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The Sinclair Women and Oxford,  
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RORY G. CRITTEN

**ABSTRACT:** This article develops the suggestions of previous commentators that Elizabeth, Jean, and Margaret Sinclair read Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Arch. Selden. B. 24 and/or oversaw its second scribe's work. It does not advance new proofs in demonstration of these eventualities. Instead, it seeks to establish the place of the Sinclair women in the first audience of the codex and to explore the literary-critical implications of the book's reception in their orbit. This approach facilitates fresh readings of the topic of advocacy in the second scribe's texts—the *Letter of Cupid*, the *Lay of Sorrow*, the *Lufaris Complaynt*, and the *Quare of Jelusy*. Who, these poems seem to ask, can speak for women? The depiction of marriage in the *Kingis Quair*—for which the second scribe supplies a 140-line conclusion—is also considered. The argument closes with reflections on speculation, book history, and the interest of reception studies for readers of late medieval literature.

**KEYWORDS:** Chaucer lyrics, *Kingis Quair*, marriage, MS Arch. Selden. B. 24, reception studies, Sinclair family, women's advocacy

Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Arch. Selden. B. 24 is well known to medievalists both for its Scotticized texts of several of Chaucer's poems and its preservation of the unique extant copy of the *Kingis Quair*, a love vision traditionally attributed to James I of Scotland (1394–1437). The initial impetus

for the manufacture of the codex seems to have lain with Henry, third lord Sinclair (d. 1513), whose arms and signature mark the book on fols. 118v and 230v.<sup>1</sup> Dating information for the compilation is provided by the arms, which Henry assumed in 1489 following the resolution in his favor of a dispute over the inheritance of his grandfather, William, first lord Sinclair and earl of Orkney and Caithness (d. ca. 1480).<sup>2</sup> The manuscript has been found by some to constitute an appropriate celebration both of this success and of Henry's marriage a year previously to Margaret Hepburn.<sup>3</sup> Others have attributed its commissioning to family pride: Henry's determination to have a manuscript containing a copy of the *Kingis Quair* may reflect his awareness of his relation to James I via his grandmother, James's niece, Elizabeth Douglas (d. 1451), and via his grandfather, William, and great-grandfather, Henry (d. 1418), both of whom were close associates of the king.<sup>4</sup> The bibliophilia with which Henry's contemporaries credited him probably also played a part in the commission. In the prologues to his *Eneados* (ca. 1512), Gavin Douglas immortalized Henry as the "fadir of bukis" at whose request he had undertaken his Virgilian translation.<sup>5</sup>

Henry was not the only Sinclair booklover. At the request of William, Henry's grandfather, Sir Gilbert Hay (b. ca. 1397, d. after 1465) had produced a series of prose translations from French, and Henry's uncle, Oliver (d. 1523), is credited with commissioning a manuscript of these works as well as another book containing pastoralia.<sup>6</sup> The subsequent history of book acquisition and preservation in Oliver's branch of the family can be quite thoroughly

1. See Julia Boffey and A. S. G. Edwards, intro., *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer and The Kingis Quair: A Facsimile of Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Arch. Selden. B. 24* (Cambridge, UK, 1997), 21–23 (hereafter cited as "Boffey and Edwards, *Facsimile*"); and Julia Boffey and A. S. G. Edwards, "Bodleian MS Arch. Selden. B. 24: The Genesis and Evolution of a Scottish Poetical Anthology," *Poetica* 60 (2003): 31–46.

2. On Henry's career, see Barbara E. Crawford, "Sinclair Family (per. 1280–c. 1500)," in *ODNB*, online at: doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/54321.

3. See R. J. Lyall, "The Court as a Cultural Centre," *History Today* 34.9 (1984): 27–33, at 29; and Roderick J. Lyall, "Books and Book Owners in Fifteenth-Century Scotland," in Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall, eds., *Book Production and Publishing in Britain, 1375–1475* (Cambridge, UK, 1989), 239–56, at 252.

4. See Julia Boffey, "Bodleian Library, MS Arch. Selden. B. 24 and Definitions of the 'Household Book,'" in A. S. G. Edwards, Vincent Gillespie, and Ralph Hanna, eds., *The English Medieval Book: Studies in Memory of Jeremy Griffiths* (London, 2000), 125–34, at 131–32. On William and Henry Sinclair's connections to James, see Michael Brown, *James I* (Edinburgh, 1994), 14–19, 51–52, 158.

5. The citation is discussed in Priscilla Bawcutt, *Gavin Douglas: A Critical Study* (Edinburgh, 1976), 47, 92–95.

6. Sally Mapstone, "Introduction: Older Scots and the Fifteenth Century," in Sally Mapstone, ed., *Older Scots Literature* (Edinburgh, 2005), 3–13, draws together a wealth of information concerning Sinclair patronage.

documented.<sup>7</sup> The status of Henry's library is less clear, but signatures added to the Selden manuscript indicate that this book, at least, remained in the possession of his family after his death at Flodden. Two of these signatures are of particular interest to this inquiry: an "Elezebeth synclar" has signed her name on fol. 231r, and a "Jen Sinclar" has signed hers on fol. 231v.

The conjunction of these names in the codex enhances the likelihood that they were written by the Elizabeth and Jean Sinclair listed in James Balfour Paul's *Scots Peerage* amongst the daughters of Henry, third lord Sinclair.<sup>8</sup> The *Scots Peerage* also notes Jean's marriage to Alexander Lindsay, master of Crawford; Jean's death before 1562; and marriage arrangements between Elizabeth and Walter Drummond in 1511–12, which fell through.<sup>9</sup> The standard printed sources have a little more to say about Elizabeth. The *Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland* locate her at court on January 1, 1512, where she is listed amongst those receiving New Year's gifts from the king; and *The Register of the Privy Seal of Scotland* has a copy of a letter thanking Elizabeth Sinclair, daughter of Henry Sinclair, for her service to the king and queen.<sup>10</sup> If the Elizabeth who signs her name in the Selden manuscript was not Henry, third lord Sinclair's daughter, she may have been his daughter-in-law: Henry's son, William, fourth lord Sinclair, had married Elizabeth Keith, daughter of William, third earl Marischal, by 1524.<sup>11</sup>

In what follows, I take the coincidence of Elizabeth and Jean's signatures in the Selden manuscript as an invitation to reconsider the role that they played in the production of the book. In so proceeding, I expand upon Priscilla Bawcutt's claim that the codex was read by Elizabeth, Jean, and their mother, Margaret.<sup>12</sup> More particularly, I am keen to revisit Joanna Martin's proposition that the portion of the manuscript added by its second scribe was an unscheduled addition, "perhaps suggested by someone who had not been

7. For details of 102 books known to have belonged to Oliver's sons, Henry Sinclair, bishop of Ross (d. 1565), or John Sinclair, bishop of Brechin (d. 1566), see John Durkan and Anthony Ross, *Early Scottish Libraries* (Glasgow, 1961).

8. So Boffey and Edwards, *Facsimile*, 22. I follow Boffey and Edwards in their transcription of Elizabeth Sinclair's signature. The first name might also be transcribed "Elezebeth."

9. See James Balfour Paul, *The Scots Peerage*, 9 vols. (Edinburgh, 1904–14), 7:572.

10. See James Balfour Paul, ed., *Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland, 1507–1513* (Edinburgh, 1902), 324; and M. Livingstone, ed., *The Register of the Privy Seal of Scotland, 1488–1529* (Edinburgh, 1908), 360.

11. See Paul, *The Scots Peerage*, 7:573. On Elizabeth Keith's potential connection to the Selden manuscript, see further the commentary below.

12. See Priscilla Bawcutt, "My bright buke': Women and Their Books in Medieval and Renaissance Scotland," in Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Rosalynn Voaden, Arlyn Diamond, Ann Hutchison, Carol Meale, and Lesley Johnson, eds., *Medieval Women—Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain: Essays for Felicity Riddy* (Turnhout, 2000), 17–34, at 33.

involved in the initial stages of planning the book . . .—perhaps Margaret Hepburn, or her daughters.”<sup>13</sup> The mode of argument that I adopt is exploratory: I do not propose to advance definitive proof for the Sinclair women’s participation in the expansion of the Selden manuscript. Indeed, hard evidence of the kind of influence that I am interested in is unlikely to survive.

