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Ruskiewicz, Dominika. 2021. *Love and Virtue in Middle English and Middle Scots Poetry*. Studies in Medieval Language and Literature, 58. Berlin: Peter Lang. Pp. 221. ISBN 9783631861738.

Reviewed by Nicola Royan
University of Nottingham

This monograph explores the ways in which love is addressed in Older Scots texts, from the *Kingis Quair* through to *The Thrissil and the Rois*. Its methodology is to bring Older Scots material into discussion with specific Chaucerian texts. That is of course not a new project: the texts selected for discussion are some of the most familiar Older Scots poems, and also the most overt about their engagement with Chaucer and Chaucerian material. Most of the pairings are not new either—the most original is *The Parliament of Fowls* with *The Thrissil and the Rois*—although the extended discussion of the Boethian tradition has not been done in quite this way. Moreover, the richness of the intertextual relationships offers opportunities for reconsideration, particularly through the thematic approach Ruskiewicz outlines, namely the balance between love and virtue, and the way in which it is used to examine the relationship between natural law and divine law. Chapter 1 provides the long context for Ruskiewicz's arguments. She carefully works through ways in which love and virtue have been addressed in western European literature, through both vernacular writing and through Latin writing, notably Boethius. She concludes this discussion with an account of the interplay between classical and Christian attitudes, and the ways in which this plays out firstly in Chaucer's works, and then in the Older Scots material, all of which acknowledges Chaucer directly.

In chapter 2, Ruskiewicz brings together her first pairing, Chaucer's *The Romaunt of the Rose* and Dunbar's *The Goldyn Targe*, to examine the representation of reason in managing both love and virtue. Reason is the method of distinguishing between natural virtuous love and unnatural, sterile overwhelming desire, where courtly love becomes an end in itself rather than a means of self-improvement. In *The Golden Targe* in particular, reason is identified with divine order, and love as a violent impediment to true vision; the conclusion of the chapter, that the intellect is not enough to support salvation, and that reason must encompass more, offers an intelligent reading of a difficult poem. This argument is developed in chapter 3 through a comparison of Chaucer's Boethian poems and *The Kingis Quair*. She convincingly argues that the *Quair* demonstrates a deeper engagement with Boethian writing than is sometimes perceived, and goes on to suggest the poems demonstrate that virtue can be developed as an active response to inevitable change. The chapter notes the difference between Chaucer's use of ancient settings as a mean of critiquing limited knowledge and James's engagement with the present. Ruskiewicz argues convincingly that the *Quair* does not posit the familiar choice between spiritual and earthly love, but rather outlines ways in which a king and a man might seek to embody Christian virtues in his earthly relationships.

The subjects of Chapter 4, Chaucer's *The House of Fame* and Gavin Douglas's *The Palice of Honoure*, are an obvious pairing, both dream poems directly concerned with the nature of honour, virtue and the relationship between them. Ruskiewicz identifies a key difference: where Chaucer locates fame as earth-bound and its transmission as transitory, Douglas sees honour as part of exemplary order. She goes on to explore the ways in which Chaucer's presentation interacts with models of chivalry, from the quality of the individual knight to the preferences of the sovereign, and how this contrasts with Douglas's view of good government in *The Palice*. For Douglas, she argues, honour lies "in the exercise of the virtues and responsibilities which man has to accept" (136). The identification of the sovereign as the arbiter of honour is extended in chapter 5, where the comparison of *The Parliament of Fowls* and *The Thrissil and the Rois* underlines a concern for harmony whether in the natural or the political world, articulated through the law of kind. Ruskiewicz compares the treatments of rank and the value given to non-noble voices, and the ways in which gender roles are given power. This includes an extended discussion of the overlap between language used to address Margaret Tudor and Marian devotional verse, and how it is used to outline the queen's role as a model of mercy in contrast to the king's role as judge and rule-maker.

The final chapter addresses the relationship between *Troilus and Criseyde* and *The Testament of* Cresseid. Although this relationship has been explored many times, Ruskiewicz offers an interesting reading, focusing on the embodiment of divine virtue and Christ-like attributes. Her most striking contrast is Henryson's allocation of Christ-like qualities to Cresseid, as she recognises a significance of her earthly suffering, opposed to Chaucer's elevation of Troilus above mortal suffering. In both cases, the poems speak to a Boethian conception of virtue as divine and the need to understand how best to live. Ruskiewicz's closing arguments trace a continuity in Older Scots writing between the *Kingis Quair* and *The Thrissill and the Rois*, where Minerva's prescription of virtuous life and experience as a means of enduring the uncertainties of mortal existence becomes embedded as an understanding of the human condition.

A few minor quibbles. The textual editions used are perhaps a slightly odd choice, particularly for Henryson and Douglas: Denton Fox's 1981 Oxford edition is still standard, and Priscilla Bawcutt's *Shorter Poems of Gavin Douglas* was revised in 2002. Kendal's edition of the *Eneados* is idiosyncratically modernised, although in fairness accessing Coldwell's earlier Scottish Text Society edition has been difficult. Problems of access might also account for the focus on well-known and fairly well-discussed material: since the comparisons with Gilbert Hay's translations added a great deal to contextualise the Scottish aspects of the argument, it would have been interesting to see the same kind of analysis applied to less familiar (but arguably just as Chaucerian) material, such as Hary's *Wallace*. However, these quibbles should not detract unduly from such a thoroughly and carefully argued engagement that brings a fresh perspective on the material and its Boethian underpinnings and new insights into the texts it discusses.

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