TWO ASPECTS OF GAVIN DOUGLAS[0]

Gavin Douglas was born to be conservative. Embedded in feudalism and the pre Counter Reformation church he was not the kind of person to cause a ripple in history. Literature gave him his fame. There single handed with his translation of Vergil's *Aeneid* he brought Scotland into the Renaissance. History robbed him of the influence he might have had. The manuscripts of his *Aeneid* were put away and forgotten, and by the time they were brought to light his language had become obsolete, so now a not infrequent response to the mention of his name is 'Who's he?'.

'He' was two years younger than James IV and finished his *Aeneid* translation in 1513, the same year as Flodden. Flodden was especially tragic because it came at a time when the nobles, of whom so many fell, were still very important to Scotland. In England and France feudalism might be looking at the beginning of the end because substitution of money for service was making barons no longer indispensable, but in Scotland not only was Lowland feudalism influenced by Highland clan ideals but the continual succession to the throne of minors had nobles playing an indispensable if not always concerted part in government.

When Gavin Douglas was a boy feudalism was fighting fit. James III was the king who upset the nobles by preferring the company of a group of commoners to theirs. He more than upset them when he conferred a title on his architect friend Cochrane. Cochrane not only upgraded his attire and took to going round with a small entourage, which after all was only airs and graces, but he also interposed himself between the king and petitioners. Power was something the nobles regarded as their prerogative. King Henry VI of England judging this a good time to interfere in Scottish affairs sent an army marching northwards. King James called out his barons. When everybody was gathered at Lauder the nobles held a secret meeting in the church in the small hours in order to reach some decision about how to get rid of Cochrane. The entourage was the stumbling block. Lord Grey likened them to the mice in an Aesop fable. The mice too had held a meeting. Their trouble was a cat. At their meeting they decided that the best idea was to hang a bell round the cat's neck so that they could hear her coming. The weakness of this plan was summed up in the question 'But who will bell the cat?'. "I will bell the cat." said a confident voice. No plan was ever made known, because at that moment who should come to the door of the church but Cochrane, without his entourage. They took him out and hanged him from Lauder Bridge along with the rest of the royal favourites, whom they dragged from the presence of the king. At the time of this incident Gavin Douglas was

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seven years old and the nobleman who offered to bell the cat was his father, Archibald, fifth Earl of Angus.

The fifth earl contributed a son to the church, as was the practice among noblemen with one to spare. It was their guard against the necessity of appointing to a position of power a man of humble birth. Of his four sons Gavin was the third and he was the one who went into the church. Brought up with the idea that his first duty was to the Douglas family, he knew that in the church he could best advantage kin by getting to the top. The bishop of St Andrews was primate of Scotland, and at his job every ordained younger son was aiming.

The men of the church were granted benefices, which entitled them to the rents from certain areas in return for the discharge of their clerical function. Bishops received such huge rents that they were the equivalent of powerful barons. Such power made kings touchy about the appointment of bishops. Near the end of James III's reign Innocent VIII conferred on the Scottish kings the right to nominate whom they wished for the Sees. James IV and James V took advantage of this in the pontificates of weak men by making bishops of their illegitimate sons. Another thorn in the secular side was the practice of purchasing church positions from Rome. Scotland could not afford to have large sums of money going out of the country. Gavin Douglas was in his last university year and James IV old enough to have assumed government when the Scottish parliament enacted that any one who purchased an ecclesiastical position illegally at Rome would be declared a rebel to be punished by banishment, and this became law in Scotland. At Rome under Leo X another law operated, that the end justified the means.

Two other principles which may be observed in the filling of church positions were *possession is nine tenths of the law* and *it is not what you know it is whom you know.* Both of these had an influence on Douglas's later career, but in the more serene days of its onset he turned to literature as a means of demonstrating his ability in order to seek advancement.

In 1501 Douglas wrote *The Palice of Honour*, a longish poem, over 2,000 lines, which he dedicated to the king. There was a position vacant for provost at St Giles Kirk, Edinburgh. It was a well-endowed church and the king was patron. The building needed repairs, and there were new chapels to be built. So we find in *The Palice of Honour* three descriptions of processions. When music is mentioned in connection with one of them out come the technical terms: diapason, retorts, proportions, modulation; half a dozen instruments are mentioned including portatives, shawms, and the lute.[1] In the part of the poem where the palace comes into view its description includes architectural terms: buttress, *kernels* (crenels), corbels and *suttyl*

1Gavin Douglas, *The Palice of Honour*, 492-507.

muldry (moulding).[2] He was given the post. Also in 1501 there became available on the Continent a new commentary on Vergil. It was not available in Scotland. I think this was what influenced Douglas to choose a translation of the *Aeneid* as a means of demonstrating outstanding ability. *The Palice of Honour* has a half promise in the allegory that the author will translate something.[3] Douglas finished his *Aeneid* in July 1513. He started writing marginalia style notes but these stop two thirds of the way through Book I. It is not difficult to see what caused the interruption.

