of these very different poets to occupy the place of master.

Because Chaucer is such a compendious writer, his influence on subsequent literature manifests itself in ways which are often barely discernible, taking the form of a characteristic attitude, situation, or rhetorical pattern which may not seem peculiarly Chaucerian but which comes to be

³⁰p. 469.

³¹Eleanor P. Hammond, *Chaucer: A Bibliographical Manual* (New York, 1908), esp. pp. 51-69.

³²Perhaps a single example will serve to illustrate the general tendency. Robert Toye's edition of Chaucer (1545), the third collected edition, contains the same material as Thynne's edition of 1542. There is, however, one important change in the order of the *Canterbury Tales*; the *Plowman's Tale*, which Thynne prints after the *Parson's Tale*, is moved to a position anterior to it. Thus, what in Thynne had been a "Chaucerian piece" is in Toye a part of the *Canterbury Tales*.

³³See Bonner, p. 465, who says, "The fact that Chaucer was renowned in his own day and during the fifteenth century as the chief English poet of love and was supposed to have composed a large body of love poetry [see his own statement to this effect in *The Prologue to the Legend of Good Women*, G 410-11] very probably influenced his early editors to assign to him many 'unclaimed' compositions of that genre."

associated exclusively with him. The reasons for this tendency are clearly Chaucer's popularity and the availability of his work, the latter being in part merely a reflection of the former. Honored by his contemporaries, Gower and Usk, rewarded by the king and other members of the court, Chaucer is renowned well before his death. As his fame and importance increase, so too does the number of manuscripts containing his work, and because he writes in a dialect intelligible throughout England and the lowlands of Scotland, his writings receive wide dissemination. In some ways the fifteenth-century reaction to Chaucer must have been much like ours, for although he is certainly not the first middle-English poet to discuss the meaning of dreams or to describe the coming of Spring, his descriptions are the ones we tend to think of first, and, they therefore become the standard against which all similar descriptions are measured.

The dream-vision is perfectly illustrative of this phenomenon. In Old English the "tradition" begins and ends with *Dream of the Rood*: in middle English the great progenitor is the *Roman de la Rose*, Dante being generally less accessible and less concerned with the form itself. Although the form is employed before the fourteenth century, its full efflorescence is not reached until Chaucer, Langland, and the *Pearl*-poet. Of the three, *Pearl* seems to exert no influence at all. It has come down to us in only one manuscript, its dialect severely limits its intelligibility outside the West Midlands, and, as a stylistic and highly technical *tour de force*, it discourages imitation. *Piers Plowman*, which seems to have been an enormously popular work—if the number of manuscript copies is any indication of popularity—nevertheless exerts only limited influence. Like *Pearl*, *Piers* is a difficult and idiosyncratic work; the alliterative tradition does not continue unabated into the fifteenth century, and an explicitly allegorical poem written in alliterative staves is not likely to excite emulation. The influence which is exerted by *Piers* is essentially stylistic and is limited almost exclusively to the imitation of Langland's verbal and satirical brilliance by Dunbar and Skelton, who, when they come to employ the dream-vision form, ignore Langland and turn instead to Chaucer. With regard to the influence of Chaucer's dream-visions, as opposed to *Pearl* or *Piers*, one possible explanation is the authoritative way in which Chaucer identifies himself with this kind of poem. He has, he says, translated at least part of the *Roman de la Rose*. He also translates *The Consolation of Philosophy*, which while not a dream is nevertheless a vision, and in his other works constantly refers to the leading medieval authority on dreams, Macrobius, whose commentary he uses as the point of departure for the discussions of dreams in *Troilus*, the *Nun's Priest's Tale*, and elsewhere. These discussions, as has often been noted, are heavily Boethian, and the combination of Boethius and Macrobius is to help characterize Chaucer for at least one Scottish poet, namely James I. In addition to the passages on the nature and meaning of dreams, are comparable passages dealing with vision, in the *Knight's Tale*, for example, and these are connected

with the discussions of dreams by the Boethian influence which permeates both.

What Chaucer attempts, and accomplishes, is truly remarkable. He establishes himself as the translator of the most famous medieval dream-vision poem and uses it as the model for his own efforts in this form. He describes his copy of Macrobius's *Commentary on the Somnium Scipionis* as "myn olde bok totorn" and gives ample evidence of his knowledge of the various kinds of dreams and how they should be interpreted. He explores the relationship between prophetic dreams and the operation of man's free will as well as that between dream and vision. Each of these elements if separated from the others would not be especially significant, but taken together they serve to make Chaucer what he in fact becomes for the fifteenth century, an authority on dreams whose practical use of them in his poetry is complemented by theoretical discussions of their origin, nature, interpretation, and significance. That fifteenth-century authors should model their dream visions on Chaucer then is not only natural but inevitable.

