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SKELTON'S 'GARLAND OF LAUREL' AND CHAUCER'S 'HOUSE OF FAME.'

SKELTON'S *Garlande or Chapelet of Laurell* is a poem of somewhat over sixteen hundred lines, devoted to the exaltation of Skelton as poet. He, being in the woods near Sheriff Hutton Castle, in Yorkshire, dreams that he sees a pavilion in which are Pallas and the Queen of Fame, the latter of whom accuses Skelton of indolence. After a lengthy discussion, it is agreed between them that Skelton shall have an opportunity to exculpate himself by alleging any works that he has produced. Eolus is then called upon to sound his trumpet, whereat nearly a thousand poets appear, with Phoebus at their head. Among the poets are Gower, Chaucer, and Lydgate, who severally compliment Skelton, and are courteously answered by him. Being presented to Pallas, Skelton is sent by her, with the other poets, to the rich palace of the Queen of Fame. Here he sees the queen sitting in state, surrounded by chatterers, and forms the acquaintance of Occupation, Fame's registrar, who brings him forth into a field enclosed by a wall, where he beholds many curious sights. Finally, Occupation leads him up a winding stair, where he finds the Countess of Surrey, surrounded by a bevy of ladies whom she is exhorting to embroider a coronal of laurel for Skelton. After he has complimented the Countess and ten of her ladies, he is summoned by the trumpet of Eolus, and returns with the embroidered garland, wrought with silk and gold, pearls and precious stones. Accompanied by the three English poets, he returns to the Queen of Fame, who requires him to justify his assumption of the laurel. Occupation undertakes to do this for him, and over three hundred lines of the poem are devoted to her enumeration. This ended, the crowd shout their congratulations, and the dreamer awakes.

Though Miss Spurgeon, in her *Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion*, where she quotes (pp. 74—5) the passages in which Chaucer is mentioned by name, and notes the references to *Troilus and Criseyde* in lines 871—4, has observed no dependence upon

Chaucer in Skelton's account of the House of Fame, it is evident, on inspection, that such dependence exists. The principal correspondences fall under the following heads:

1. The trumpeter in both poems is Eolus.

Chaucer, 1567—73:

And with that word she gan to calle
 Hir messenger, that was in halle,
 And bad that he shulde faste goon,
 Up peyne to be blind anon,
 For Eolus, the god of winde;—
 'In Trace ther ye shul him finde,
 And bid him bringe his clarioun.'

Skelton, 233—40:

Call forthe, let se where is your clarionar,
 To blowe a blaste with his long breth extendid;
 Eolus, your trumpet, that knowne is so farre,
 That bararag blowyth in every mercyall warre,
 Let hym blowe now, that we may take a vewe
 What poetis we have at our retenewe;

To se if Skelton wyll put hymselfe in prease
 Amonge the thickest of all the hole rowte.

2. In Chaucer, the first act of Eolus was that he (1598—1601)

leet a certeyn wind to go,
 That blew so hidously and hye,
 That hit ne lefte not a skye
 In al the welken longe and brood.

In Skelton, the trumpet of Eolus (260—3)

longe tyme blewe a full timorous blaste,
 Lyke to the boryall wyndes whan they blowe,
 That towres and townes and trees downe caste,
 Drove clowdes together lyke dryftis of snowe.

3. Chaucer, in describing the House of Fame, says (1184)

Al was of stone of beryle,

and later refers (1288—9) to

these walles of beryle,
 That shoon ful lighter than a glas.

In Skelton's palace (467),

Of birrall embosid wer the pyllers rownde.

4. Of Chaucer's House of Fame,

Bothe castel and the tour,
 And eek the halle, and every bour, (1185-6),

the poet says (1167—73) that

alle the men that ben on lyve
 Ne han the cunning to descryve
 The beautee of that ilke place,
 Ne coude casten no compace
 Swich another for to make,
 That mighte of beautee be his make,
 Ne [be] so wonderliche ywrought.

Skelton describes (458—463) how he

was brought
 Into a palace with turrettis and towris,
 Engolerid goodly with hallis and bowris,
 So curiously, so craftely, so connyngly wrowght,
 That all the worlde, I trowe, and it were sought,
 Suche an other there coude no man fynde.

5. Of Chaucer's House of Fame we are told (1343—6, 1350—5)
 that

every wal
 Of hit, and floor, and roof and al
 Was plated half a fote thikke
 Of gold.
 And they wer set as thikke of nouchis
 Fulle of the fynest stones faire,
 That men rede in the Lapidaire,
 As greses growen in a mede;
 But hit were al to longe to rede
 The names; and therefore I pace.

The palace-gates in Skelton's poem were (469—473)

Enlosed with many goodly platis
 Of golde, entachid with many a precyous stone;
 An hundred steppis mountyng to the halle,
 One of jasper, another of whalis bone;
 Of dyamauntis pointed was the rokky wall.

