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Gavin Douglas and the Selden B 24 Manuscript

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*,¹ was in the possession of the Sinclairs of Roslin, cousins of Douglas.² Moreover, Lord Henry of Sinclair is specifically identified as the manuscript's owner on folio 230, where it is noted, "liber Henricii Dmi Sinclair."³ This Lord of Sinclair could have been the cousin, "Sanct Clair," who urged Douglas to translate the *Aeneid*⁴ and to whom the envoi of

My speciall gude lord Henry Lord Sanct Clair,
Quhilk with grete instance diuers tymes seir,
Prayit me translait Virgill or Omeir;
Quhais plesour suithlie as I wnderstuid,
As neir coniuinct 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 ze
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,
Greting in God ay lestand and gud heill. (11. 1-4)

Among the Chaucerian works included in the Selden B 24 are the *Troilus*, the *Legend of Good Women*, the *Parliament of Fowls*, "Truth,"

1. Eleanor P. Hammond, *Chaucer: A Bibliographical Manual* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1908), pp. 341-42.

2. Hammond, pp. 341-42.

3. J. T. T. Brown, *The Authorship of the Kingis Quair* (Glasgow: J. Maclehose & Sons, 1896), p. 70.

4. Gavin Douglas, "The Proloug of the First Buik," in *The Poetic Works of Gavin Douglas*, ed. John Small, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: W. Paterson, 1874), II, p. 6. Douglas himself states that Henry suggested the translation:

5. "Heyr the Translater Direkkis 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.

"Mars," and the "Complaint of Venus."⁶ In "The Prologue of the First Buik" of *Eneados*, Douglas chides Chaucer for taking liberties in translating Virgil's Dido story.⁷ In doing so, Douglas refers to Chaucer's

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

Legend of Good Women,⁸ which was printed by Thynne for the

Thocht venerable Chaucer, principall poet but peir,

 In his legeand of notable ladyis, said
 That he culd follow word by word Virgill,
 Wisare than I mycht fail in lakar stile
 (11. 7; 12-14)

first time in 1532.⁹ Since Douglas translated the *Aeneid* and prepared this Prologue in 1512 or 1513,¹⁰ 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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6. Hammond, pp. 341-42.

7. *The Poetic Works of Gavin Douglas*, II, p. 16, Douglas comments on Chaucer's boldness in translating Virgil:

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:

9. W. W. Skeat, *The Chaucer Canon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), pp. 160-61.

10. Small, ed., *The Poetic Works of Gavin Douglas*, I, p. cxliv notes that Douglas began his translation in 1512 and completed it, according to textual evidence, on July 22, 1513.