Douglas was moving towards recognition and distinction. He had been one of those appointed in 1512 to assist the rector of St Andrews University. On the 9th of September 1513 King James IV was killed at Flodden, as were Douglas's two elder brothers, and in accordance with the King's will Queen Margaret became regent for the infant King James V. Douglas was among the lords and prelates chosen ten days later to attend the queen daily in an advisory capacity. By the end of the month he had been made a free burgess of Edinburgh. His pursuit of the bishopric of St Andrews had begun and in February of 1514 he put in his complaint that it had been given to William Elphinstone. The fifth earl died early in 1514 and was succeeded by his grandson Archibald. In August 1514 Queen Margaret married Archibald. This meant that the person of the infant king passed into the possession of the sixth Earl of Angus. The possession of kings during their minority was something over which nobles in the past had fought with kidnapping supported by murder and treachery in the Macbeth tradition, because it made a man virtual ruler of the realm.

The prospect of so much power in Douglas hands greatly disturbed many nobles. They wrote to the Duke of Albany asking him to become regent and claimed that the queen's regency had been invalidated by her remarriage. The Duke of Albany's father had been a brother of James III, and he had fled to France when Cochrane convinced the king that he was using witchcraft against him, so this Duke of Albany had grown up in France and he had no wish to leave what was home to him for years of residence in Scotland. Although the nobles had lost no time in writing to him he vacillated for nine months. During that nine months of power Queen Margaret supported Gavin Douglas for every worthwhile vacancy that occurred.

She described him in glowing terms in a letter to the Medici Pope, Leo X, recommending him for the abbacy of Arbroath including 'second to none in letters and in personal character'. It would appear that even though his *Aeneid* was not in circulation its existence was known. She added, 'the man deserves not merely the monastry but the primacy itself'.[4] The Archbishop of

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2 *Ibid,* 1430-1440.
3 *Ibid,* 1756-1757.
4 P. Bawcutt, *Gavin Douglas: A Critical Study*, p.12 par.1.

St Andrews had special privileges pertaining to under-age kings, so it would have strengthened the position of the queen and the sixth earl to have the family's representative in the church as bishop of St Andrews. Within a few days of the Pope's passing over Douglas for Arbroath, Bishop Elphinstone of St Andrews died. Queen Margaret penned an even more glowing letter and this time she asked her brother Henry VIII to support her. He obliged in like vein, referring to Douglas's 'extraordinary learning conjoined with prudence, modesty and probity'.[5] The Pope, however, appointed Andrew Foreman. Henry VIII likewise coveted possession of the infant king, so it wasn't long before the Scottish envoy in London, in a race against the surfacing of Albany's sense of duty, began sending inducement-laced letters to Gavin Douglas exhorting him to use his influence with the queen to persuade her to go to England. One written at the beginning of 1515 urges 'yff yee folow the consell and avysse off hyr brother the Kyng yee cannot do amysse, as I have vrytten afore, your blood is made for ever'.[6] About two weeks later the See of Dunkeld became vacant and again Queen Margaret recommended Douglas as her candidate.

Meanwhile Andrew Foreman was accused before the Lords of Council of purchasing at Rome not only St Andrews but also most of the other positions made vacant by the losses at Flodden in contravention of the privileges conferred by Pope Innocent VIII in the 1480s and to the detriment of the realm. His brother Robert Foreman, argued on his behalf that although he had purchased the benefices it had been in defence of the privileges and for the good of the realm so that they might be held by a Scot instead of being impetrated by Italians. The Pope appointed Douglas bishop of Dunkeld on condition that Foreman remained Bishop of St Andrews. Apparently some persuasion was also needed, as a later letter to Douglas from his procurator in Rome contains the sentence 'had nocht bene the respect of that money we suld nocht have gotten our entent in Dunkeld'[7]

On the 18th of May 1515 Albany arrived. He straightaway took over the custody of the king from Queen Margaret, whereat Henry VIII wrote to the Pope protesting. The queen and the sixth earl took themselves to England, but the king, of course, remained in Scotland. Albany wanted Queen Margaret to return to Scotland, but there were forces at work to keep her in England. Within two months of Albany's arrival Douglas was accused of purchasing the Dunkeld position at Rome. Although he was found guilty he was not banished. It would not have been in Albany's interests to have him go to England. His father had been one who advocated closer ties with England than with France and now his nephew had become allied to the English royal

5 *Ibid*, p.12 par.3.
6 *Ibid*, p11. par.2.
7 *Ibid*, p.13 par.1.

house. In England the sixth earl and Gavin Douglas could have been a dangerous combination, because one of them had brains.