Instead, working from the circumstantial proofs assembled by Martin and others, I propose an argument that keeps open the possibility of Elizabeth, Jean, and Margaret’s involvement in the selection, commissioning, and/or authorship of some of the second scribe’s texts. The value of this approach resides in the new readings it facilitates for the poems added to the latter part of the codex. Previous discussions of the Scottish reception of Chaucerian writing have emphasized the misogynist atmosphere in which Chauceriana sometimes circulated in Scotland, or have argued that, north of the border, interest in Chaucer’s treatment of ethical and political topics predominated.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, this article develops a reading of the Selden manuscript that situates its reception amongst a mixed audience whose preoccupation with love-talk influenced its expansion.

Whatever continuing influence Henry Sinclair held over the evolution of his book seems to have been most diluted in its final leaves, and it is here that I begin my reading of the manuscript, from back to front. I interpret the signatures and poems that appear in the codex’s final leaves as indicative both of the sociable milieu in which it was kept and of one of the pastime preoccupations enjoyed there: the two short poems invite discussion of the relationships between men and women in courtship. From there, I consider how the interests of this milieu might be reflected in the complete texts that the second scribe writes: Hoccleve’s *Letter of Cupid*, the *Lay of Sorrow*, the *Lufaris Complaynt*, and the *Quare of Jelusy*. Here I pay particular attention to the topic of advocacy. Who, these poems seem to ask, can speak for women? At this juncture, I also review the strongest evidence in favor of the Sinclair women’s involvement in the evolution of the book. Finally, I offer a fresh look at the *Kingis Quair* itself. Rather than addressing the role that this love vision might have played in the political career of its assumed author, I consider the significance of the second scribe’s 140-line conclusion to the *Quair* for the people in whose midst the

13. Joanna Martin, *Kingship and Love in Scottish Poetry, 1424–1540* (Aldershot, 2008), 30.

14. See, respectively, Carolyn Ives and David Parkinson, “Scottish Chaucer, Misogynist Chaucer,” in Thomas A. Prendergast and Barbara Kline, eds., *Rewriting Chaucer: Culture, Authority, and the Idea of the Authentic Text, 1400–1602* (Columbus, OH, 1999), 186–202; and Kylie Murray, “Passing the Book: The Scottish Shaping of Chaucer’s Dream States in Bodleian Library MS Arch. Selden. B. 24,” in Mark P. Bruce and Katherine H. Terrell, eds., *The Anglo-Scottish Border and the Shaping of Identity, 1300–1600* (Basingstoke, 2012), 121–39.

poem had arrived by the turn of the sixteenth century. The argument closes with some more general reflections on the role of speculation in book history and the interest of reception studies for readers of late medieval literature.

### *Talking about Love*

The final leaves of the Selden manuscript are littered with the signatures of men and women who came into contact with the book. Alongside “Elezebeth synclar” and “Jen Sinclar,” signatories include “Agnes findlason” and “Mr John Duncan” (both on fol. 229r); “Mig Domnall Gorm” and “Channois” or “Chaunois” (on fol. 231v); “Villem crusstance” (on fol. 231r); and “Williame,” “Villam Lord,” “patrik schiner,” and “Lawrence smolo” (on fol. 230v). These leaves also preserve the previously mentioned ownership mark of Henry, third lord Sinclair: “liber Henrici domini Sinclar” (fol. 230v).<sup>15</sup> The form the signatures assume—which often includes a version of the phrase “with my hand” or “by me”—suggests that, later in its history, the Selden manuscript served as a *liber amicorum*, or visitors’ book, in which people who called upon its owners wrote their names. Not all the signatures were written into the book at the same time: the name “Channois” or “Chaunois” is followed by the date 1592, for example, many years after the date given for Jean’s death in *The Scots Peerage*. Together, however, these marks are indicative of the codex’s survival in a context of sociability comprising both men and women. They offer tantalizing glimpses into interactions between the signatories. For example, on fol. 229r, Mr. John Duncan signs his name just beneath Agnes Findlason’s in a layout that appears to mirror hers.

Further indication of the kinds of interactions that these people shared is afforded by the addition to these leaves of two poems written in an early sixteenth-century hand, “O lady, I schall me dress” (*DIMEV* 3952; fols. 231r–230r); and “Go fro my vindow” (*DIMEV* 6884; fol. 230r).<sup>16</sup> “O lady, I schall me dress” is the better preserved of the two poems. Its alternating

15. The manuscript pages are treated in the order in which they originally appeared. This does not match the foliation, which reflects the disordered state of the book’s final leaves prior to its disbanding for conservation in 1993. See Boffey and Edwards, *Facsimile*, 6. The most complete list of signatures in the book remains that given by J. T. T. Brown, *The Authorship of the Kingis Quair: A New Criticism* (Glasgow, 1896), 77.

16. Boffey and Edwards argue that fol. 229r–v, which is written in the hand of the manuscript’s first scribe, has been displaced from another part of the book (*Facsimile*, 9). For this reason, I do not count the poems that it transmits—“My frende gif thou will be a serviture” (*DIMEV* 3601); “Thy bagyning is barane brutulness” (*DIMEV* 5934); and “Man be as mery as tho” (*DIMEV* 3337)—amongst the final additions to the book. *DIMEV* numbers given for the shorter poems mentioned are taken from *The Digital Index of Middle English Verse*, online at: [dimev.net/](http://dimev.net/).

address appears to describe a situation in which a man discusses the difficult progress of his love for a lady with another woman, the “lady” of the poem’s first line, who is his confidante:

O lady, I schall me dress with besy cure,  
 With hart and mynd for to do observaunce,  
 Vnto my lady bricht, I yow assure,  
 Greting hir weill with hwmyll continuaunce,  
 In termes rud, but 3it with esperauce.  
 (lines 1–5; fol. 231r)<sup>17</sup>

The speaker then begins to read out a bill that he has composed for his lady, but breaks off after two lines to return to addressing his immediate audience, the confidante:

This bill I wret with hert interiall,  
 Exorting hir excuss my ignoraunce,  
 And to haf pite of me, catife bound [and thrall]:  
 “Haf piete, lady, of me catif bound [and thrall]  
 And let me neuer thus de in to diss[pair]...”  
 San in þis world is no thing corporell  
 Þat ma releve my cruell paine and [sair]  
 But sche for quhome I suffir all þis [care].  
 (lines 6–13; fol. 231r)

A suggestive parallel to this dramatic situation may be found in a Middle English lyric surviving in Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College MS 383, “Myn owne dere ladi fair & fre” (*DIMEV* 3516). In that text, a speaker who is suffering in love explains his determination to present his lady with an *arnde* (petition) on the advice of another woman. That poem concludes:

my-self y wol myn arnde bede,  
 þe betur y hope forte spede;

17. Unless otherwise stated, primary texts in Selden are cited by folio number in transcription from Boffey and Edwards, *Facsimile*. Abbreviations are silently expanded throughout with a preference for Scottish forms; the punctuation is mine. Line numbers are taken from the editions referred to in the notes. For an edition of “O lady, I schall me dress,” see Rossell Hope Robbins, ed., *Secular Lyrics of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1955), 197–98. Robbins’s substitutions for damaged parts of the text are given within square brackets.

non so wel may do myn nede—  
a woman so me tolde.

(lines 13–16)<sup>18</sup>

In “O lady, I schall me dress,” it appears that we are made privy to the kind of advisory situation described in “Myn owne dere ladi fair & fre.” Other scenarios might also be imagined. Later in “O lady, I schall me dress,” the identities of the lady and the confidante are harder to distinguish. Here, for example, it seems that the speaker is to be imagined in soliloquy, addressing now himself inwardly, now the imagined presence of his lady:

Sche hes my hert in to hir gouern[all],  
O lady sweit above all wthir fair,  
Haf piete of me, cative bound and thrall.

