Gavin Douglas and the Seldne B 24 Manuscript

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The extent to which Chaucer’s poems were familiar to Scottish poets of the late Middle Ages is a perennial problem. In at least one instance it appears likely that Gavin Douglas’ knowledge of Chaucer stemmed from the Selden B 24 Manuscript.

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries this manuscript, which contains the earliest known version of the *Kingis Quair*, was in the possession of the Sinclairs of Roslin, cousins of Douglas. Moreover, Lord Henry of Sinclair is specifically identified as the manuscript’s owner on folio 230, where it is noted, “liber Henricii Dmi Sinclair.” This Lord of Sinclair could have been the cousin, “Sanct Clair,” who urged Douglas to translate the *Aeneid* and to whom the envoy of

My speciall gude lord Henry Lord Sanct Clair,  
Qhilk with grete instance diuers tymes seir,  
Prayir me transair Virgill or Omeir;  
Qhais plesour suithlie as I wnderstuid,  
As neir coniunct to his lordschip in bluid,  
So that me thocht his requeist ane command,  
Half disparit this wark tuik on hand,  
Nocht fullie grantand, nor anis sayand 5e  
Bot onelie to assay quhow it mycht be. (11. 2-10)

*Eneados* is directed.5

My Lord, to your nobilite in effect,  
To quham this wark I haue abufe direct,  
Gawyn, your cousyng, provest of Sanct Geill,  
Gretting in God ay lestand and gud heil. (11. 1-4)

Among the Chaucerian works included in the Selden B 24 are the *Troilus*, the *Legend of Good Wome*, the *Parliament of Fowls*, “Truth,”

5. “Hyr the Translater Direkkiis His Buik and Excusis Hym Self,” in *The Poetic Works of Gavin Douglas*, IV, p. 224; the dedication to Lord Henry occurs in the opening lines.

My master Chaucer greitlie Virgile offendit.
All thocht I be to bald hyme to repreif,
He was far baldar, certes, by his leif,
Saying he followit Virgillis lanterne to forne,
Quhen Eness to Dido was forsworne. (11. 14-18)

Legend of Good Women, which was printed by Thynne for the

Thoicht venerable Chaucer, principall poet but peir,

In his legeand of notable ladys, said
That he culd follow word by word Virgill,
Wisare than I mycht faill in laker stile . . . .

(11. 7; 12-14)

first time in 1532. Since Douglas translated the *Aeneid* and prepared this Prologue in 1512 or 1513, he could only have been familiar with Chaucer's *Good Women* in manuscript form. The Selden B 24 contains Chaucer's *Good Women* and was accessible to Douglas through his relationship with "Henry Lord Sanct Clair," and, therefore, it seems likely that Douglas was familiar with the manuscript.

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8. *The Poetic Works of Gavin Douglas*, II, p. 14; Douglas notes that in the *Legend of Good Women* Chaucer claims to render a word for word translation of Virgil:
