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**David F. C. Coldwell, ed. Selections from Gavin Douglas. Oxford. The Clarendon Press. 1964. xxix + 164 pp. 18 shillings.**

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## Reviews

David F. C. Coldwell, ed. *Selections from Gavin Douglas*. Oxford. The Clarendon Press. 1964. xxix + 164 pp. 18 shillings.

In 1959, the Saltire Society Classics series brought out a selection from Douglas's poetry, edited by S. G. Smith and containing 70 pages of extracts from *Eneados* together with some short pieces from *The Palice of Honour* and *King Hart*. Previous to this edition and discounting examples printed in anthologies, we know of only one other volume of selections from Douglas in Middle Scots; this was a reprint of the Charteris edition of 1579 produced for popular consumption by the Morisons of Perth in 1787 and characterized by their habitual inaccuracy. Now we have a third presentation of the kind, this time a reduced version of Dr. Coldwell's complete edition commissioned by the Scottish Text Society; its advantage over Smith's Saltire volume lies mainly in the fact that Dr. Coldwell's text is based on his own version of the earliest MS. (the Cambridge MS., c. 1515), and not on the 1874 S.T.S. edition made by John Small from the Elphinstoun MS. (c. 1520). The Cambridge MS., owned by Trinity College, was made by Douglas's own secretary and bears annotations possibly by the poet himself. As the copy "nixt eftir the translation," it is the authoritative copy; Rutherford and Dundas produced a reliable transcription of it for the Bannatyne Club in 1839, without introductory material or notes.

Dr. Coldwell organises his Clarendon volume as follows: 1) an introduction wherein Douglas's translation is compared with Dryden's as a rendering and as poetry; 2) a biographical note on Douglas; 3) a note on the MSS. and previous editions; 4) extracts culled from appreciations by Warton, Saintsbury, Lewis and Tillyard, none of them, incidentally, Scotsmen; 5) the text itself, comprising about two thousand lines from *Eneados* and three hundred selected from *The Palice of Honour* by Miss Priscilla Preston and annotated by her; 6) notes, with line references; 7) a selective glossary of obsolete, dialectal or difficult words, about fourteen hundred in all, listed in the inflectional forms in which they appear. *King Hart*, now reckoned to be by another hand, is not included, nor even referred to. There is one illustration, of a woodcut by Sebastian Brant from his edition of Virgil printed at Strasbourg in 1502; it depicts the Romans as sixteenth-century Germans.

R E V I E W S

Dr. Coldwell's introduction takes this woodcut for its starting-point and observes that Douglas's attitude to Virgil was like Brant's—his characters are contemporary, not Virgilian or handled with the austere reverence of the translator who wants to make the personages suitably "ancient." "Douglas saw far less difference between the lives of Scots and Romans than Dryden did," he points out, and proceeds to illustrate the differences in conception by means of a number of parallel passages, concluding that "Douglas, less of a Latinist than Dryden, is largely for that reason closer to 'the common reader.'" In this Dr. Coldwell is following, rather uncritically, C. S. Lewis's argument in *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, from which he later prints a significant extract. Even though his method of translation, which was not line-by-line and depended on the couplet as unit rather than on the hexameter of the original greatly increased the number of lines in Virgil, Douglas was steadfastly faithful to his resolution

. . . to mak it braid and plane,  
Kepand na sudroun bot our awyn langage,

and ignored the cold decorum of Renaissance scholarship in favour of rough-hewn equivalence in *Scottis*, as far as the limitations of that tongue would allow. Dr. Coldwell's Lewis-inspired explanation would have been rendered more acceptable had he tried to see Douglas as a *makar*, in company with Henryson and Dunbar and their predecessors Barbour and the shadowy "Blyn Hary," both of whom wrote epics in Scots; as it is, he deals with Douglas in a vacuum so far as the development of Scots poetry is concerned and nowhere enters into any discussion of the condition in which Douglas found his "bad, harsk spech and lewit barbour tong," nor about its tragic petering-out at the time of its greatest linguistic triumph. *Eneados* is a curiosity not only because later readers were conditioned by the petrified pedantry of the new learning; religious and political pressures peculiar to Scotland soon afterwards combined to bring about the disintegration of *Scottis* as a vehicle for literature of the first order. A hundred years later *Eneados* could not have been attempted:

Yit stude he nevir weill in our tung endyte  
Les than it be by me now at this tyme.

Even in his own day the language was, on Douglas's admission, inadequate for the highest flights; its oral range was limited.