6. Chaucer describes his House of Fame as full of minstrels, among
 whom was Orpheus (1193—1207):

And eek in ech of the pinacles
 Weren sondry habitacles,
 In whiche stoden, al withoute—
 Ful the castel, al aboute—
 Of alle maner of ministrals,
 And gestiours, that tellen tales
 Bothe of weping and of game,
 Of al that longeth unto Fame.
 Ther herde I pleyen on an harpe
 That sounded bothe wel and sharpe,
 Orpheus ful craftely,
 And on his syde, faste by,
 Sat the harper Orion
 And Eacides Chiron
 And other harpers many oon.

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At the sounding of the trumpet, it happened, according to Skelton (269—273), that

 there come in wonderly at ones
A murmur of mynstrels, that suche another
Had I never sene, some softer, some lowder;
Orpheus, the Traciene, herped meledyously
Weth Amphion, and other Musis of Archady.

7. Speaking of the House of Rumor, Chaucer tells us (2043—54 : cf. 1956—61) that

 every wight that I saugh there
Rounded ech in otheres ere
A newe tyding prevely,
Or elles tolde al openly
Right thus, and seyde: 'Nost not thou
That is betid, lo, late or now?'
'No,' quod [the other], 'tel me what;'
And than he tolde him this and that,
And swoor therto that hit was sooth—
'Thus hath he seyde'—and 'Thus he dooth'—
'Thus shal hit be'—'Thus herde I seye'—
'That shal be found'—'That dar I leye.'

Correspondingly, Skelton has (498—502):

 How doth the north? what tydyngis in the south?
The west is wyndy, the est is metely wele;
It is harde to tell of every mannes mouthe;
A slipper holde the taile is of an ele,
And he haltith often that hath a kyby hele.

8. Chaucer's crowd is unmannerly (2149—54):

 And whan they were alle on an hepe,
Tho behinde gonne up lepe,
And clamben up on othere faste,
And up the nose on hye caste,
And troden faste on othere heles,
And stampe, as men don after eles.

Compare this with Skelton (505—6):

 Sir, I pray you, a lytyll tyne staude backe,
And lette me come in to delyver my lettre.

9. Fame is thus described in Chaucer's poem (1360—5; cf. 1394—5; 1415—6):

 But al on hye, above a dees,
Sitte in a see imperial,
That maad was of a rubee al,
Which that a carbuncle is ycalled,
I saugh, perpetually ystalled,
A feminyne creature.

And thus Skelton (481—8):

Unto this place all poetis there did sue,
 Wherin was set of Fame the noble Quene,
 All other transcendyng, most rychely besene,
 Under a gloryous cloth of astate,
 Fret all with orient perlys of Garnate,
 Encrownd as empresse of all this worldly fate,
 So ryally, so rychely, so passyngly ornate,
 It was excedyng byyonde the commowne rate.

10. According to Chaucer (1532—41), Fame is arbitrary in replying to her suitors:

And also sone
 As they were come into the halle,
 They gonne down on kneës falle
 Before this ilke noble quene,
 And seyde, 'Graunte us, lady shene,
 Ech of us, of thy grace, a bone!'
 And somme of hem she graunted sone,
 And somme she werned wel and faire;
 And somme she graunted the contraire
 Of hir axing utterly.

And Pallas, in Skelton's poem, says to Fame (176—180):

But whome that ye favoure, I se well, hath a name,
 Be he never so lytell of substaunce,
 And whome ye love not ye wyll put to shame;
 Ye counterwey not evynly your balaunce;
 As wele foly as wysdome oft ye do avaunce.

Cf. Sypherd, *Studies in Chaucer's House of Fame*, pp. 120 ff.

Of minor significance are the following.

Chaucer has (1106—8):

Thou shalt see me go, as blyve,
 Unto the nexte laure I see,
 And kisse hit, for hit is thy tree;

with which may be compared Skelton, 320—2:

Yet, in remembraunce of Daphnes transformacyon,
 All famous poetis ensuyng after me
 Shall were a garlande of the laurell tre.

Skelton's Palace of Fame is a mile in circumference (489), while Chaucer's House of Rumor is sixty miles long (1978).

Chaucer's House of Rumor has a thousand holes in the roof (1949) through which sound may issue, and the field in Skelton (574) has a thousand gates.

Reminiscences of other Chaucerian poems occur in Skelton's *Garlande* as follows:

And then she sayd, Whyllis we have tyme and space, (563)

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compared with Chaucer, *Prologue*, 35 :

But natheles, whyl I have tyme and space.

Above in the top a byrde of Araby,
Men call a phenix ; (667—8)

with *Book of the Duchess*, 982 :

The soleyn fenix of Arabye.

Apollo that whirlid up his chare, (1471)

with *Squire's Tale*, 663 :

Apollo whirleth up his char so hye ;

cf. *The Flower and the Leaf*, 1—2.

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