

4-1-1967

The Taill of Rauf Coilyear printed by Robert Lekpreuik at St. Andrews in 1572: A facsimile of the only known copy. With a bibliographical note by William Beattie. Edinburgh. The National Library of Scotland. 1966. xii + 32 pp. 25 shillings.

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Recommended Citation

Coldwell, David F. C. (1965) "The Taill of Rauf Coilyear printed by Robert Lekpreuik at St. Andrews in 1572: A facsimile of the only known copy. With a bibliographical note by William Beattie. Edinburgh. The National Library of Scotland. 1966. xii + 32 pp. 25 shillings.," *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 4: Iss. 3, 232–233.
Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol4/iss3/9>

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STUDIES IN SCOTTISH LITERATURE

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The Taill of Rauf Coilyear is here printed in facsimile from the unique copy in the National Library of Scotland. It is a Scottish variation on a common theme: how a king, Charlemagne in this instance, arrived incognito at the house of a subject, here Rauf, who by candour and directness gave him a lesson in manners, and who, subsequently meeting the king, was handsomely rewarded. This is an exceptionally lively version. The opening hunt is economically passed through; in fact, Rauf and the king meet in the fourth stanza. The following twenty stanzas contain the substance of the poem: the brisk conversation between king and subject, largely dominated by Rauf. The only minor characters of consequence, Rauf's wife and Schir Rolland, are sketched in firmly. The recognition is made, and Rauf becomes Schir Rauf. The poem ends with an irrelevant coda in which the new knight proves himself against a Saracen—though the episode might be defended as a demonstration that a collier can perform knightly feats if he escapes his laborer's role.

In all such poems there is an ambiguity. Do they speak for the common man, asserting that he is as good as knight or king? Or, on the other hand, are they, less sturdily, a kind of wish-fulfillment—"If only I had a million dollars . . . or a knighthood. . . ." The poem ends with Rauf rich, and safely ensconced in the privileged class (though "his wyfe wald he nocht foryet"). The poet, however, wrote with vigour and directness, qualities that seem to fit an assertion that merit should count, not rank, and less to fit a dream of luxury and splendour. But a critical essay on the poem is no part of the present edition.

Facsimiles of early Scottish printing are few, and this is therefore welcome. The collotype plates are clear and accurate. Reading from sixteenth-century print, however, is subjective in part, as it is from manuscripts. Poor type and poor paper do not produce certainty. Rather subjectively, then, I would add the following misprints to Dr. Beattie's list:

3a 3, "wel cumto" should be "welcum to."

REVIEWS

5b 16, "rid" should probably be "red" for the rime, though the poem has unrimed "rid" at 6a 7 and 14b 23.

5b 17, "aue" appears for "ane"; cf. "cunniug" at 3a 23.

10b 8, "busteoufly" should be "busteously"—the reading seems to be "-fl-" in comparison with "dispittously" at 15a 4.

14a 15, "bakheir" is surely a misprint for "bak heir (i.e. here)" or "backer" or "backer here."

On the other hand, I am not sure of some of the misprints reported:

8b 24, "tewellis" should be kept for the alliteration, and taken as "clothes" (OED, towel, 2b).

9a 7, "vndertak" can be kept: Rauf swears in the present that the coals should be brought.

10b 28, "Git" seems to be a badly printed "Gif"; cf. "fundin" in the same line, "said" at 11a 9, "mesure" at 11a 29, "fyue" at 11a 31, and "furth" at that same line. It is almost impossible to distinguish c's, f's, s's, and t's in some circumstances.

14b 19, "Cousingis" is possible, though rare, for "Cousingis," but at 15a 15 the reading is the more common "cusingis."

When Dr. Beattie does not mark a misprint, he probably accepts the reading, I believe rightly on 3a in stanza 7, "ruse," "behuse," and "excuse." The EETS edition reads "rufe," "behufe," and "excuse." The s's are necessary for the rime. "Roose" is a poetic word for "vaunt," "behuse" is the plural of "behuve," a variant of "behuvis," and the choice of words was influenced by the common phrase "use and behuvis."

The book is labelled "Keppie Facsimiles No. 1"; it is to be hoped that it begins a long series of reprints of rare and unique items in Dr. Beattie's care.

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