Nor yit sa cleyn all sudron I refus,  
Bot sum word I pronounce as nyghtbours doys:  
Lyke as in Latin beyn Grew termys sum,  
So me behufyt quhilum or than be dum  
Sum bastard Latyn, French or Inglys oys,  
Quhar scant war Scottis—I had nane other choys.

## STUDIES IN SCOTTISH LITERATURE

When he said, therefore, that he lacked the "fowth" or abundance of language Douglas was not simply exhibiting a conventional humility in the august company of "maist reverend Virgill, of Latyn poetis prynce." The year he completed his poetical labours of eighteen months was the year of Flodden, and this national disaster may perhaps, in Dr. Coldwell's words, have "worked to Douglas's political advantage," but, as is well known, this clash of arms came to be the symbol of the end of the old Scotland and of the destruction of the young seed of her Renaissance. Political trends towards Union implied a movement in favour of anglicisation and a London-centred culture; ironically enough it was as *patria sua exul*, under Wolsey's protection, that Douglas died in 1522, proscribed in his native land as rebel and traitor. He left behind him a great translation of *Aeneid* in a language soon to become tragically unread and unreadable and in mediaeval styles technically old-fashioned in his own day. Gavin Douglas was at heart a schoolman, and although his "nature" poetry looked forward to the eighteenth century, his *Scottis* was built up on the eclectic principle of modern *Lallans*, taking its own where it could be found, from Latin, French, the literary Scots of his predecessors, and English.

The selections themselves are, of course, arbitrary, but to be "helpful to the ordinary reader" and to "the university student," one would expect the original *Prologues* to be well represented, particularly I, VII, XII, and XIII, together with sizable extracts from the actual translation, especially of the early and more familiar books of the *Aeneid*. Once these requirements have been met, one editor's choice of additional material is probably as good as another's. Dr. Coldwell's *Selections* are therefore adequate, although we should have preferred more from the *Prologues* which, after all, represent the measure of Douglas's contribution as an original poet; Dr. Coldwell leaves out *Prologues* II, III, V, VI, X, and XI. The fifth *Prologue* starts conventionally in the spring, but contains further observations on the problems of translation, while the sixth treats of Hell, as poets and philosophers have conceived it. Comparing these selections with those in S. G. Smith's Saltire edition, we are inclined to find a greater variety in the latter, which omits only II, V, and IX, though the extracts themselves are short.

The accompanying notes are extremely helpful, though aimed at the scholar rather than at "the ordinary reader" for whom, according to the statement on the dust-cover, this series of texts is intended. Ordinary readers of Douglas have in the past had his works "modernised" for their benefit; this is why the impermanence of the language in which he wrote did not affect the popularity of his works, which continued to be read,

#### REVIEWS

along with those of Barbour, Blyn Hary, and Lyndsay, until the nineteenth century. Dr. Coldwell's glossary is useful but it is only a working vocabulary; a key to a translation of an epic like the *Aeneid* is obviously not going to be provided in 18 pages of dialectal and obsolete words taken from a translation in a language almost entirely dialectal or obsolete. The work is a sourcebook of what we call "Middle Scots"; no other *makar* has preserved the "wordhord" available to him so completely. For this reason the writer of the dust-jacket description deserves one bad mark for pointing out that "by some critics it [Douglas's version] has been accounted the best in *English*," and a second for drawing attention, with misquotation, to Ezra Pound's absurd claim for the translation as "actually better than the [*sic*] original." The audience for whom a text like this is intended do not need such crude salesmanship, particularly when about all it reveals is the ignorance of the seller concerning the nature of his wares. One may, of course, cut off the offending flap.

The printers have made an excellent job and it is hard to fault them. Dr. Coldwell's book is not a "populariser," but is more likely to be read or rather dipped into, than any full-scale edition of Douglas. This is the seventh in the Clarendon Mediaeval and Tudor Series and it is well up to the standard of its predecessors.

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Alexander Welsh. *The hero of the Waverley Novels*.  
New Haven. Yale University Press. 1963. xiv+273 pp.  
\$6.00.

Most careful readers of Scott have noted that there is something odd about his heroes: they are altogether too passive, they are acted on rather than act, they have an exaggerated, even a self-defeating, respect for law and public authority. This can be partly explained by interpreting the ostensible heroes of the Waverley Novels less as conventional heroes of fiction than as symbolic observers through whose innocent and law-abiding eyes the reader is allowed to see the tensions between picturesque violence and civilised order (with the latter in the end approved and victorious) that constitute the theme of most of Scott's best work. Mr. Welsh accepts this up to a point, just as he accepts and refers with gratifying generosity to my own argument about the centrality of Scott's concern with the transition from the age of heroic violence to the age of prudence. But he takes the point much further than this. He examines in perceptive detail