Instead Douglas was imprisoned. For the most part it was in 'the wyndy and richt vnplesand, castell and royk of Edinburgh'.[8] One of Wilson's *Tales of the Border* dealing with an earlier time says 'All the early Douglases were remarkable for their tall figures and somewhat gaunt-like appearance — their bones being large and the flesh very sparingly distributed over them'.[9] This not so early Douglas may well from being similarly put together have been particularly susceptible to cold, just as his *Seventh Prologue* suggests with its remarks about the penetrating cold

'Dasyng the blude of euery creatur,
Maid seik warm stovis and beyn fyris hoyt,
In dowbill garmont cled and wily coyt
With mychty drink and metis confortyve', (88-91)[10]

Its having become his best loved piece must be to some extent due to such keen observations as

'Thik drumly skuggis dyrknyt so the hevyn,
Dym skyis oft furth warpit feirfull levyn,
Flaggis of fire, and mony felloun flaw,
Scharpe soppys of sleit and of the snypand snaw.
'The dolly dichis war all donk and wait
The law valle flodderit all with spait,
The plane stretis and euery hie way
Full of floschis dubbis, myre and clay'.(47-54)[11]

and those sympathetic lines

'The watir lynnys rowtis and euery lynd
Quhislit and brayt of the swouchand wynd.
Puyr labouraris and bissy husband men
Went wait and wery draglit in the fen.
The silly sheip and thar litil hyrd gromys
Lurkis vndre le of bankis, woddis and bromys;' (73-8)[12]

It is more accessible than the bulk of the *Aeneid*, since it is to be found in the *Oxford Book of Scottish Verse*.

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8 *Ibid*, p.13 par.2.
9 Wilson, *Tales of the Border* , Vol.2, 'The Rival Sheriffs of Teviotdale'.
10 *beyn* (pleasant) and *wily coyt* (is a coat worn under the outer coat).
11 *drumly* (gloomy), *skuggis* (shadows), *levyn* (lightning), *flaggis* (flashes of lightning), *flaw* (squall of wind), *soppys* (fragments), *snypand* (biting), *dolly* (dismal), *dichis* (ditches), *donk* (damp).
12 *silly* (derserving pity), *hyrd* (shepherd), *gromys* (fellow), *bromys* (broom plant).

When Queen Margaret protested to Pope Leo X about Douglas's imprisonment she put him in an awkard position. He would have preferred not to antagonise Albany now that he had assumed power in Scotland but was nonetheless obliged to support the appointment he had himself made as a trade for Foreman's and for which according to the custom of the times he had thus been paid twice. After his complaints to Albany had been reinforced by threats Douglas was released as the elect of Dunkeld. It was now, however, the middle of 1516. Dunkeld was being claimed by Andrew Stewart, who was still in minor orders but whose brother was the Earl of Athol. The earl's men were occupying both the episcopal palace and the church tower. This confrontation was resolved by a combination of force, strategy and threat of excommunication.

In 1517 Albany selected Douglas as one of three ambassadors to go with him to France to negotiate a marriage for James V to a French princess. As there was suspicion about the French king's intentions in foreign affairs the embassy was partly a cover, but whereas Douglas stayed a few months Albany was absent for three years. Before leaving he came to an agreement with Queen Margaret about her return. He had been invited to Scotland to curb the power of the Archibald Douglas, sixth earl of Angus. He had no quarrel with Queen Margaret and probably none with Gavin Douglas if they could be separated from the earl. Douglas loyalty, however, was not easily prised away from kindred.

The sixth earl had come back to Scotland somewhat earlier than the queen and had managed to get hold of enough rope to hang himself. On her return she found that he had been appropriating her revenues from Ettrick Forest, and to make matters worse was said to have taken a mistress. When Douglas arrived back he immediately sided with his nephew, citing in accordance with *Regiam Majestatem* 'he is lord of hir persoun, doury and all uthir gudis pertenyng to hir hienes.'[13] All that that achieved was to turn Queen Margaret against him. By April of 1518 she was ready to divorce the sixth earl. He had made, she maintained, no conjugal approach to her in six months. Through neglect of an obvious precaution he played right into Albany's hands.