For poets not interested in dreams, of course, the Chaucerian standard is entirely different. The case of Blind Harry is an especially interesting one. Here we have a poet who, like most Scottish poets of this century, is at his best in descriptions which require realistic detail. Although there is a sameness to his battle descriptions—after all, far greater poets suffer from the same affliction—they are generally immediate and effective. Even more effective are his detailed descriptions of Scottish topography, so effective in fact that it has been suggested that he must have been a herald because only a professional traveler would have access to the specialized information which Harry obviously has at his disposal.³⁴ Yet in spite of his pointed observations about the Scottish landscape, all of his long nature descriptions are patently Chaucerian. With an easy familiarity, apparently bred by long acquaintance with such places, he describes a "strength" on the water of Cree as follows:

A strenth thar was on the wattir off Cre,
With-in a roch, rycht stalwart, wrocht off tre;
A gait befor, mycht no man to It wyn
But the consent off thaim that duelt with-In.
On the bak sid a Roch, and wattir was
A strait entre forsuth it was to pas. (VI, 803-08)³⁵

³⁴For discussions of Harry's vocation see J.T.T. Brown, *The "Wallace" and the "Bruce" Restudied* (Bonn, 1900); W.H. Schofield, *Mythical Bards and "The Life of William Wallace"* (Cambridge, Mass., 1920), pp. 116-46.

³⁵*Harry's "Wallace"*, ed. Matthew P. McDiarmid, *STS*, 4th Series 4, 5 (Edinburgh & London, 1968-69). All references are to this edition.

In the battle which follows (809-33), each of the above details is to be significant. But when Harry comes to describe nature in more general terms, the change of seasons for example, his description is radically different.

In Aperill the one and twenty day,
 The hie calend, thus Cancer, as we say
 The lusty tym off Mayus fresche cummyng
 Celestiall gret blythnes in to bryng;
 Pryncypaill moeth forsuth it may be seyn,
 The hewynly hewis apon the tendyr greyn;
 Quhen old Saturn his cloudy cours had gon,
 The quhilk had beyn bath best and byrdis bon;
 Zepherus ek, with his suet vapour,
 He comfort has, be wyrking off natour,
 All fructuous thing in-till the erd adoun
 At rewlyt is wndyr the hie Region;
 Soby Luna, in flowyng off the se;
 Quhen brycht Phebus is in his chemage hie,
 The Bulys cours so takin had his place;
 And Iupiter was in the Crabbis face;
 Quhen Aryet the hot syng [sic] coloryk,
 In-to the Ram quhilk had his Rowmys Ryk,
 He chosyn had his place and his mansuun
 In Capricorn, the sygn off the Lioun;
 Gentill Iupiter with his myld ordinance
 Bath Erb and tre reuertis in plesance,
 And fresch Flora his floury mantill spreid
 In euery waill, bath hop, hycht, hill, and meide—
 This sammyn tym, for thus myn auctor sayis,
 Wallace to pass off Scotland tuk his wayis.
 (IX, 125-50)

All of Chaucer's rhetorical furniture is here: astrological allusions, references to classical deities, etc. Even the time of year is the same as in the *General Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales*, and in addition to the verbal echoes (e.g., l. 133), we might note that the syntax of the transition (ll. 149-50) is almost identical to Chaucer's (*General Prologue*, ll. 12-14).

As Skeat noted many years ago, Harry is a bona-fide Chaucerian, but passages similar to the one from the *Wallace* appear also in a poem which seems to have inherited little from Chaucer. I refer to the romance of *Lancelot of the Laik* (ca. 1485-1500) in which the following nature descriptions appear:

The soft morrow ande The lustee Aperill,
 The wynter wet, the stormys in exill,
 Quhen that the brycht & fresch illumynare

Upristh arly in his fyre chare
His hot courss in to the orient,
And frome his spere his goldine stremis sent
Wpone the grond, in maner off mesag,
One euery thing to valkyne thar curage,
That natur haith set wnder hire mycht,
Boith gyrss, and flour, & euery lusty vicht;
And namly thame that felith the assay
Of lufe, to schew the kalendis of may,
Throw birdis songe with opine wox one hy,
That sessit not one lufaris for to cry,
Lest thai foryhet, throw slewth of Ignorans,
The old wsage of lowis obseruans. (1-16)³⁶

