Book Review

Anglo-Scottish Literary Relations 1430–1550 by Gregory Kratzmann. Cambridge University Press. 282 pp. £13.50.

Dr Kratzmann's book is 'a study of literary influences . . . to show how a number of Scots poets, most of whom had some connection with the Stewart courts, drew upon English literature to enrich the quality of their own "making"'. It is in effect a considerable scholarly examination of the much-abused phrase 'The Scottish Chaucerians' and a study of this sort and scale was long overdue. Dr Kratzmann points out appositely how many of the Scots had already been in England, Dunbar, Douglas, Holland, Lyndsay, and of course King James himself who started it all with *The Kingis Quair,* and how many had their works printed in London in the early sixteenth century. So we can presume that the English poets were not unfamiliar with what was going on in the north. The author's main concern is to show what it was that Chaucer communicated to the Scots and how they used it in their own highly effective way, when contemporary English poets were following Lydgate into a wordy wilderness. This quality Dr Kratzmann identifies as the engagement of the author in his own story. In the dream-allegory or the court of love or whatever, the poet himself acts as a *dramatis persona, par excellence,* in *The Kingis Quair*, where the poet is presumably telling his own love story, though with great economy of detail, since his main purpose is to hammer out a philosophy to reconcile love, fortune and divine purpose.

One of the best chapters is the comparison of Chaucer's *Troilus* and Henryson's *Testament.* Here Dr Kratzmann is clear and perceptive compared with so much that has been written on this: 'The question of justice, of truth and falsehood in love, is at the core of the poem's meaning. In her blasphemy Cresseid attributes the blame for her wretchedness to the gods of love, and it is for what this act signifies—a refusal to recognise that she is bound to accept the constraints imposed by "devyne sapience" on "all things generabill"—that she is found guilty. Cresseid's blasphemy reflects her mistaken belief that her beauty, her ability to love and her capacity for attraction, are ordained to flower for ever. . . . . Henryson's focus is constantly upon human conduct in life.' Dr Kratzmann points out how Cresseid in her agony grows in moral stature as she understands the nature of her offence and how she comes to be 'the most impressive heroine in all British medieval literature'. *The Morall Fabillis* are decidedly homelier, the matter of Aesop rather than the matter of Troy and Chaucer. In comparing *The Cock and the Fox* with *The Nuns' Priest's Tale* the author finds in Henryson a stronger moral and serious tone and all the *Fabillis* are outstanding in

their stylistic variety, humour, moral vigour and intellectual control, qualities he ascribes to their essential Scottish traditions. A similar relationship to Chaucer's influence is argued for Douglas's *Palice of Honour* as compared with his *Aeneis*. The first goes back via Chaucer's *House of Fame* to *The Roman de la Rose* but it is a much more serious and closely constructed theme of the poet's search for Honour rather than Fame. There is a moral integrity in Douglas in contrast to a kind of ethical fuzziness and a rambling inconclusiveness which one has already found in Chaucer's *Troilus*. In his close comparison between Dunbar, Chaucer and Lydgate, the author's critique is basically sound: he contrasts Chaucer's and Lydgate's verbosity with the short sharp word-play of Dunbar and reworks the old themes with painstaking thoroughness, but it is in his evaluation of Dunbar and Skelton that he breaks new ground, suggesting that Skelton, who was virulently anti-Scottish, had some knowledge of Scots poetry and of Dunbar in particular. Obviously Skelton is the one man out in the Chaucer, Lydgate, Hawes tradition and has more affinities with the flyting and the popular alliterative Scottish muse of the day.

Again, in translating Virgil, the Scot Douglas had pioneered with his *Aeneis* in 1513, in which he strove to reproduce the spirit of the original with an amplitude that goes beyond the strict literalness of the Latin. Surrey in translating the Dido story made close use of Douglas in his own blank verses, but in trying to emulate Virgil's conciseness misses the essential qualities of vigour, colour and movement which Douglas so amply infuses into his translation. Yet it was this same Surrey and Wyatt who proved such a potent influence in transmitting the lyric and the sonnet to Scotland, to Scott, Montgomerie and King James. But Dr Kratzmann's attempt to trace connections between Skelton's morality play *Magnyfycence* and the first part of Lyndsay's *Satyre* shows how tentative and uncertain this kind of literary criticism is.

His last chapter draws together the many threads thrown out in the course of the book. *The Kingis Quair* is the main channel through which Chaucerian influences flowed, though *Lancelot of the Laik* would be better derived, through *The Quare of Jelusy*, much more from Lydgate than Chaucer; and he contends that English poetry took the wrong turning in the fifteenth century and followed after the learned Lydgate where the Scots kept in the footsteps of Chaucer as actors in their own creations, as James and Henryson did; where they also experimented with various genres of short poems, as Dunbar did; and where they ran their own tradition in the low-life comedy piece. There is an easy transition from aureate to alliterative and simple style among all our poets, well illustrated by Douglas in his various prologues. In the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries the Scots are at their ease on Parnassus but about the time of Rolland *c.* 1550, they began to falter and to seek inspiration from the tradition of Lydgate which the English had at last abandoned under Wyatt and Surrey. By the second half of the sixteenth century King James had started a movement towards the new fashions from France and Italy. His own movement to London brought to an end the golden age of Scottish poetry.