Another relative to whom Douglas lent his support was his younger brother, Archibald Douglas of Kilspindie. He and James Hamilton, 1st Earl of Arran, had been holding the position of provost of Edinburgh in alternate years. At the end of the 1519 term the sixth earl's men barred Arran from entry into Edinburgh. Kilspindie was directed to vacate his office but only by some of the Lords of Council. Others beside his brother sided with him and boycotted the council's December meeting of Stirling. The absence of a regent in the realm fostered both feudal bickering and feudal force, so that by

13 P. Bawcutt, *op.cit.* p.18 par.1.

the end of April 1520 the Douglases and Arran's family, the Hamiltons, were preparing to fight it out in the main street of Edinburgh. Douglas went to see Bishop James Beaton, who was pro-Hamilton, in Blackfriars church, hoping that between them they might prevent bloodshed. 'Me lord, be my conscience', exclaimed Beaton, 'I know not the matter,'[14] forgetful as he slapped his chest of the armour he was wearing under his cassock. Douglas contented himself with the comment 'I persave, me lord, your conscience be not goode for I heir thame clatter'.[15] The sixth earl's suggested peace terms to Arran were also rejected. Beaton did not follow Gavin Douglas's example of non participation in the battle, but he was one of the first to leave it with Douglas adherents in pursuit as he made for Blackfriars Church. They pulled him out from where he crouched behind the altar and would have been happy to despatch him if Gavin Douglas had not dissuaded them. The Douglases were victorious and Blackfriars received several more Hamiltons seeking refuge.

In November 1520 Albany returned from France. From the start he had tried to make an ally of Queen Margaret and he succeeded quite nicely now that the sixth earl was out of favour. The earl in consequence went off to the Border, which was the badlands of Scotland. The Douglases had property down there. Before the year was over, however, he sent his unfortunate uncle to England to contact Wolsey and give him a letter for Henry VIII. Scarcely had Gavin Douglas set out than Queen Margaret and Albany were sending letters asking Henry not to help him. Albany tried to have him summoned to Rome to keep him away from England. He arrived there on Christmas eve 1521. It was then that Archbishop Foreman died and St Andrews became vacant. Beaton seeing Douglas as a rival for the See had him declared a rebel because he had gone to England. Meanwhile the sixth earl surrendered to Albany. Douglas was left with no recourse but to apply to Wolsey for political asylum in England. It was a heartbroken letter he wrote, undertaking to have no further dealings with 'the vnworthy Erl of Arguse', which must have cost him dear, for Douglas blood was much thicker than water, 'nor never sall pass in Scotland'. Wistfully he says,'I traist my brother and vther my frendis will vse my counsale', adding, 'Albeyt yon young wytles fwyl has runnyn apoun his avne myscheyf'.[16] In September 1522 he died of plague in London, in exile. All his life he had done his duty as he understood it. He had supported family members right or wrong and at every opportunity he had tried to become bishop of St Andrews.

The Gavin Douglas story in literature is by contrast one of achievement instead of so many efforts which were blocked from succeeding. It deals with new trends, new discovery and new experiments instead of with a man

14 *Ibid*, p.19 *cf,* (Pitscottie, (David Lyndsay of) *The Historie and Cronicles of Scotland*, Vol.1 pp.281-282.
15 *Ibid*, p.19, *cf*, Pitscottie vol.1 pp.281-282.
16 J. Small, (ed), *The Works of Gavin Doulgas* , Vol.1 p. civ.

tethered to the *status quo* with his decisions made for him by other people's interests. Douglas was one of the Scottish Chaucerians. James I had taken approval of the Chaucerian style to Scotland when he returned from his long exile in England during the fifteenth century, and by the time of James IV any one who wished to be considered a court poet had to be seen to be writing like Chaucer.

Chaucer is a good example of the innovator being the one to cause a ripple. He used verse forms which had been brought from the Continent and enriched his vocabulary with words of French and Latin origin. For this he was criticised in his own day. A small body of works has survived written about the same time in the dialects of various regions. There is not a word in them from French or Latin. Some are metrical romances, some are written in unrhymed alliterative verse, the English style going right back to the Saxons. There are good stories to be found among them as well as pockets of attractive poetry, but you will not walk into an ordinary bookshop and pick them off the shelf the way you did your copy of Chaucer. Time has decided in favour of the author who had something new to offer.