(lines 14–16; fol. 231r)

Such liable deixis may be a general property of medieval lyric.<sup>19</sup> At least in its opening lines, however, the disposition of nouns and pronouns in “O lady, I schall me dress” conjures the image of a man talking to a woman whom he is not courting about his own love conduct. Whatever conversation might ensue in this context will be consolatory or advisory and not, in the first instance, a pretext for wooing.

A more hot-headed exchange is depicted in the other poem written into the back of the Selden manuscript. Damage to the book has rendered illegible large portions of “Go fro my vindow,” but enough remains to detect a conversation between a woman and a visiting suitor:

“[Go fro my] vindow, go, go fro my vindow  
[.....win]dow, si[r]!” “[Qu]ho ys at 3our vindow?”  
“Go fro my vindow, go”

(fol. 230r)<sup>20</sup>

A little later in the damaged text, a comic element in the sparring exchange is perceptible. At one point, the suitor refers to himself as “a sely rat.” This

18. Cited from Robbins, ed., *Secular Lyrics*, 13–14.

19. See A. C. Spearing, *Textual Subjectivity: The Encoding of Subjectivity in Medieval Narratives and Lyrics* (Oxford, 2005), 174–210.

20. Cited from P. J. Frankis, “Some Late Middle English Lyrics in the Bodleian Library,” *Anglia* 73 (1955): 299–304, at 301–3. Frankis’s substitutions for damaged parts of the text are given within square brackets; the punctuation is mine.



prompts the response from the woman whom he is attempting to visit that “my cat / shall reskew me,” and the suitor picks up this idea again, although it is now unclear what he does with it:

[. . . . .] þat your rat & þat cat  
 [. . . . .]  
 with hir go

(fol. 23or)

As they are presented in the Selden manuscript, one after another, the no-nonsense woman speaker of “Go fro my vindow” undercuts the self-absorbed utterer of “O lady, I schall me dress” by revealing the irritation that men’s attentions can cause women, and women’s imperviousness to men’s love-talk. It is tempting to see this as the introduction of a woman’s perspective on the matter of wooing; certainly, the woman in “Go fro my vindow” is allowed to talk back in a way not admitted in the manuscript’s preceding item. But there is no guarantee that “Go fro my vindow” is woman-authored or even, ultimately, sympathetic to women. The poem may reflect yet another male fantasy, for example, of the woman who says she doesn’t want it but really does. “Go fro my vindow” is an early example of a type of song in which the visited party relents. Thus, in a later sixteenth-century moralized version of the poem, the visitor—there recast as a man addressing God—is finally admitted.<sup>21</sup> Because the end of “Go fro my vindow” is now obscured by damage in the Selden manuscript, we do not know whether the male speaker also achieves admittance in this iteration of the motif.

The question of how medieval lyrics featuring women speakers should be interpreted has often provoked debate amongst modern critics.<sup>22</sup> Similar conversations might be imagined taking place amongst the men and women who wrote their names in the Selden manuscript in the vicinity of “Go fro my vindow” and “O lady, I schall me dress.” Is the woman in “Go fro my vindow” serious in her intent to bid off her visitor? The questions that Chaucer poses at the endings of Part One of the *Knight’s Tale* and the *Franklin’s Tale* are just two of the more frequently cited pieces of evidence suggesting that

21. For an edition, see Alasdair A. MacDonald, ed., *The Gude and Godlie Ballatis*, STS 5th ser. 14 (Cambridge, UK, 2015), 185–87.

22. For recent discussion, see Carissa M. Harris, “Teen Moms: Violence, Consent, and Embodied Subjectivity in Middle English Pregnancy Laments,” *Review of English Studies*, n.s. 71 (2019): 1–18. More generally, see Anne L. Klinck, “Woman’s Song in Medieval Western Europe,” in Karl Reichl, ed., *Medieval Oral Literature* (Berlin, 2012), 521–54.

medieval authors expected their audiences to enjoy debating love problems of this kind.<sup>23</sup> Such debates might also extend to address men's behavior in courtship; in this case, is the visitor in "Go fro my vndow" within his rights to persist? or: is the egocentric speaker of "O lady, I schall me dress" to be mocked or pitied? I contend that the initial reception of the Selden manuscript should be imagined taking place within the context of discussions of this sort between Henry Sinclair, his wife, his daughters, and other members of and visitors to their household.

### *Speaking for Women*

The interest in gender relations that animates "Go fro my vindow" and "O lady, I schall me dress" is characteristic of many of the works compiled in the Selden manuscript by its first scribe, including Chaucer's *Troilus*, the *Complaint of Mars*, the *Complaint of Venus*, the *Parliament of Fowls*, and the *Legend of Good Women*, as well as Lydgate's *Complaint of the Black Knight*, Clanvowe's *Book of Cupid*, and the misogynist poem, "Deuise proues and eke humilitee (*DIMEV* 1123)."<sup>24</sup> Although it shares these broad concerns, the smaller group of texts copied by the second scribe is distinguished by a more acute interest in the ambivalence that frequently characterizes men's advocacy for women, and in the production of women's voices in poetry. In this section, I offer an extended look at the poems added to the Selden manuscript in the second scribe's stint; in the next, I review the circumstantial evidence that their copying took place in collaboration with the Sinclair women and in response to the tastes and requirements of the mixed audience described above.

The first of the second scribe's texts is Hoccleve's *Letter of Cupid*, a poem taking the form of a missive sent from the deity to his ministers in response to complaints that he has received from women about men. Cupid begins by rehearsing women's reports of men's feigning. There then follows a catalogue of further reported complaints interspersed with defenses of women and refutations of some of the typical medieval misogynist arguments. Finally, Cupid banishes the false men that have been the target of his writing, and his letter is dispatched.

23. See *The Riverside Chaucer*, gen. ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn. (Boston, 1987), *CT*, I 1347–54, V 1621–24. On the local debate cultures fostered by manuscripts of Chaucer's poetry, most recently, see Kara A. Doyle, *The Reception of Chaucer's Shorter Poems, 1400–1450: Female Audiences, English Manuscripts, French Contexts* (Cambridge, UK, 2021).

24. For a complete account of the contents of Selden, see Boffey and Edwards, *Facsimile*, 1–3.

Hoccleve translated the *Letter of Cupid* (1402) from Christine de Pizan's *Epistre au dieu d'amours* (1399), an unequivocally pro-woman text that marks the beginning of Christine's serious engagement with matters of gender politics.<sup>25</sup> The attitudes that Hoccleve develops towards the women whom Christine defended have proven harder to pin down.<sup>26</sup> Hoccleve himself touts the polemicizing potential of his text in the Dialogue section of his *Series*. There he has his friend suggest that he ought to write something in praise of women because so many women have been upset by his translation (lines 659–80).<sup>27</sup> A sense of the differing ways in which medieval readers approached the *Letter of Cupid* is afforded by the varying manuscript contexts in which the poem survives.<sup>28</sup> These include the Devonshire and the Findern manuscripts, two books whose production medievalists are now well used to locating in a context of debate between the sexes.<sup>29</sup>

The *Letter of Cupid* is well chosen for readers interested in the “woman question.” The matter of the poem's origins is left open by Hoccleve: nowhere in his text is the poem identified as a translation from Christine's earlier work, and nowhere does Hoccleve identify himself as its author. As it appears in the Selden manuscript, the poem is unattributed, and the second scribe's text elides the link to Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* that Hoccleve had built into his work. In his autograph copy of the *Letter of Cupid*, Hoccleve has Cupid refer his audience to “our legende of martirs” (line 316) for further examples of men's infidelity to women.<sup>30</sup> By contrast, the text of the poem in the Selden manuscript sends readers more

25. See Thelma S. Fenster and Mary Carpenter Erler, eds., *Poems of Cupid, God of Love: Christine de Pizan's Epistre au dieu d'Amours and Dit de la Rose; Thomas Hoccleve's The Letter of Cupid, with George Sewell's The Proclamation of Cupid* (Leiden, 1990), 3–19.