Quhen tytan, withe his slsty heit,
Twenty dais In to the aryeit
Haith maid his courss, and all with diuerss
 hewis
Aparalit haith the feldis and the bewis,
The birdis amynd the erbis and the flouris,
And one the branchis, makyne gone thar bouris,
And be the morow singing in ther chere
Welcum the lusty sessone of the yere. (335-42)

The long dirk pasag of the vinter, & the lycht
Of phebus comprochit with his mycht;
The which, ascending In his altitud,
Awodith saturn with his stormys Rude;
The soft dew one fra the hewyne doune valis
Apone the erth, one hillis and on valis,
And throw the sobir & the mwst hwmouris
Vp nurisit ar the erbis, and in the flouris
Natur the erth of many diuerss hew
Ourfret, and cled with the tendir new.
The birdis may them hiding in the grawis
Wel frome the halk, that oft ther lyf berevis;
And scilla hie ascending in the ayre,
That euery vight may heryng hir declar
Of the sessone and passing lustynes. (2471-85)

³⁶Ed. W.W. Skeat, *EETS* 6 (London, 1865). All references are to this edition.

Stylistically, these passages are reminiscent of Chaucer, but as Miss Gray points out, they are even closer to Harry.³⁷ What we seem to have here is a case of indirect Chaucerian influence, the agent of transmission being Harry's *Wallace*. This indirect Chaucerian influence is not limited to the passages on nature. The treatment of prophetic dreams, for example (365-522; 2003-2130) is very much like Harry's (VII, 68-152) which in turn is somewhat like Chaucer's (e.g., *Nun's Priest's Tale*, VII, 2896-3156; *Troilus and Criseyde*, V, 1233-1533) and the same process is illustrated by the *Lancelot*-poet's handling of the decasyllabic couplet.³⁸

If an essentially non-Chaucerian poem like *Lancelot* can be shown to demonstrate certain Chaucerian characteristics at one remove from their source, it is obvious that the limits of Chaucerian influence on fifteenth-century Scottish literature cannot be ascertained by examining only the overtly Chaucerian pieces. Others, like the *Howlat*, *Jack Upland*, *Golagros and Gawain*, and *Rauf Coilyear*, must be studied as well, and although such a study has not, to my knowledge, yet been attempted, I suspect the results would indicate that the case of *Lancelot* is far from unique.

When we turn back to direct Chaucerian influence the categories remain the same, substantive and stylistic, but the evidence is more readily accessible. Under substantive influence would come the various attempts to add tales to the Canterbury group and to complete tales which Chaucer left unfinished, verbal echoes and, in some instances, even direct quotation, poems which are written to complement, extend or refute Chaucer's opinions on various issues raised in his poetry, appropriation of characters, situations and attitudes found in Chaucer, etc. Stylistic influence includes imitation of Chaucer's rhetoric his metrics, his imagery, his diction (including perhaps some words of his own coinage), his particular use of traditional forms like the dream-vision and the fabliau, his distinction between the narrator and the author, his use of transitions, his irony, even his humor. Each of these kinds of influence must be studied in some detail before we can document Chaucer's influence upon Scottish poets; but such documentation will not suffice unless we are willing to take up the more general, and far more difficult, problems of the Chaucer canon in fifteenth-century Scotland and the overall relationship between medieval Scottish poetry and English poetry of the same era. Which poems, for example, did the Scottish "makaris" attribute to Chaucer? How did rhetorical theory and practice in Scotland, which culturally as well as politically was closely allied to France, differ from English rhetorical usage? And, most importantly, how are the peculiar and idiosyncratic facts of existence in

³⁷*Lancelot of the Laik*, ed. M.M. Gray, STS, NS2 (Edinburgh & London, 1912); xiv.

³⁸See my essay, "William Wallace and his 'Buke': Some Instances of their Influence on Subsequent Literature," *SSL*, 6 (1969), pp. 223-26.

fifteenth-century Scotland reflected in that nation's literature, and how do they serve to separate it from the English? Unless we are capable of answering these and related questions, we cannot, with any degree of confidence, expect to resolve the vexing problem of the nature of Chaucerian influence upon fifteenth-century Scottish poetry.

*State University of New York
Stony Brook*