There was still a lot of alliterative verse around in the reign of James IV. The Scottish poets who laboured to write in the style of Chaucer would have had alliterative verse ringing in their ears from the poems that shaped their youth. Douglas wrote both *The Palice of Honour* and the *Aeneid* in pentameter, the meter used in most of the *Canterbury Tales*. Pentameter and alliterative verse are poles apart and one is no training ground for the other. Alliterative verse is concerned with stressed syllables. There are four to a line and three of them must alliterate, so the position of the non-alliterating stress changes from line to line to provide variation. There is no relationship of number or position between the stressed and unstressed syllables, so there is nothing resembling feet. It is a verse form not a meter. The *sine qua non* of pentameter is an exact number of stressed and unstressed syllables. In a normal line there are five of each, and if that line is regular they come in pairs that have the unstressed syllable first. Those pairs provide the feet. There is a still-learning feel to some of *The Palice of Honour* pentameter in spite of many an ingenious line. The *Aeneid* is smoother and more mature, even though three alliterating stressed syllables find their way occasionally into a line of well-mannered metre. Chaucerian style was required, so Douglas wrote in it.

So far all we have is a poet who is keeping up with the times. How did he get ahead of them? This happened firstly because the *Aeneid* was a translation and Douglas was the scholar who was there at the right time and secondly because it was a translation of Vergil, who is arguably the greatest poet who ever lived. He was not only an excellent craftsman with a hundred poetical devices at his finger tips but a deft hand at applying them to contexts where they would have a great effect. There probably are not a hundred

poetical devices, but he worked so many variations on the ones there are that he made them into a hundred. I will give you some examples.

To describe a man bringing a heavy rock[17] he slows his line down to the maximum by using four spondees, eight long syllables. (The pattern of the last two feet of a hexameter line is fixed but you can do what you like with the first four) There are words saying 'making an effort' and 'with his whole body' and the rock is described as being very big, so if, having read that, you go on to think about it you will realise that he must have been under a lot of physical strain, but just in case you do not think about it Vergil puts the strain in with the meter.

When he describes the hidden away grove where Venus gives Aeneas the armour made by Vulcan,[18] he alliterates the first syllable of one word with an inner syllable of another. This is not as obtrusive as alliteration with initial letters, so in three lines he can pack as many as three to a line. It has the effect of making the grove seem as hidden as the alliteration, and does more for the atmosphere than the two verbs meaning surround.

Vergil loves contrasts. With another manipulation of alliteration he once more uses sound to augment sense. When Turnus catches sight of the phantom-Aeneas which Juno has made to deceive him,[19] he follows brandishing his drawn sword not knowing he follows thin air. For 'brandishing his sword' Vergil finds three words which do not begin with the same letter but which together contain '*c*' four times and '*r*' three. They have an aggressive sound a bit like the grinding of teeth. The all-to-no-avail part about not knowing it is a phantom includes two words beginning with '*v*', which the Romans pronounced like '*w*', sounding soft and vaporous, separated from each other as the pieces of a phantom might separate as it disperses. In this way the aggressive intention is contrasted with the unsubstantial reality.

In Homer's *Oddyssey,* Oddysseus blinds the cyclops, who is a man-eating giant, and so escapes from his cave and his island. Vergil has Aeneas put in at the same island, which gives him the opportunity for a description of the cyclops making his way down to the shore using a stick to feel his way. Into four lines of description[20] he crams ten words ending in '*m.*'. This is easy enough to do in Latin because of its case endings. The accusative singular ends in '*em*' and '*um*' as do some nominatives. Under ordinary circumstances style-conscious Latin authors avoid having the same ending turning up in clumps. When you read Vergil's passage you get the feeling that you are going to be stepped on at any minute by this huge giant who cannot see you and had better not hear you. There are no word meanings here which say

17 Vergil: *Aeneid*, X, 127.
18 *Ibid*, VIII, 597-599.
19 *Ibid*, X, 651-652.
20 *Ibid*, III, 656-659.

that. The closest is 'moving'. It's all done with sound. So you have this constant overlay of extra meaning across the prose meaning of the words.

Then, of course, there's onomatopoeia. In the line and a half describing a man being trampled to death by a horse:

'crebro super ungula pulsu
incita nec domini memorum proculcat equorum'.[21]

the internal rhyme of '*ul*' is used for the thud of the murderous hooves.

Here is an example of his feeling for application. The device is repetition, an easy device to use but not necessarily an effective one. One of the mythological characters in the underworld has a large rock poised above his head. It never falls but it unremittingly seems about to fall, and that is Hell. To put an any-moment touch into what he is relating Vergil repeats the word for '*now*' 'iam iam lapsura cadentique'.[22] There is a word saying 'about to fall' and one saying 'falling'. What these two convey in meaning 'iam iam' conveys in feeling.