26. For a recent survey of critical opinion, see Catherine Batt, “The *Epistre au dieu d'Amours* and *The Letter of Cupid*: Christine de Pizan, Thomas Hoccleve, and Vernacular Poetics,” *Medieval Translator* 14 (2018): 427–41.

27. For an edition, see Thomas Hoccleve, *Hoccleve's Works: The Minor Poems*, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall and I. Gollancz, rev. Jerome Mitchell and A. I. Doyle, 2 vols., EETS e.s. 61, 73 (1892, 1925; rev. edn. Oxford, 1970), 133–39.

28. See Rory G. Critten, “Imagining the Author in Late Medieval England and France: The Transmission and Reception of Christine de Pizan's *Epistre au dieu d'Amours* and Thomas Hoccleve's *Letter of Cupid*,” *Studies in Philology* 112 (2015): 680–97.

29. See the foundational studies by Sarah McNamer, “Female Authors, Provincial Setting: The Re-Versing of Courtly Love in the Findern Manuscript,” *Viator* 22 (1991): 279–310; and Elizabeth Heale, “Women and the Courtly Love Lyric: The Devonshire MS (BL Additional 17492),” *Modern Language Review* 90 (1995): 269–313.

30. For an edition of the autograph text, see Hoccleve, *Hoccleve's Works*, ed. Furnivall and Gollancz, 294–308.

generally to “legendis of martirs,” omitting the personal pronoun (fol. 215r).<sup>31</sup> This variant reading further obscures the external connections of the *Letter of Cupid*, whose vagueness already left ample room for discussion of its meaning. The texts that come after the *Letter of Cupid* in the second scribe’s stint continue its focus on men’s mistreatment of women while at the same time encouraging closer attention to the tenor of women’s voices in poetry.

In the poem directly following the *Letter of Cupid*, the *Lay of Sorrow* (DIMEV 786), the production of women’s speech in verse is brought abruptly to readers’ attention. The *Lay of Sorrow* gives a complaint in a woman’s voice about her lover’s faithlessness. Its pathos is heightened by the poet’s artful use of verse forms, which mixes nine- with sixteen-line stanzas on the model established in the complaint section of Chaucer’s *Anelida and Arcite*.<sup>32</sup> Its speaker’s use of imagery is also striking: the faithless lover has broken the lock on her heart and carried away the key, she says; her Christmas is turned to Lent; although she sows her garden with patience, she only reaps rue, the bitterest herb; the ruby has fallen from the ring that her lover gave her, in protest at his infidelity. At its end, however, the woman’s passionate speech is revealed to have been a ventriloquist performance. An envoy identifies the poem as a commissioned work:

Princes full gracious and excellent,  
 How dar I 3ou for verray schame present  
 This rude compleynt, vncorreck euery quhare,  
 That makit is vnto non othir entent  
 Bot to obey 3oure hie commaundment,  
 With hert full of gude will and half with fere,  
 For briggit thing and burowis here and there  
 May nocht compare vnto the grete extent  
 Of him the quhich enheryit hath þe vent  
 Of fair langage to all þe worldis ere.  
 (lines 176–85; fol. 219r)

Kenneth G. Wilson tentatively suggests that these lines show the foregoing complaint to have been the work of a male poet writing at the request of a

31. For an edition of the *Letter* recording variant readings from Selden, see Hoccleve, *Hoccleve’s Works*, ed. Furnivall and Gollancz, 72–91.

32. On the Chaucerian debts of *Lay of Sorrow* and the *Lufaris Complaynt*, see Rebecca Marsland, “Complaint in Scotland c. 1424–c. 1500,” D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford (Oxford, 2013), 104–21.

woman commissioner.<sup>33</sup> But the text of the envoy admits other interpretations. “Princes” in the first line might refer to a group of lords, for example. This is the reading sometimes offered for the word when it occurs in initial position in the envoy of the *Complaint of Venus*, where Chaucer reveals his presence behind that text.<sup>34</sup> One possible interpretation of the stanza might thus identify the foregoing portrait of a suffering woman as a decorous distraction produced for men, a kind of writing whose history stretches back at least as far as Ovid.<sup>35</sup> Another reading might pick out the possibility that the commissioned writer is herself a woman. In that case, the anxious comparison with the work of an unnamed male writer in the stanza’s penultimate line—an allusion to Chaucer, perhaps—may amount to an attempt to negotiate the more unusual situation of the complaint’s composition. Below, I raise the possibility that some of the second scribe’s texts were written by or for the Sinclair women. If this was so for the *Lay of Sorrow*, then the poem’s resonances will have been clearer and more personal amongst the first readers of the Selden manuscript.

Whereas the *Lay of Sorrow* shines a light on the frequently mediated nature of women’s literary expression, the second scribe’s next text, the *Lufaris Complaynt* (DIMEV 927), strikes a more combative note in favor of men and men’s poetry. Its speaker boasts of his direct access to writing: “I will non otheris dolouris feyne nor vs,” he asserts; the tears that fill his pen will be those that fall from his own two eyes (lines 12–14; fol. 219v). A little later, the bodily production of those tears is emphasized. They are of his very blood:

The blak, cloudy thochtis of dispaire  
 Ar enterit in myn hert cald and wod  
 And it opprest so cruelly and sare  
 That of þe awin verray propir blud,  
 It went to euery eye.

(lines 22–26; fol. 219v)

33. See Kenneth G. Wilson, ed., “The *Lay of Sorrow* and *The Lufaris Complaynt*: An Edition,” *Speculum* 29 (1954): 708–26, at 725. Line numbers accompanying citations of this poem and the *Lufaris Complaynt* are from this source.

34. See *The Riverside Chaucer*, 1082. It might be objected that the usual plural-forming suffix in Scots was *-is*, but the *Dictionary of the Older Scots Tongue*, s.v. *prince*, gives many more citations of the plural form in *-es*. See online at: [dsl.ac.uk/our-publications/a-dictionary-of-the-older-scottish-tongue-dost/](http://dsl.ac.uk/our-publications/a-dictionary-of-the-older-scottish-tongue-dost/).

35. On Chaucer’s response to this tradition, see Irina Dumitrescu, “Beautiful Suffering and the Culpable Narrator in Chaucer’s *Legend of Good Women*,” *Chaucer Review* 52 (2017): 106–23.

The speaker draws to himself a series of legendary male supporters, calling on Oedipus, Pluto, Tantalus, Pirus, Adonis, Phoebus, Jove, and Mars to help him. He also thinks that he can count on other male writers to fight in his corner. With some audacity, he claims that, if Chaucer were alive, the English poet would rather have memorialized his story than any other that he had already written: “the accident,” he says, “is more pitous / than was the double sorow of troilus” (lines 34–35; fol. 219v). Although the speaker of the *Lufaris Complaynt* directs most of his ire against Fortune, not against his lady’s changeability, the text serves as a reminder both of the exclusively male communities that the cult of love produces and of the long history of men’s writings that this cult sustains. At the same time, an ironizing reception of the text is invited by the extravagance of some of the speaker’s claims and by the logical flaw at the heart of his argument: how truly individual or sincere can his expression of love pains be if its writing relies upon the evocation of so many precedent examples?<sup>36</sup>

The second scribe’s last text, the *Quare of Jelusy* (DIMEV 5729.3), is also ripe for ironic reading. The *Quare* combines the matter of women’s and men’s differing access to poetry with the interest in defenses of women that animates the *Letter of Cupid*. In it, a male speaker walks out one May morning in a garden, where he encounters a beautiful woman and hides, waiting to hear what she might say. At this point, the speaker notices that the woman is crying. Despite his imperfect grasp of the woman’s situation, about which the text is explicit, the speaker goes on to make several quick deductions:

It semyt wele that woo hir hert constreynit:  
 Sche sorowit, sche sikit, sche sore compleynit.  
 So soberly sche spak that I no mycht  
 Not here one word quhat þat sche said arycht—  
 Bot wele I herd sche cursit preualy  
 The cruell vice of causles jelousye.  
 (lines 51–56; fol. 222r)<sup>37</sup>

Although the speaker has not engaged with the woman and cannot hear “one word” of what she has said, he is confident that she is crying because she is unhappy and that she is cursing jealousy. The contrast with Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess* is striking. Where Chaucer’s dreamer hears the complaint of

36. On the poem’s self-defeating logic, see Marsland, “Complaint in Scotland,” 121.

37. For an edition, see J. Norton-Smith and I. Pravda, eds., *The Quare of Jelusy* (Heidelberg, 1976).

the Man in Black but is slow to catch his meaning, the speaker of the *Quare of Jelusy* purports to have caught the meaning of his complainant's speech without even having heard it.