Dr Kratzmann has gone out into the highways and byways, the byways especially, to study in depth and intricacy the relations between Scottish and English medieval poetry. He has not missed much in a tightly packed book; it is not always easy to see the wood for the trees in his arguments, made tougher through a rather involuted style, but there are useful notes and an index, and if on the whole Dr Kratzmann has not changed our general picture of the period he has filled in many valuable details and drawn attention fruitfully to many points which have till now been overlooked. His work is a major contribution to the growing corpus of scholarship on medieval Scottish literature and it is good to see Australia now entering this field too.

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Books Received

Some of these books may be reviewed later in *Scottish Studies*

The Union of England and Scotland by P. W. J. Riley. Manchester University Press, 1978. 352 pp. £14.50.

Highland Fairy Legends by James MacDougall (introduction by Alan Bruford). D. S. Brewer, Cambridge 1978. 121 pp. £3.95.

A St Kilda Handbook, edited by Alan Small. (University of Dundee Department of Geography Occasional Paper No. 5.) The National Trust for Scotland, Edinburgh 1979. Illustrated with photographs and diagrams. 96 pp.

Scottish Aspects of Child Education a Century Ago by Elizabeth Lipp. Rainbow Books, Aberdeen 1979. 111 pp. £1.80.

The Mirror and the Maze—Poems by Bill McCorkindale. Rainbow Books, Aberdeen 1979. 76 pp. £2.00.

A Bibliography of Bagpipe Music, by Roderick D. Cannon. John Donald, Edinburgh 1980. £15.

The World of Rob Donn by Ian Grimble. The Edina Press Ltd., Edinburgh 1980. £6.75.

Anglo-Scottish Literary Relations 1430–1550, by Gregory Kratzmann. Cambridge University Press, 1980. £13.50.

Eachann Bacach and Other Maclean Poets, by Colm Ó Baoill. The Scottish Gaelic Texts Society. Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh 1980. £7.50.

Along a Highland Road by I. F. Grant. Shepheard-Walwyn, London 1980. 198 pp. £6.95.

Government by Pen. Scotland under James VI and I by Maurice Lee, Jr. University of Illinois Press, London 1980. 232 pp. £9.60.

Highland Man by Ian Grimble. Highlands and Islands Development Board, Inverness 1980. 108 pp. £3.50.

Edinburgh and the Medical Revolution by R. D. Lobban. (Cambridge Introduction to the History of Mankind. Topic Book: general editor, Trevor Cairns). Cambridge University Press, 1980. 48 pp. £1.85.

Migration in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland by Rosemary Lumb. Institute for the Study of Sparsely Populated Areas, University of Aberdeen. Research Report no. 3, 1980. 234 pp.

Scottish Genealogical Research by Donald Whyte. Scottish Genealogical Society, Edinburgh 1980. 24 pp. £1.

Celtic. A comparative study of the six Celtic languages seen against the background of their history, literature and destiny by D. B. Gregor. Oleander Press, Cambridge (England) and New York, 1980. 398 pp. £13.50. (Soft back £5.95)

The Making of the Scottish Countryside, edited by M. L. Parry and T. R. Slater. Croom Helm, London, and McGill Queen's University Press, Montreal, 1980. Illustrated with photographs and diagrams. 328 pp. £22.50.

Place Names of Great Britain and Ireland by John Field. David & Charles, Newton Abbot, and Barnes and Noble Books, Totowa, New Jersey, 1980. 208 pp. £8.50.

The Anglo-Norman Era in Scottish History by G. W. S. Barrow (The Ford Lectures Delivered in the University of Oxford 1977). Clarendon Press, Oxford 1980. 232 pp. £17.50.

The Fellowship of Song: Popular Singing Traditions in East Suffolk by Ginette Dunn. Croom Helm, London 1980. Music illustrations and photographs. 254 pp. £12.50.

Everyman's Book of British Ballads, edited by Roy Palmer. Dent and Sons, London 1980. Music illustrations. 256 pp. £8.95.

The Northern and Western Islands of Scotland. Their Economy and Society in the 17th Century by Francis J. Shaw. John Donald, Edinburgh 1980. 270 pp. £15.

Scotland Farewell. The People of the Hector by Donald Mackay. Paul Harris, Edinburgh 1980. 229 pp. £7.50.

The Ring-Net Fishermen by Angus Martin, John Donald, Edinburgh 1981. Illustrated with drawings by Will Maclean, and photographs. 264 pp. £12.

Easter Ross 1750–1850: The Double Frontier by Ian R. M. Mowat. John Donald, Edinburgh 1981. 270 pp. £15.