Vergil is a magic world, and Douglas discovered Vergil whereas previous translators had merely explored to find him. The new commentary might be pretty elementary but it was close enough to being comprehensive. Douglas still had to use his head but by combining using his head with using the commentary he was able to translate all the words in the text. The last man who had tried his hand at translating Vergil, Octavian de Saint-Gelais in France, had had to leave out a few words, a few phrases, some classical allusions because he did not know what they meant. He had a good commentary but it was not comprehensive. Vergil's vocabulary stretched far beyond the deliberately limited extent of mediaeval Latin, with which so many people across Europe were familiar. He was a poet writing an epic which touched the sublime. When he came to a word that was homely, everyday, prosaic he usually substituted another. There were no dictionaries so commentators were the only aid available. Each contributed what he could. Where did commentators get their knowledge? Largely from reading classical authors who were not as difficult as Vergil. Seeing a word in four or five contexts helps to clarify its meaning. Even people who are too lazy to look up their dictionaries manage to increase their vocabularies by reading. So it befell that Gavin Douglas produced the first comprehensive translation of Vergil. It was accurate enough to be used in conjunction with the text. There would not be more than two significant omissions; there would be half a dozen mistranslations to lay at Douglas's door and a few at the commentator's which he let pass; a few translations are taken from variant readings, which were more prevalent in those days. All these things, if you are thinking of using

21 *Ibid* XII, 533-534.
22 *Ibid*, VI, 602.

Douglas to translate Vergil for you, are covered by notes in Coldwell's edition, which has a generous glossary. You will find a translation that is vigorous and just as fresh as you would expect it to be coming from a man who was making a wonderful discovery.

I had not read all the books of Vergil when I started reading Douglas. The three I had read are regarded as his best, but I found that I enjoyed the others more, probably because there had been no one beforehand to spoil them for me. Douglas does have a way of making Vergil enjoyable. I know of no other translator who is his equal in that respect.

No previous translation of Vergil had reached Renaissance standard. The Renaissance standard had been set by the Italian humanists of the fifteenth century when they translated Greek into Latin. To accuracy they gave priority. Douglas's translation differed from their's in two ways both arising from the same cause. Because the humanists wrote in Latin they wrote for the cream of educated people from Poland to Ireland, everywhere that the Roman church had taken the Latin language. Douglas says that he is not writing for scholars and churchman but for, as he put it, 'every gentill Scot.'[23] This meant that he was reaching down to a lower educational level. The humanists allowed the text to speak for itself and eschewed adding anything into the translation. Expansion was a mediaeval habit. Douglas was not confident that to his people the text would speak clearly enough and was prepared to step back into the Middle Ages for them.

When the commentary has a paragraph of explanation he will sometimes incorporate just the tip of it, three or four words, into his translation as an extra line. Often translations and expansions are tailored to measure. The word *'glaive'* occurs six times. Vergil, of course, had never seen a *'glaive.'* Douglas uses it to translate two very general words for 'weapon' and also in small expansions. Particularly where Vergil is listing weapons Douglas loves to add a couple more. Maces turn up in the same way. When Vergil says the primitive inhabitants of Italy lived off the country on what they could get by hunting,[24] Douglas says they ate venison,[25] which Vergil had not specified. James IV ate venison. His table was kept supplied from herds on his country estates. Noblemen, you may be sure, either did or tried to do likewise. When Vergil does specify in Book I 'fat venison and old wine'[26] Douglas has a note[27] to the effect that as everybody knows the older the wine is the better and if venison is not fat enough the flavour is spoilt, which is more like a nudge than an explanation. In his allusion to the death of Mettius Fufetius, who was torn apart by chariots driven in four directions, Vergil as a graphic

23 Gavin Douglas, *Aeneid,* (ed).Coldwell, Vol.4, p.193; l,.43.
24 *Ibid*, VIII, 318.
25 Gavin Douglas, *Aeneid* , VIII, vi, 18.
26 'Veteris Bacchi pinguisque ferinae', Vergil, *op.cit.* I, 215.
27 Gavin Douglas, *Aeneid,* I, vi, 98 N.

detail has the bushes spattered with blood.[28] Douglas writing for the Scottish nobility adds bowels and entrails.[29]

Another problem when translating the *Aeneid* for people who might not be following with the text was conveying poetical content, all Vergil's rich overlay of extra meaning. Douglas was poet enough to appreciate that this was as much a part of the *Aeneid* as the prose meaning of the words, and that if he was to give his people the whole of the *Aeneid* the poetry had to be included. Vergil had put it there with literary devices, so Douglas had to get it into the translation by the same means, which meant improving his own poetic technique. He could not use spondees because iambic pentameter does not have them. The English accusative singular does not have a case ending, so it can end in almost any letter of the alphabet. He had to explore pentameter's potential and look for what English had to offer which Latin did not.