Just as the speaker is about to leave his hiding place to go to her, he is interrupted:

And as I was uprising for to go  
 To confort hir and counsele of hir wo  
 So come one othir lady hir allone  
 The nerrest way vn to hir is sche gone  
 And one thai tuo ysamyn gan to fare  
 But quhens thai past I can nocht 3ou declare.

(lines 109–14; fol. 222v)

Frustrated in his attempt to engage the woman directly, the speaker of the *Quare* resolves to devote the remainder of his poem to fighting her cause. What follows is a five-hundred-line diatribe against jealousy in which the evils of the vice, and the suffering that it causes to both men and women, are pored over in detail. A sense of mounting outrage is produced as the speaker shifts poetic gears through an impressive range of verse forms, including heroic couplets, nine-line stanzas in two different rhyme patterns, rhyme royal, and one ten-line stanza. Finally, what began as a poem about a woman's suffering becomes an exercise in apportioning blame amongst men. In the penultimate section of his poem, the speaker apostrophizes an individual jealous man:

O wofull wrech and wickit euill consate!  
 O fals suspicioun nurist full of hate,  
 In hevin and erth þi harm is boith ywritte!  
 O cruell serpent aye leving in awayte!  
 O sclanderous tong fy on thy dissayte!  
 Quhare that thou lovith thou feynyth þat, ypocrite!  
 That thou art jelous, lufe thou gevith þe wyte—  
 Thou leis thereof as þat I schall declare  
 To vnderstand to euery trewe lufare.

(lines 464–72; fol. 227r)

It would be difficult to find a better medieval example of what today we might call *performative activism*, that is, activism that does more to raise the profile of the activist than to help the person or group of people on

whose behalf the activism is ostensibly undertaken. What motivates the speaker's writing is his exclusion from the discussion conducted elsewhere by the two women whom he sees walking out of the garden together. As Dana M. Symons writes, his composition of the latter part of the poem amounts to an attempt to "thrust his way between" these interlocutors.<sup>38</sup> His text ultimately elides their experience, replacing the women's voices with his own. Nevertheless, the speaker of the *Quare of Jelusy* hopes to garner gratitude for his efforts from the "loueris" to whom he dispatches his text: he signs his work "quod Auchen[...]" (fol. 228r) so that they will know where to direct their thanks.

Not all modern critics have interpreted the *Quare of Jelusy* in this way. Helen Phillips reads the poem more straightforwardly as an attempt to garner sympathy for women trapped in bad marriages, for example, and Martin concentrates on the poem's development of the theme of governance.<sup>39</sup> The reading of the text's explicit has also been disputed.<sup>40</sup> It is, however, worth entertaining the possibility that readers of the Selden manuscript approached the *Quare of Jelusy* skeptically. At least one later medieval reader of the book thought that the work deserved an audience: a sixteenth-century hand has added an instruction at the poem's opening, "avise Ye gudely folkis and see" (fol. 221v). We know that the readership envisaged by this annotator most likely included women as well as men, and we have seen that the compilation of texts in the second scribe's stint primes readers to be on the lookout for thematic arguments of the kind highlighted in the foregoing analysis. Careful readers of the *Letter of Cupid*, the *Lay of Sorrow*, and the *Lufaris Complaynt* will be alert both to the complexities attending writing in defense of women and to the vexed issue of women's access to writing. The speaker of the *Quare of Jelusy* runs roughshod over these topics, and he does this so bombastically—the last block citation is not an isolated instance of his outrage—that it is tempting to read the text as an ironic performance of bad allyship.

38. Dana M. Symons, ed., *Chaucerian Dream Visions and Complaints* (Kalamazoo, 2004), 155. See also the observation of Ann McKim, "'Makand hir mone': Masculine Constructions of the Feminine Voice in Middle Scots Complaints," *Scotlands* 2 (1994): 32–46, that "among other things, the *Quare of Jelusy* is a poem about speaking for women" (36).

39. See Helen Phillips, "Frames and Narrators in Chaucerian Poetry," in Helen Cooper and Sally Mapstone, eds., *The Long Fifteenth Century: Essays for Douglas Gray* (Oxford, 1997), 71–97, at 94–95; and Martin, *Kingship and Love*, 31–39. On the theme of governance in the poem, see too Marsland, "Complaint in Scotland," 121–29.

40. See Norton-Smith and Pravda, eds., *The Quare of Jelusy*, 14–17.



### *The Expansion of the Book*

The influence of Henry Sinclair's wife and daughters on the evolution of the Selden manuscript doubtless ran throughout its compilation. One of the leitmotifs in Carol M. Meale's landmark study of medieval laywomen's book culture is her argument that it is often difficult to distinguish between the patronal activities of book-loving husbands and their wives.<sup>41</sup> The likelihood of shared patronage is enhanced where, as in Margaret Hepburn's case, independent evidence of book culture exists. At her death in 1542, Margaret was identified as the possessor of "duos libros."<sup>42</sup> The probability of Margaret and her daughters' involvement in the production of the Selden manuscript is highest during the second scribe's stint. Combined with the thematic and tonal characteristics of the second scribe's poems, evidence relating to layout, exemplar provenance, and patronal biography suggests that the beginning of this portion of the manuscript corresponded with a reconception of the book's purpose that closely reflected these women's interests.

First, the change in hand on fol. 209v corresponds with a downgrading of the book's appearance and, potentially, a loosening of Henry Sinclair's control over its development. The first scribe had strong links to the Sinclairs; his hand is found in three other manuscripts known to have been owned by Henry or his uncle, Oliver. It seems likely that this scribe was resident within Henry's or Oliver's households, or a member of their family; he may have been Alexander Sinclair, Oliver's brother, who was both a notary public and a priest.<sup>43</sup> The second scribe is a shadier figure, and although Boffey and Edwards point out that "his hand is generally a clearer and more precisely formed one" than that of his predecessor copyist, they also note that he drops the standardized layout employed by the first scribe, opting for a more mobile format.<sup>44</sup> Together with the absence of decoration in the second scribe's stint, the *mise-en-page* of his contribution is suggestive of a more improvised addition that did not enjoy the attention lavished by the book's first commissioner on its earlier sections.

The new provenance of the materials that the second scribe copies is also indicative of a change in the mode of the book's production. Except for the *Letter of Cupid*, the second scribe's texts appear to have reached their copyist

41. See Carol M. Meale, "' . . . alle the bokes that I haue of latyn, english, and frensch': Laywomen and Their Books in Late Medieval England," in Carol M. Meale, ed., *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150–1500* (Cambridge, UK, 1993), 128–58.

42. W. Muir, ed., *Notices from the Local Records of Dysart* (Glasgow, 1853), 9.

43. See Mapstone, "Introduction," 6.

44. See Boffey and Edwards, *Facsimile*, 11–12.

via routes different from those that brought the first scribe's English materials into Scotland.<sup>45</sup> Many of the first scribe's texts and the *Letter of Cupid* are now extant in multiple copies, and some of them probably circulated in Scotland prior to their compilation in the Selden manuscript.<sup>46</sup> By contrast, the *Lay of Sorrow*, the *Lufaris Complaynt*, and the *Quare of Jelusy* survive only in this book. In combination with the limited circulation of these works, philological evidence indicating their composition in Scotland suggests that they were coterie pieces written for or by members of Henry Sinclair's family.<sup>47</sup> Boffey proposes that the poems were written for a small audience with a view to demonstrating "Scottish mastery of English forms," and it is true that all three poems manifest considerable virtuosity in their versification.<sup>48</sup> But given the absence elsewhere in the Selden manuscript of overtly nationalist comment, it seems more likely that whoever selected the poems was attracted to them primarily for their development of the themes exposed in the Chaucerian poems already copied into the book.

Henry Sinclair died at Flodden in 1513, but the signatures at the back of the Selden manuscript indicate its continued ownership within his family. In this case, Elizabeth, Jean, and Margaret were in prime position to take possession of the codex and oversee its further expansion, either individually or as a group, most likely in collaboration with the mixed audience described above.<sup>49</sup> The possibility that the Sinclair women directly commissioned or authored some of the second scribe's materials bears consideration, as does

45. On which, see Boffey and Edwards, *Facsimile*, 18–21; and Kylie Murray, "Thomas Hoccleve, the Dream Vision, and Scotland: New Insights," *Notes and Queries* 66 (2019): 30–34.

46. See Julia Boffey and A. S. G. Edwards, "Bodleian MS Arch. Selden. B. 24 and the 'Scotticization' of Middle English Verse," in Prendergast and Kline, eds., *Rewriting Chaucer*, 166–85.

47. Differing interpretations of the philological data are offered by Wilson, ed., "The *Lay of Sorrow*," 709n3; P. J. Frankis, "Notes on Two Fifteenth-Century Scots Poems," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 61 (1960): 203–13; and C. D. Jeffrey, "Anglo-Scots Poetry and the *Kingis Quair*," in Jean-Jacques Blanchot and Claude Graf, eds., *Actes du 2e colloque de langue et de littérature écos-saises* (Strasbourg, 1979), 207–21, at 217–18.

48. See Julia Boffey, "The *Kingis Quair* and the Other Poems of Bodleian Library MS Arch. Selden. B. 24," in Priscilla Bawcutt and Janet Hadley Williams, eds., *A Companion to Medieval Scottish Poetry* (Cambridge, UK, 2006), 63–74, at 72. On Selden as an attempt to Scotticize English culture, see also T. S. Miller, "Chaucer Abroad, Chaucer at Home: MS Arch. Selden. B. 24 as the 'Scottish Ellesmere,'" *Chaucer Review* 47 (2012): 25–47.

49. Tantalizing evidence for the later history of Selden is included in Muir, ed., *Notices from the Local Records of Dysart*, 8–9, which attests that, after the death of Margaret Sinclair in 1542, Margaret's keys for Ravenscraig Castle were given to "Elizat Kayt dominae de Sinclar," that is, the Elizabeth Keith mentioned above as marrying Henry Sinclair's son, William, by 1524. The notice goes on to state that "dominus sinclar accessit ad cubiculum in loco de rawenscraig ubi morabatur et jacebat ante obitum margareta" (lord Sinclair went into the bedroom at Ravenscraig where Margaret dwelt and slept before her death), and it is at this juncture that Margaret's ownership of two books is mentioned. If one of those books was Selden, the possibility is raised here that the book passed from the household of Margaret Sinclair into that of her son, William, upon Margaret's

their ability to write for themselves. The text beneath Elizabeth's signature on fol. 231r has been lost due to cropping to the manuscript; it may once have constituted an extended iteration of the "in his/her own hand" formula found elsewhere amongst the book's signatures. There is slightly more to go on with Jean. Her name appears to sign not only the book but also the short verse that precedes it on fol. 231v: "in my defense, God me defend / and bring my saull to ane guid end, O lord."<sup>50</sup>

Evidence for the direct involvement of the Sinclair women in the expansion of the Selden manuscript remains inconclusive. In this regard, their case and the scholarly discussions pertaining to it recall the perennial debates regarding women's authorship of anonymous poetry and their participation in the production of books throughout medieval Britain. The precise nature of women's involvement in the Findern Manuscript, mentioned above, remains disputed, for example.<sup>51</sup> The closest Scottish analogue for the situation I am describing, the later sixteenth-century Maitland Quarto, is also controversial. One commentator has argued that Marie Maitland, whose name appears twice on the first folio of the book, is both its scribe and the author of at least some of its anonymous poetry.<sup>52</sup> But these assertions have not won universal approval.<sup>53</sup>

Alexandra A. T. Barratt long ago pointed out the statistical imbalances that result from the high burden of proof placed on those who would identify women's poetry.<sup>54</sup> One means of redressing this balance, for which more recent commentators advocate, is the consideration of the kinds of influence that women might exert on developing literary cultures as patrons, dedicatees, or audience members—in these cases, the burden of proof may be reduced.<sup>55</sup> This is the path that is adopted here, with a view to suggesting a new context

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death. I am grateful to a peer reviewer of my article for this point, and for many other helpful comments on my work.

50. Cited from Boffey and Edwards, *Facsimile*, 3. Boffey and Edwards report Priscilla Bawcutt's advice that this couplet frequently occurs in manuscripts and prints of Scottish ownership.

51. For a recent summary of the discussion, see Joanna M. Martin, ed., *The Findern Manuscript: A New Edition of the Unique Poems* (Exeter, 2020), 17–38.

52. See Evelyn S. Newlyn, "A Methodology for Reading Against the Culture: Anonymus, Women Poets, and the Maitland Quarto Manuscript (c. 1586)," in Sarah M. Dunnigan, C. Marie Harker, and Evelyn S. Newlyn, eds., *Woman and the Feminine in Medieval and Early Modern Scottish Writing* (Houndmills, 2004), 89–103.

53. See Joanna M. Martin, ed., *The Maitland Quarto: A New Edition of Cambridge, Magdalen College, Pepys Library MS 1408*, STS 5th ser. 13 (Cambridge, UK, 2015), 28–32.

54. See Alexandra A. T. Barratt, "'The Flower and the Leaf' and 'The Assembly of Ladies: Is There a (Sexual) Difference?'" *Philological Quarterly* 66 (1987): 1–24.

55. On this development, see Lara Farina, "Women and Reading," in Liz Herbert McAvoy and Diane Watt, eds., *The History of British Women's Writing, 700–1500* (Houndmills, 2011), 142–50.

in which the poetry of the second scribe's stint might be fruitfully reread. One text remains to be considered in this light: the 140-line conclusion that the second scribe adds to the first scribe's copy of the *Kingis Quair*. The last section of this article considers the interest that the second scribe's continuation manifests in the figure of the speaker's lady and asks what it means to read the *Quair* not only with James's demise in mind, but also that of his wife, Joan Beaufort. At the same time, the discussion contributes to ongoing assessments of the textual integrity of the poem.

### *Marriage in the Kingis Quair*

The first scribe's text of the *Kingis Quair* narrates the story of its speaker's capture in youth by his enemies; an almost eighteen-year imprisonment at their hands; his sight during that time of a beautiful woman; and, after a dream in which he secures the help of Venus, Minerva, and Fortune, the promise of his union with that woman and final enfranchisement (lines 1–1239).<sup>56</sup> The poem's waking plot maps readily onto the biography of James I of Scotland, whom the second scribe identifies as the author of the text in a Latin colophon: "quod Iacobus primus scotorum rex illustrissimus" (fol. 211r). James spent eighteen years in English captivity; he was delivered to Henry IV in 1406 by pirates who intercepted the ship that was to take him to France from Scotland, where his family feared for his safety; negotiations for his release were completed in 1423; and his return to Scotland as its monarch followed upon his marriage in early 1424 to Joan Beaufort (d. 1445), niece of cardinal Henry Beaufort and second cousin of Henry VI.<sup>57</sup>

Turn-of-the-century scholarship on the *Quair* demonstrates the likelihood that the poem was written around the time of James's marriage in order to advertise his fitness to rule.<sup>58</sup> To this end, the text adopts an idea developed by Gower and his French predecessors according to which chaste love confirmed in marriage can ground states as well as individuals.<sup>59</sup> The *Quair* also effects a bold reworking of Boethian precedent, which its speaker

56. Line numbers refer to James I of Scotland, *The Kingis Quair*, ed. John Norton-Smith (Leiden, 1981).

57. See M. Brown, *James I*, 9–39.

58. See Sally Mapstone, "Kingship and the *Kingis Quair*," in Cooper and Mapstone, eds., *The Long Fifteenth Century*, 51–69; and Joanna Summers, *Late-Medieval Prison Writing and the Politics of Autobiography* (Oxford, 2004), 60–89.