Onomatopoeia, alliteration and repetition were all available in English. Vergil's handling of alliteration was adventurous and subtle. Douglas set about learning from him with alliteration and other devices. Application also underwent an improvement. A device can be completely wasted if it is applied to an insignificant context. The difference between the style of the *Aeneid* and the style of *The Palice of Honour* is far greater than one would expect to find in two works by the same author.

I sometimes wonder whether Douglas was trying to do for Middle Scots what Chaucer had done for Southern English and make it into a literary language by means of an outstanding work. Once Chaucer had pushed Southern English towards becoming standard English, everybody else's English was downgraded to dialect. Scots and Northern English were very similar but Douglas uses some specifically Scottish words, one side of the Border words, wherever he finds a context to which they can make an appreciable contribution. They were rather rustic words. He had not used them in *The Palice of Honour* and some of them are listed in the Oxford Dictionary as not having been used by any one else. Other poets were not using them, but people were using them. They are good for describing inelegant characters such as the cyclops and Charon the ferryman of the Underworld and also for natural description such as the waves of the sea moving in and out. Into such a context he will slip in two or three of them, as if his aim is to show not merely that Middle Scots, augmented with some words from Latin, French and Southern English, is adequate for a literary work, but also that the native Scottish element in it has a worthwhile contribution to make. The context appears to be put at the disposal of the vocabulary. A writer of original material could construct his own suitable

28 Vergil, *op.cit*, VIII, 644-645.
29 Gavin Douglas, *Aeneid*, VIII, xi, 6-10.

context, but at least with a translation of Vergil there was no onus of proof of literary standard.

Douglas pounces on contexts that will allow him to experiment with metrical variants. There are six of these in the *Aeneid*.[30] They describe struggle, violence and action, so they can stand a sprinkle of variants instead of a single one judiciously placed. That had been the means favoured by Chaucer to emphasise the most dramatic moment in a story. He would put it in one of the later feet, where the impact was stronger than in the first foot. A metrical variant occurs when two syllables adjacent in the regular pattern are swapped round so that somewhere in the line there are two stressed syllables side by side and consequently two unstressed syllables. It is able to occur because the fifth stress gives pentameter a weaker beat than four stress verse and brings it just close enough to prose so that it will yield to a particularly strong prose rhythm. At the same time it must never be allowed to become prose. To prevent this two things are needed, a strict syllable count and discretion on the part of the poet. Since the potential for metrical variation in pentameter arises from its mathematical and physical nature, it would still be there if not a single poet had ever discovered it. It was not a single poet who discovered it but several poets independently. Gavin Douglas was one of them. Having made the discovery he was keen to experiment to see how far he could push variation while still maintaining his compact with discretion. You can tell he is experimenting in these action passages because the variants become bolder and wilder, and because wherever something he tries is not a complete success he will try it again in another passage, and sure enough there he will get it right. Once again in literature Douglas was blazing a new trail, one which other poets might have been expected to follow. History, however, contrived that few passed by to see his axe marks.

By the time the five extant manuscripts of Douglas's *Aeneid* all made before 1550, were brought from their hiding place conventions for elision, on which the scansion depends, had changed. Any poet who might be influenced by Douglas's zesty experiments with meter would therefore have to come within range of understanding his elision. The two obvious candidates are David Lyndsay, who died in 1555 and the Earl of Surrey, grandson of that Earl of Surrey who led the English at Flodden and who died in 1547.

Lyndsay was fifteen years younger than Douglas, but when be began writing poetry he had almost reached the age at which Douglas gave it up. The metrical variation of his early poem *The Dreme* remains within Chaucerian bounds. His scansion is not as definite as Chaucer's but it is possible to read metrical variation into later lines from contexts that might benefit from emphasis.

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30 *Ibid*, I, ii, 49-68; I, iii, 15-33; II, iv, 31-38; IX, xiii, 61-87; XI, xiv, 63-74; XII, xi, 147-174.

Surrey translated Books II and IV of the *Aeneid*. Throughout his translation there is a constant sprinkle of phrases gently reminiscent of Douglas, enough to convince that Surrey had certainly read his work. For the translation Surrey used blank verse, devised by himself for the purpose. The unrhymed form of pentameter is particularly accommodating to metrical variants.

For comparison extracts from the three poets are appended with their scansion or, in the case of Lyndsay, possible scansion.