59. The classic exposition of Gower's idea is J. A. W. Bennett, "Gower's 'Honeste Love,'" in John Lawler, ed., *Patterns of Love and Courtesy: Essays in Memory of C. S. Lewis* (London, 1966), 107–21. On the *Quair*'s debts to Gower, see Martin, *Kingship and Love*, 19–29; J. A. W. Bennett, "A King's Quire," *Poetica* 3 (1975): 1–16; and the studies referred to in note 58, above. On the *Quair*'s

evokes not to facilitate a reiteration of warnings against the temporary nature of Fortune's goods, but as an example of a man who founded his greatness on an experience of misfortune.<sup>60</sup> The resulting portrait clearly engaged at least one of the early readers of the Selden manuscript. The second scribe's attribution is echoed by a later annotator of the book, who adds an incipit giving information about the text's name and the date and location of its composition:

Heirefter followis the quair maid be  
 King James of Scotland þe first  
 callit þe kingis quair and  
 maid quhan his majeste wes in  
 Ingland.

(fol. 191v).

But the thematic interests indicated by the other texts that the second scribe copies suggest that the *Quair's* treatment of its central female character and its depiction of courtship and marriage will also have attracted the attention of the early audience of MS Arch. Selden. B. 24.

In this connection, it is helpful to observe that the second scribe's continuation of the *Kingis Quair* shifts the focus of the poem towards its speaker's lady. The first scribe's text had ended with James awakening from his dream, asking the gods for a sign regarding its meaning, and receiving confirmation of their benevolence in the form of a visit from a turtledove (lines 1205–39). Along with a corroborating message that the turtledove is said to bear and a series of prayers, the second scribe's conclusion adds the lines giving the clearest identification of the poem's lady as Joan Beaufort:

And schortly, so wele fortune has hir bore  
 To quikin treuly day by day my lore,  
 To my larges that I am cumin agayn  
 To bliss with hir that is my souiraine.

(lines 1264–67; fol. 209v)

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French debts, see William Calin, "The *dit amoureux* and the Makars: An Essay on *The Kingis Quair* and *The Testament of Cressid*," *Florilegium* 25 (2008): 217–50.

60. As well as the studies listed in note 58, above, see Lois A. Ebin, "Boethius, Chaucer, and *The Kingis Quair*," *Philological Quarterly* 53 (1974): 321–41; and Elizabeth Elliott, "The Open Sentence: Memory, Identity and Translation in the *Kingis Quair*," in Sarah Carpenter and Sarah M. Dunnigan, eds., *Joyous Sweit Imaginatioun: Essays on Scottish Literature in Honour of R. D. S. Jack* (Leiden, 2007), 23–39.

This “souriraine” is evoked again, more teasingly, where the speaker claims that his lady saved his life:

And thus this flouris—I can seye no more—  
 So hertly has vnto my help actendit  
 That from the deth hir man sche has defendit.  
 (lines 1307–9; fol. 210v)

Then, just before a rendition of the “Go, little book” dispatch formula, the second scribe’s continuation has a two-stanza speech in which the poem’s speaker describes his union with his lady as the *terminus* of his story and expresses his thanks for her love:

For to the presence suete and delitable  
 Rycht of this floure þat full is of plesance,  
 By processe and by menys fauorable,  
 First of þe blisfull goddis purueyance,  
 And syne throu long and trew contynuance  
 Of veray faith in lufe and trew seruice  
 I cumin am, and forthir in this wise,  
  
 Vnworthy, lo, bot onely of hir grace,  
 In lufis ʒok that esy is and sure,  
 In guerdoun of all my lufis space,  
 Sche hath me tak, hir humble creature.  
 And thus befell my blisfull auenture  
 In ʒouth of lufe that now from day to day  
 Flourith ay newe.  
 (lines 1338–44; fols. 210v–211r)

The authorship of the second scribe’s continuation is in doubt. William A. Quinn thinks that the poem circulated in a longer and a shorter form and locates both within the purview of James’s court.<sup>61</sup> But, in light of the foregoing argument, the more recent confection of the text’s conclusion also seems possible. Boffey admits this eventuality, pointing out that the Selden manuscript also has a unique conclusion to its text of the *Parliament of Fowls*.<sup>62</sup>

61. See William A. Quinn, “Red Lining and Blue Penciling *The Kingis Quair*,” *Studies in Philology* 108 (2011): 189–214.

62. See Boffey, “*The Kingis Quair* and the Other Poems,” 71. On Selden’s text of *PF*, see also (elsewhere in this issue) Rhiannon Purdie, “Borrowed Feathers: The Spurious Older Scots Ending

Paleographical evidence has been deployed to support the traditional case for the integrity of the *Quair*. It has been pointed out that the varying size of the second scribe's script during his copying of the ending of the *Quair* (fols. 209v–211r) probably reflects an attempt to fill an overly long gap that he had left between the end of the first scribe's work and the beginning of the first text that he copied, the *Letter of Cupid*. It may be that the second scribe had been holding out for a more complete exemplar of the *Quair* that resembles the text as it is edited today.<sup>63</sup> All that this manuscript evidence really proves, however, is that the second scribe was expecting more text to be added to the first scribe's copy of the *Kingis Quair* and that he ended up getting less than he had reckoned for.<sup>64</sup>

The possibility remains that the first scribe thought that his copy of the *Quair* was complete, and that the addition of the conclusion to the manuscript was done by the second scribe at the request of his employers, who may themselves have written, commissioned, or collected these stanzas for their book. The factors motivating such a commission extend beyond the thematic interest in women's experiences of love that characterizes the texts collected in the Selden manuscript. The members of Henry Sinclair's household had a special connection to Joan Beaufort that is likely to have enhanced their interest in her story: the Scottish queen had died at Dunbar Castle, where Margaret Hepburn's great-grandfather had been keeper.<sup>65</sup>

From the perspective of the late fifteenth century, Joan's career might be considered with a mix of admiration and regret. On the one hand, the enthusiasm that the speaker of the *Kingis Quair* expresses for his lady looks to have been matched by James's love and respect for Joan. The king's confidence in his wife's capacity to play an active role in government is attested to by his attempts to establish Joan as a partner in his rule: in 1428, the king requested that noble heirs and newly installed bishops should swear an oath to Joan as well as to him, and in 1435, he asked that the Scottish Estates give Joan letters of fidelity.<sup>66</sup> Joan's story does not end any more happily than James's, however. Although she succeeded in bringing James's murderers to justice, secured the

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to Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls* in Bodleian Library MS Arch. Selden. B. 24," *Chaucer Review* 59 (2024): 135–81.

63. See Marsland, "Complaint in Scotland," 64–65.

64. I am also at odds with Marsland's argument that the manuscript's first scribe oversaw the book's evolution into the second scribe's stint. This claim relies on slender evidence insofar as it needs the incipit added to the *Quare of Jelusy* to be written by the first scribe. See Marsland, "Complaint in Scotland," 127–29.

65. See Fiona Downie, *She Is But a Woman: Queenship in Scotland 1424–1463* (Edinburgh, 2006), 153. On the significance of this connection, see also Martin, *Kingship and Love*, 29–30.

66. See Downie, *She Is But a Woman*, 99–102.

accession of her son, James II, and eventually remarried, her influence did not long survive her husband. When Joan died at Dunbar Castle in 1445, she had lost custody of the young king.<sup>67</sup>

Retrospective contemplation of Joan's fall must have been wrapped up in the larger matter of her husband's demise, which makes the triumphalism of the *Quair* look rather like hubris. At the turn of the sixteenth century, however, James's reputation was enjoying a rehabilitation. One of the earliest accounts of the king's murder, *The Deth of the Kynge of Scotis*, had accused James of covetous and tyrannous behavior and gave a sensational description of his murder, which it located in a drain beneath the royal privy.<sup>68</sup> But, by the end of the century, the more laudatory biography included in Walter Bower's *Scotichronicon* (1440–47) was widely circulated, and in the early sixteenth century Bower's account would be further embroidered upon by John Major and Hector Boece.<sup>69</sup> None of these men were unconditional royalists.<sup>70</sup> It seems, rather, that the tumultuous years following James's murder heightened the desirability of the firm rule for which the king was remembered.<sup>71</sup>

All this suggests that backwards glances on James's reign ca. 1500 were more likely to be rueful than biting critical, particularly within the Sinclair household, whose links to James were outlined above. It is not my aim here to repurpose ironic readings of the *Quair* as an implicit criticism of its speaker's self-serving interpretation of Boethius.<sup>72</sup> What I would like to suggest is that an awareness of the unhappy outcome of Joan's and James's stories might have cast a pall over the poem's otherwise marked attempt to vindicate married love. Viewed with hindsight, the happy marriage of James and Joan is apt

67. See Michael H. Brown, "'That Old Serpent and Ancient of Evil Days': Walter, Earl of Atholl and the Death of James I," *Scottish Historical Review* 71 (1992): 23–45; and Downie, *She Is But a Woman*, 138–55.

68. See Margaret Connolly, ed., "*The Deth of the Kynge of Scotis*: A New Edition," *Scottish Historical Review* 71 (1992): 46–69.

69. See Walter Bower, *Scotichronicon*, ed. D. E. R. Watt, 9 vols. (Aberdeen, 1987–98), 8:301–37; John Major, *A History of Greater Britain, as well England as Scotland*, trans. Archibald Constable (Edinburgh, 1892), 350–71; Hector Boece, *The Chronicles of Scotland*, trans. John Bellenden, ed. R. W. Chambers and Edith C. Batho, 2 vols., STS 3rd ser. 10, 15 (Edinburgh, 1938, 1941), 2:365–402.

70. See Roger A. Mason, "From Chronicle to History: Recovering the Past in Renaissance Scotland," in Rudolf Suntrup and Jan R. Veenstra, eds., *Building the Past* (Frankfurt, 2006), 53–66.

71. See Michael Brown, "'Vile Times': Walter Bower's Last Book and the Minority of James II," *Scottish Historical Review* 79 (2000): 165–88.

72. See Vincent Carretta, "*The Kingis Quair* and *The Consolation of Philosophy*," *Studies in Scottish Literature* 16 (1981): 14–28; Clair F. James, "*The Kingis Quair*: The Plight of the Courtly Lover," in David Chamberlain, ed., *New Readings of Late Medieval Love Poems* (Lanham, 1993), 95–118; and William F. Hodapp, "Reading the Narrator Reading Boethius: The Implied Audience of *The Kingis Quair*," *Enarratio* 14 (2007): 23–35.



to assume a tragic dimension, particularly when read in the context of the descriptions of love pains that the Selden manuscript collects. Put bluntly, the claim developed in the *Kingis Quair* is that success in love and politics go hand in hand. But, ultimately, the careers of James and Joan offer an example of the effects of loving that is no more positive in its outcomes than are those of the stories told in the *Lay of Sorrow*, the *Lufaris Complaynt*, or the *Quare of Jelusy*.<sup>73</sup>

The paucity of named women writers in late medieval Scotland has led to negative assessments of women's involvement in literary culture there. Where so few women can be shown definitively to have written, it has been argued, men's preoccupations and perspectives must have predominated.<sup>74</sup> The foregoing argument responds to concerns of this sort by reconstructing, insofar as is currently possible, the roles that Margaret, Elizabeth, and Jean might have played in the production of the Selden manuscript. Inconclusive arguments of the kind advanced here have not always found favor with book historians, who typically shun speculation. But the alternative is a cultural history that underestimates women's total contributions and, especially where open-ended thinking results in a better-rounded literary-critical appreciation of the materials studied, the method might more often be tried. Here I have shown that reconsideration of the Selden manuscript as an expression of the Sinclair women's interests enables fresh approaches to the representation of women both in the *Quair* itself and in the works copied to accompany it by the book's second scribe.

The largest claim that this article makes is for the interest of reception studies as an aid to the understanding of medieval poetry. Accounts of authorial intention are enjoying a revival in late medieval literary scholarship, often on the back of new archival research. Advances in paleography and the digital reproduction of manuscripts have allowed for the identification of new autograph work; updated book histories offer fresh perspectives on authors' ownership of their own texts in manuscript; and new testamentary evidence can be marshaled in more nuanced portrayals of the conditions of authorial

73. On skepticism of marriage as a hallmark of the fifteenth-century love vision, see further Rory G. Critten, "Love Visions and Love Poetry," in Julia Boffey and A. S. G. Edwards, eds., *The Oxford History of Poetry in English, Vol. 3: Medieval Poetry, 1400–1500* (Oxford, 2023), 282–99.

74. See, for example, Evelyn S. Newlyn, "Images of Women in Sixteenth-Century Scottish Literary Manuscripts," in Elizabeth Ewan and Maureen M. Meikle, eds., *Women in Scotland c. 1100–c. 1750* (East Linton, 1999), 56–66; and Evelyn S. Newlyn, "The Female Voice in Sixteenth-Century Scots Poetry," in Mapstone, ed., *Older Scots Literature*, 283–91.

composition.<sup>75</sup> Inevitably, readings that proceed from these valuable data will amplify voices that literary scholars are already used to listening for, namely those of the male bureaucrats who composed and copied so much of the surviving medieval poetry and the documentary evidence that allows for its immediate contextualization. In contrast, reception studies have the benefit of refocusing critical attention through a wider variety of possible perspectives, including women's perspectives.

Medieval Scottish literature is an especially promising field for reception-oriented approaches since so many of the earliest canonical works—for example, Barbour's *Bruce*, the *Scottish Legendary*, Andrew of Wyntoun's *Original Chronicle*, the *Buik of Alexander*, Holland's *Buke of the Howlat*, and the *Scottish Troy Book*—survive only in copies that postdate their composition, often by a significant margin.<sup>76</sup> A desire to find national origins in these works has tended to obscure consideration of their later medieval transmission and reception—in this regard, the parallel between the treatment of Early Scots and Old English literature in scholarship is striking. It is to be hoped that in the midst of the more confident Scottish nationalism currently prevailing, more space will be opened up for alternative perspectives on early Scottish literature. It is difficult to conceive of a better guide in the exploration of these vistas than the later medieval readers who ensured the survival of this rich and varied corpus.

Université de Lausanne  
Lausanne, Switzerland  
(rory.critten@unil.ch)

75. For recent examples of discoveries in each of these categories, as well as discussion of their literary-critical significance, see Sebastian Sobeci, *Last Words: The Public Self and the Social Author in Late Medieval England* (Oxford, 2019). See also the forthcoming special issue of *JMEMS* (*Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*) on "Intention and Interpretation, Now and Then," ed. James Simpson. This trend can be traced back at least as far as Linne R. Mooney's ground-breaking identification of the copyist of the Ellesmere and Hengwrt manuscripts of *CT*, reported in "Chaucer's Scribe," *Speculum* 81 (2006): 97–138.

76. For details, see Rhiannon Purdie, "Before the *Makars*: Older Scots Literature Under the Early Stewart Kings," in Robert DeMaria Jr., Heesok Chang, and Samantha Zacher, eds., *A Companion to British Literature. Vol. 1: Medieval Literature 700–1450* (Chichester, 2014), 293–307.