Douglas: *Aeneid* II iv 31-38 translating Vergil's *Aeneid* II 218-221

u – – u u – u – u–
And twys cyrkyllit his myddil rownd about
u – – u u – u – u –
And twys faldis thar sprutlit skynnys but dowt
u – u – u – u – u –
About hys hals - bath nek and hede thai schent
u – – u u – u u – –
As he etlys thar hankis to haue rent
– u u – u – u – u –
Of with his handis and thame away have draw
u – – u u – u – u –
His hed bendis and garlandis all war blaw
– u – u u – – u –
Ful of vennom and rank poyson atanys
– u – u u – – u –
Quhilk infekkis the flesch, blude and banys.

Surrey: *Aeneid* II 253-259 translating the same passage

u – u – – – u u u –
To rescue them; twice winding him about,
u – u – u – u – u –
With folded knots and circled tails, his waist:
u – u – u – u – u –
Their scaled backs did compass twice his nek
u – u – u – u – u –
With reared heads aloft and stretched throats,
– u u – – u u – u –
He with his hands strave to unloose the knots,
u – u – u – u – u –
(Whose sacred fillets all besprinkled were
u – u – u – u – u –
With filth of gory blood, and venom rank

Lyndsay: *The Dreme* (295-301)

– u u – u – u – u–
Quhare is the meit and drynke delicious
u – u – u – u – u–
With Quhilk we fed our cairfull cariounis
– u u – u – u – u–
Gold, sylver, sylk, with peirlis precious,
u – u – u – u – u–
Our ryches, rentis and our possessionis
u – u – u – u – u–
Withouten hope of our remissionis,
u – u – u – u – u –
Allace, our panis are Insufferabyll
u – u – u – u – u –
And our tormentis to compt Innumirabyll.

Lyndsay: *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estatis* (2437-2444)

u – u – u – u – u –
Ane gret wounder, that day, wes sene, also,
u – u – u – u – u – u –
Quhow Nabuchodonosar, in his yre,
u – u – u – u – u – u –
Tuke Sydrach, Misach, and Abednago,
u – u – u – u – u – u –
Quhilks wald nocht bow thare kne at his desyre
– u – u – u – u – u –
Tyll that Idoll, gart kast them in the fyre,
– u u – – u – u u –
For to be brynt, or he sterit of that steid.
u – u – u u – – u –
Quhen he beleuit thay wer brynt, bone and lyre,
u – u – u – – u u –
Wes nocht consumit one small hair of thair heid.

Douglas: XII xi (147-174)

– u u – u – u – u –
Thus has he said, and from the cart inhy
u – u – u – u – u –
Apon the land he lap deliverly,
u – u – u – u – u –
And left his sistir trist and dissolate;
– u u – u – u – u –
Thrist throu hys fays and wapynnys all, fute hait
– u u – – – u u u –
And with sa swift fard schot throu the melle
– u u – u – u – u –
That the myd rowtis and wardis schuddris he.
u – u u – – – u u –
And like as the gret roch crag with a sovn
u u – u – – u – u –
From the top of sum montan tumlyt doun,
– u u – u – u – u –
Quhen at it is our smyt with wyndis blast,
u – u – u – u – u –
Or with the drumly schowris spait doun cast,
u – u – u – u – u –
Or than be lang proce of mony zheris
– u u – u – u u – –
Lowsyng tharfra the erd, and away weris,
u – u – u – u – u –
Is maid to fall and tumbill with all his swecht,
– u u – u – u – u –
Lyke till a wikkit hill of huge weght,
– u u – u – u – u –
Halding his fard the dicens of the bra
u – u – u – u – u –
With mony skyp and stend baith to and fra,
u - u – u - u – u –
Quill that he schut far on the plane grund,
u – u – u – u – u –
And all that he ourrekis doith confund;
– u – u – u – u –
Woddis, heyrdis, flokkis, catale and men
u – u – u - u – u –
Our welterand with hym in the deip glen

u – u – u – u – u –
Towart the wallys Turnus ruschit als fast
u – u – u – u – u – u –
Throw owt the rowtis, by hys fard doun cast,
u - u – – u u –u –
Quhar tho the grund wet and bedyit stude
u – u – u – u – u – u –
A weill far way with effusioun of blude,
u – u – u –u – u –
And large on breid the skyis and the ayr
u – u – u – u – u – u –
For schaftis schot dyd quhissilling heir and thar:
– u u - u – u – u –
A bekyn with hys hand to thame maid he,
u – u – u – u – u – u –
And sammyn eik with lowd voce cryis: 'Lat be!'.

Laurel Humphreys
Sydney